

GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR  
by  
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FADE IN:

EXT. ARMENIAN HIGHLANDS - NIGHT

Infinite black mountains. A sky burning with stars.

Wind moves across the land like a held breath.

Then—

FIRE.

A palace burns on the far ridge. Not raging — surgical. Controlled. The glow flickers against the mountains like a wound that won't close.

We PUSH IN slowly.

Smoke rising. SCREAMS carried faintly on the wind. Then silence. Which is worse.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROYAL PALACE - CONTINUOUS

Chaos in the courtyards. Soldiers clash in torchlight. Steel flashes. Blood runs black across white stone.

A KING collapses on the palace steps — throat cut. He reaches for something. Finds nothing.

Standing over him—

ANAK (40s). Wild-eyed. Breathing hard. Blade in hand.

He looks down at what he's done.

This is not triumph. He knows that now.

This is irreversible.

Behind him, half-hidden in shadow—

A CHILD. Five years old. GREGORY.

Frozen. Watching his father stand over a dead king.

He doesn't understand what he's seeing.

But he will remember it forever.

A horn BLASTS.

Anak turns—

Too late.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

The king's guards move through the bodies. Systematic. They are executing everyone tied to Anak's bloodline.

No hesitation.

A WOMAN — young, one of the household servants — grabs Gregory by the wrist.

RUNS.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - NIGHT

She carries him. He's too small to keep up. She doesn't slow.

Behind them — the fire spreads. The palace, the city, everything that was his home swallowed by orange light.

Gregory looks back over her shoulder. Watching it disappear.

She stops at a crossroads in the dark. Sets him down. Kneels. Takes his face in both hands.

Her eyes are wet. She isn't going to say what she needs to say. She says it anyway.

WOMAN

(urgent, low)

You do not go back. You understand me? No matter what you feel. No matter what you remember. You do not go back.

He doesn't respond. He's five. He can't process any of this.

She pulls him close — one breath — then lets go.

Pushes him gently toward the darkness ahead.

He takes a step. Stops. Looks back at her.

She mouths: Go.

Gregory stumbles forward into the dark.

We HOLD on him – a small figure swallowed by night.

We HOLD a beat longer than is comfortable.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. ARMENIAN HIGHLANDS – DAWN (YEARS LATER)

The same landscape. But calm. Golden light across rolling hills. Wildflowers in the grass. The mountains in the distance – unchanged, indifferent.

A MAN walks through tall grass. He moves like someone who has learned stillness as a discipline, not a gift.

This is GREGORY (30s). Still. Controlled. Carrying something that never gets lighter.

In the distance – a modest home. Smoke from a cooking fire. Children's voices.

He stops and looks at it for a moment before walking toward it.

As if reminding himself it's real.

CUT TO:

EXT. GREGORY'S HOME – MORNING

Simple. Lived-in. A good life built from not much.

Two YOUNG BOYS wrestle in the dirt outside.

ARISTAKES (10) – intense, competitive, the kind of boy who keeps score even when there is no game.

VRTANES (8) – quieter, watchful. Absorbs everything. Gives away little.

They laugh – until Aristakes shoves too hard.

Vrtanes hits the ground. Sits up. Looks at his brother.

Doesn't swing back.

Aristakes stands over him. Waiting.

ARISTAKES  
Hit me.

Nothing.

ARISTAKES (CONT'D)  
Come on.

VRTANES  
Why?

ARISTAKES  
Because I hit you.

VRTANES  
So?

Gregory steps into frame. He's been watching from the path. Long enough to see the whole thing.

He helps Vrtanes up. Dusts him off. A quiet ritual.

GREGORY  
(to Aristakes)  
What happens if he hits you back?

ARISTAKES  
I hit him again.

GREGORY  
And then?

Aristakes shrugs. He hasn't thought past that. Why would he?

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
That's the problem. Neither of you ever stops.

ARISTAKES  
Someone has to lose eventually.

Gregory looks at him. Something in that answer.

GREGORY  
Yes. They do.

He says it like it's the saddest thing in the world.

Aristakes doesn't get it. He's frustrated by not getting it.

MARIAM (30s) appears in the doorway. Strong-boned, sharp-eyed. A woman who has learned to read weather and men with equal precision. She misses nothing.

MARIAM  
Breakfast.

The boys run inside. Gregory stays. Mariam studies him – the way he watched the boys, the way he answered Aristakes.

