

It goes like this:

A small door in a cellar wall. A child, somewhere between nine and thirteen.

Soldiers' boots on the road beyond, and a father that loves his daughter.

This place has been many things. Currently it is a tiny house, but there are echoes of the things it once was: an inn, a temple, a tower at the gate of a prison. Hidden beneath the steps to the cellar is a tiny door, indiscernible in the darkness unless one runs their hands over the stones, and this is where a weary father, who has already lost so much, carries his young daughter.

She may be asleep, or awake. All that matters is that a necklace hangs heavy round her throat, and it is made of silver. All that matters is her father kisses it when he places her in the cubby behind the door, and a trace of his lips lingers on the metal.

The cubby is not big enough for the two of them. It is barely big enough for a little girl that is not so little and the doll that she cradles, a remnant of her past.

Her father loves her dearly. He kisses her forehead and strokes her cheek, and then he closes the door.

It goes like this:

A man hides his daughter in the cellar. She huddles in the dark, and listens as he climbs the stairs.

She listens as silence passes, unending, for minutes upon minutes.

She listens as the door opens. Listens as soldiers infect the home above and draw their swords, and speak and then shout, the volume but not the words carrying.

When her father begins to scream, the girl does not listen anymore.

It goes like this:

Hours and days and minutes and weeks pass. When she is brave enough, the girl takes her hands from her ears and listens.

She hears no soldiers, no thumping boots. She does not hear her father's screams. All that can be heard is the creaking of a tiny house that has been many things before, shifting in the wind.

When she is brave enough, the girl pushes the small door open and climbs out. She may take her doll with her. Her dress may catch on the door's hinges, and she may sob a little as she tugs at it. All that matters is that she is free, in the end, and climbs the cellar stairs with silver around her neck.

This place that is now a home has been many things. It has known sorrow and joy and fear and anger and ecstasy and so, so much death. But all that matters is that a god died here once, so long ago.

No one knows its name anymore. But this house remembers every life that bleeds upon it, from the god so old it is forgotten, to the father that loved his daughter so dearly he gave himself for her.

The earth does not forget as easily as humans do.

It goes like this:

There was once a god honored in blood, and silver, that was slaughtered upon the soil.

There was once a girl weighed down by grief and silver, who knelt at her father's side and, unknowingly, cried out in a language unspoken for centuries, a dead god's name upon her lips.

Where gods' blood is spilled, the ground turns holy.

It goes like this:

Give me silver. Give me grief. Say my name, and winter's shepherd will walk the earth again.

It goes like this:

There is a house that has been many things, and is built upon holy ground. There is a father, murdered in its front room, and his daughter's knees are wet with blood as she weeps beside him.

When you scream a god's name, it listens, even if it died millennia ago.

Deep in the earth, a god wakes. Gods do not crawl, but this one does, digging its nails in the soil and dragging itself to the surface, to the cold floor of an empty cellar. When it ascends the stairs, the wood creaks beneath its ancient feet.

It goes like this:

A child, kneeling in blood. Silver at her throat.

A god as grateful as gods can be.

The child may be shaking. She may be clutching at her father's shirt or at her own. She could be begging him to wake, but she is not that stupid.

All that matters is that in her grief, she has called a god of frost and death and silver, and that god would move stars and sun for the girl that cried its name.

The god kneels, and takes the girl's face in its hands. It is as gentle as a father. The girl sniffles and wipes her eyes, and a cold kiss is pressed to her forehead.

Half a mile away, a soldier with fresh blood on his sword tastes the smell of winter on the wind.