MARIAM (CONT'D)  
You can't raise them to be  
something the world will punish.

GREGORY  
I'm not raising them to survive the  
world. I'm raising them to improve  
it.

MARIAM  
From where? A pit? A ditch? You  
keep teaching Aristakes that  
restraint is wisdom and the first  
boy who doesn't share your  
philosophy beats him bloody.

Gregory is quiet. He doesn't dismiss this.

GREGORY  
That may happen.

MARIAM  
And?

GREGORY  
And we help him understand why it  
happened. And he grows stronger in  
the right direction.

She looks at him – not unkindly, but clearly.

MARIAM  
You sound like a man who's never  
watched someone he loves get hurt.

Something crosses Gregory's face. Quick. Gone.

GREGORY  
I don't sound like that.

A beat. She knows him well enough to not push it.

MARIAM  
Breakfast.

She goes inside.

Gregory stands in the yard. Looks out toward the distant hills. Smoke on the horizon – far away. The capital.

He turns and goes inside.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE MARKET - DAY

Busy. Crowded. Voices overlapping. The smell of bread and animal and dust.

Gregory stands at a merchant's stall, exchanging goods. Aristakes is beside him, watching.

The MERCHANT weighs the scale – and tilts it. Slightly. Deliberately.

Gregory sees it. The merchant sees him see it.

Gregory counts out payment. Hands it over. Full amount. Says nothing.

The Merchant smirks and pockets it.

They walk away. Aristakes is red.

ARISTAKES

He cheated you.

Gregory keeps walking.

ARISTAKES (CONT'D)

You saw it. I saw it. He knew you saw it and he did it anyway.

GREGORY

Yes.

ARISTAKES

So why didn't you say anything?

Gregory stops. Turns to face him.

GREGORY

What would I have said?

ARISTAKES

That he's a thief. That you want your money back.

(MORE)

ARISTAKES (CONT'D)  
That you'll tell everyone in this  
market what he does.

GREGORY  
And then?

ARISTAKES  
And then he stops doing it.

GREGORY  
Or he does it more carefully. To  
someone who can't afford to lose  
what he takes.

Aristakes clenches his jaw. He's not satisfied. He shouldn't  
be - Gregory isn't done.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
The coin he took from me today fed  
something in him - the belief that  
he can take and face nothing. If I  
take it back with shame, I've only  
taught him to hide better.

ARISTAKES  
So we just - let him?

GREGORY  
We let him have that coin. And we  
come back tomorrow. And the day  
after. And we are the same both  
times - and eventually he has to  
decide if that means something.

Aristakes stares at him.

ARISTAKES  
That's not how people work.

Gregory looks at him honestly.

GREGORY  
Most of the time. No.

He starts walking again.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
(quietly)  
But sometimes.

Aristakes follows. Unconvinced. But thinking.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD OUTSIDE VILLAGE - SUNSET

Long golden light. The family walks together. Shadows stretching ahead of them.

Vrtanes falls in step beside Gregory. He's been working up to something.

VRTANES  
Did your father do something bad?

Gregory doesn't break stride.

GREGORY  
Yes.

VRTANES  
Something very bad?

GREGORY  
He killed a king.

Vrtanes processes this with the calm of an eight-year-old who hasn't yet learned that this should shock him.

VRTANES  
Did you try to stop him?

GREGORY  
I was five.

VRTANES  
Did you want to?

Gregory is quiet for a moment.

GREGORY  
I didn't understand what I was seeing.

VRTANES  
Do you understand it now?

GREGORY  
More than I'd like.

Mariam has drifted back to walk beside Gregory. She heard enough.

MARIAM  
(low, to Gregory)  
You're telling them more than you used to.

GREGORY  
They're old enough.

MARIAM  
Old enough for what? To carry it?

GREGORY  
Old enough to understand why I am  
the way I am.

She looks at him. Really looks.

MARIAM  
And why is that?

He holds her gaze.

GREGORY  
Because my father thought strength  
meant taking. And I watched what  
that produced. And I have spent  
every day since trying to find a  
different answer.

MARIAM  
And have you?

A long beat.

GREGORY  
Some days more than others.

She takes his hand. Briefly. Then lets go.

They walk.

Aristakes is ahead. He glances back at his father. Then away.

Something has settled in him. Not agreement. Something more  
like: I'm watching you.

CUT TO:

EXT. DISTANT RIDGE - DUSK

From far away - the family is small against the landscape.  
Peaceful. Vulnerable in the way that all peaceful things are  
vulnerable.

Beyond the ridge - smoke rises from the capital city. Distant  
towers. The machinery of power.

CUT TO:

EXT. TEMPLE OF ANAHIT - NIGHT

Torchlight. Chanting. A crowd on its knees.

The Temple is massive – gold and firelight, incense thick as weather. A statue of ANAHIT, goddess of the nation, towers over the faithful. The face is serene. The eyes are empty.

At the center of it all–

KING TIRIDATES III (40s). Built like authority itself – not performatively, just actually. He stands before the statue and looks up at it.

Hard to tell if he believes.

Easy to tell that he understands what it does for him.

The crowd bows as one. Unified. Obedient. A perfect machine.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. GREGORY'S HOME - SAME TIME

Gregory stands outside in the dark. Looking toward the distant glow of the temple fires on the horizon.

Mariam appears behind him. She follows his gaze.

MARIAM

You've been standing here for an hour.

GREGORY

I know.

MARIAM

Something's changed.

Not a question.

GREGORY

There are things I've been waiting to do. I thought I had more time.

MARIAM

What things?

He turns to look at her.

GREGORY

Something my father never finished.

MARIAM  
Your father killed a king.

GREGORY  
He started a debt. I've been  
thinking about how to pay it back  
without adding to it.

She studies him. She's afraid. She doesn't let the fear  
become weakness.

MARIAM  
How long have you been planning  
this?

GREGORY  
I'm not sure I was planning it. I  
think I've just been – waiting to  
be ready.

MARIAM  
Are you?

He's honest.

GREGORY  
No. But I don't think waiting  
longer will fix that.

She looks at him for a long time. The firelight from the  
horizon reflected in her eyes.

MARIAM  
Tell me what you need from me.

He reaches for her hand.

GREGORY  
To know you understand.

MARIAM  
I understand.

A beat.

MARIAM (CONT'D)  
I don't agree. But I understand.

He nods. That's enough. It has to be.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. TEMPLE ROAD - DAWN

The stone road leading toward the capital. Empty at this hour. Long and straight and unforgiving.

Gregory stands at the edge of it. Pack on his back. He hasn't moved yet.

The family is behind him. Mariam. Aristakes. Vrtanes.

No one wants to be the first to speak.

Vrtanes breaks first.

VRTANES  
Will you come back?

Gregory kneels in front of him.

GREGORY  
I don't know. That's the honest answer.

VRTANES  
I'd rather have the honest one.

Gregory almost smiles. Puts a hand on his son's head.

GREGORY  
I know you would.

He stands. Turns to Aristakes. Who is doing everything in his power to look unmoved.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
Aristakes.

Nothing.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
Look at me.

He does. Barely.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
You're going to be angry at me for a while.

ARISTAKES  
(flat)  
I'm not angry.

GREGORY

You are. And it's right to be. I'm leaving and I'm choosing to leave and that is something I'm doing to you whether I mean to or not.

That lands. Aristakes looks away.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

Hold onto that. Don't let anyone tell you it isn't fair to feel it.

ARISTAKES

(quietly)

Then why are you going?

GREGORY

Because there is a man in that city who has been carrying a wound my father gave him. And I have been pretending that's not my problem.

ARISTAKES

Is it your problem? You didn't do it.

GREGORY

No. But I'm the only one left who can try to repair it.

Aristakes doesn't have an answer to that. He's never heard his father say anything that direct.

Gregory turns to Mariam.

They look at each other. Everything they need to say has already been said. What's left is harder than words.

MARIAM

I want to tell you this is foolish.

GREGORY

You can.

MARIAM

It wouldn't stop you.

GREGORY

No.

She takes a breath.

MARIAM

Then I want you to know that whatever you're going to do in that city - I believe you'll do it the right way. Even if it costs you everything.

A beat.

MARIAM (CONT'D)

That is not a comfort. I want you to know that too.

He takes her face in his hands. Presses his forehead to hers.

One breath. Two.

He lets go. Picks up his pack. Walks toward the road.

He does not look back.

Not because he doesn't want to.

Because he knows if he does, he won't go.

Aristakes watches him until he disappears into the early light.

Then looks at his mother.

ARISTAKES

(low)

What do we do?

Mariam watches the road. Empty now.

MARIAM

We wait. And we don't fall apart. In that order.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAPITAL CITY - MIDDAY

Massive stone walls. Guards at the gate. The smell of ten thousand people packed into one place.

Gregory approaches. He's been walking since dawn. He looks it.

A GATE GUARD steps into his path.

GATE GUARD  
State your purpose.

Gregory meets his eyes. Unhurried.

GREGORY  
Service to the king.

The guard looks him over. A man with nothing but a pack and a quality of stillness that doesn't fit the road dust on his clothes.

GATE GUARD  
You come from where?

GREGORY  
The highlands. Three days east.

GATE GUARD  
Family?

GREGORY  
Wife. Two sons.

The guard studies him. Trying to find the lie. There isn't one - not technically.

He waves him through.

Gregory passes under the gate. Into the city.

He doesn't look up at the walls. He's already memorized the architecture of what he's walking into.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE COURTYARD - DAY

Controlled chaos. Soldiers drilling. Servants rushing. Orders clipped and constant.

Gregory stands still in the middle of it. Watching. Learning the rhythms of the place.

A CAPTAIN (50s) cuts through the crowd and stops in front of him. Hard-used face. The eyes of a man who has survived a dozen kings' moods.

CAPTAIN  
You're new.

GREGORY  
Today, yes.

The Captain tilts his head. That answer was slightly wrong for a servant.

CAPTAIN  
You know what this place is?

GREGORY  
The king's house.

CAPTAIN  
It's the king's machine. There's a difference. A house you can leave.

He steps closer. Keeps his voice down. This is not a threat - it's almost a warning.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
Every man in this courtyard belongs to him. You serve well, you live well. You create problems - and I've seen what problems look like here - you don't get a second chance to regret it.

Gregory holds his gaze.

GREGORY  
I understand.

CAPTAIN  
Do you?

GREGORY  
I've been watching men like you follow orders since I was a child. I know what it costs.

A silence. The Captain searches his face.

CAPTAIN  
Men like me.

GREGORY  
Men who are good at their work and careful about what they believe.

The Captain doesn't know what to do with that. He files it away.

CAPTAIN  
Stay out of the Great Hall until you're called. Don't speak to the king. Don't speak about the king. And whatever it is you believe-

He looks at Gregory.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
Keep it where I can't see it.

He walks away.

Gregory watches him go.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - GREAT HALL - DAY

Vast. The columns stretch into shadow. Firelight from a dozen braziers. The statue of ANAHIT towers over the far end - gold catching flame, the goddess's face serene and absolute.

The COURTIERS fill the room. Arranged by rank, by proximity to power, by fear.

A hush moves through them like weather.

KING TIRIDATES enters.

He doesn't need to announce himself. The room rearranges itself around him. He walks to the throne and sits - not in relief, but in continuation. This is simply where he exists.

Everyone bows.

Gregory, standing near the back among the lesser servants - does not.

Not dramatically. He simply remains standing. Still. Eyes forward.

The Captain sees it immediately. His jaw tightens. He says nothing.

Not yet.

A PRIEST steps forward. Older. His authority here is second only to the king's - and he knows it.

PRIEST  
Those who serve the king honor the  
goddess. Those who honor the  
goddess are protected by her. This  
is the covenant of this house.

Incense bowls are passed. One by one the courtiers step forward, offer, and bow. The ritual is smooth. Practiced. A machine of devotion.

Gregory watches each person. Not the ritual – the people doing it. Some with true belief. Some with the blank efficiency of long habit. Some with the careful performance of men who know they're being watched.

The incense bowl reaches Gregory.

He takes it. Holds it. Looks at it for a moment.

Sets it down. Untouched.

The ripple is small. But the room feels it.

The Priest turns. Finds Gregory. Studies him.

PRIEST (CONT'D)  
You do not honor her.

Not a question. A wall. Gregory walks toward it calmly.

GREGORY  
I honor something else.

PRIEST  
There is nothing else in this house.

GREGORY  
Then I'll honor it quietly.

The Priest looks to the throne.

Tiridates has been watching since the moment Gregory didn't bow. He rises now. Steps down from the throne. The room gives him space like water parting.

He stops several feet from Gregory. Close enough to see him. Far enough to be deliberate.

TIRIDATES  
(quiet)  
What do you honor?

Gregory meets his eyes. He's been waiting for this question. Not anxiously. He's simply had the answer for a long time.

GREGORY  
Forgiveness.

A murmur through the room. The word is foreign here. Not dangerous yet – just strange, like a language no one speaks.

Tiridates tilts his head. He isn't offended. He's curious in the way that a man who's never been surprised is curious about something that almost surprises him.

TIRIDATES

Forgiveness. That's what you worship.

GREGORY

I follow the one who taught it.

TIRIDATES

And where is he now?

GREGORY

Dead. Killed for it.

The room tightens. That answer sits wrong – or right, depending on who you are.

TIRIDATES

And you think that makes it worth following.

GREGORY

I think it makes it worth asking why they killed him for it.

A beat. Tiridates circles him slowly. Not threateningly – appraisingly, the way a man examines something he's thinking about purchasing or destroying.

TIRIDATES

You think forgiveness makes you strong.

GREGORY

No.

That stops Tiridates.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

I think it ends things. Strength keeps a wound open – it keeps the fight going, keeps the debt unpaid. Forgiveness closes it.

TIRIDATES

Nothing closes. It just changes hands.

He steps close. Face to face now.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
 I have ruled this kingdom for  
 twenty years on that truth. Every  
 man who tried to tell me otherwise  
 is in the ground.

A beat.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
 And you come into my house and tell  
 me you honor something else.

GREGORY  
 Yes.

Silence.

The whole room is frozen.

Tiridates searches his face. Looking for the angle. The  
 ambition. The lie. There isn't one.

That is deeply unsettling.

TIRIDATES  
 (low)  
 Serve me well. Keep your god to  
 yourself. And we will have no  
 further conversation about this.

Gregory doesn't answer.

Which is its own answer.

Tiridates turns away. Waves his hand. The ritual resumes.

The Captain falls in beside Gregory, jaw tight.

CAPTAIN  
 (barely a whisper)  
 Do you understand what almost just  
 happened?

GREGORY  
 (equally quiet)  
 Yes.

CAPTAIN  
 Then why do you look like you're at  
 peace?

Gregory watches the king return to his throne.

GREGORY  
Because I am.

The Captain moves away from him. Fast. As if proximity is its own risk.

CUT TO:

EXT. GREGORY'S HOME NIGHT

Mariam sits on the step outside. The boys are asleep. The hills are dark. A candle burns in the window behind her.

She's not waiting. She has accepted that waiting is not something she can afford.

She's thinking.

Aristakes appears in the doorway. Can't sleep.

ARISTAKES  
Is he there yet?

MARIAM  
Probably.

Aristakes sits beside her on the step. A boy trying to take up the space of someone older.

ARISTAKES  
Is he going to be alright?

She looks at her son. She could protect him from this. She decides not to.

MARIAM  
I don't know.

ARISTAKES  
That's the honest answer.

MARIAM  
Your father taught you that.

Aristakes looks out toward the dark.

ARISTAKES  
He said the king killed his whole family. Because of his grandfather.

MARIAM  
His father. Yes.

ARISTAKES

And he's going back there. To the man whose father his father killed.

MARIAM

Yes.

ARISTAKES

That's not forgiveness. That's-

He struggles for the word.

ARISTAKES (CONT'D)

I don't know what that is.

MARIAM

Neither do I. But I think that's why he has to do it. Because no one else has tried.

Aristakes sits with that.

ARISTAKES

If it was me - I couldn't do it.

MARIAM

You're ten.

ARISTAKES

He was five when it happened to him.

She looks at her son. Sharp, careful, strange little person.

MARIAM

Go to sleep, Aristakes.

He goes inside. She listens to the night.

Far away - the faintest glow on the horizon. The city. The palace.

She stares at it.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - SERVANTS' QUARTERS - NIGHT

Stone. Cold. The breathing of a dozen sleeping men.

Gregory lies on his back. Eyes open. Listening to the building around him - the sounds of the palace settling, guards changing, distant voices.

He's learning the rhythms of this place the way you learn the rhythms of a sleeping animal.

The Captain appears in the doorway. Checks that the others are asleep.

Steps inside. Crouches near Gregory.

CAPTAIN  
(very low)  
I need to know something.

Gregory looks at him. Doesn't move.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
You walked in here today. You refused the goddess. You stood in front of the king and argued with him. And you're still breathing.

GREGORY  
Yes.

CAPTAIN  
Men don't do that by accident. So what are you?

Gregory is quiet for a moment.

GREGORY  
A man who owes a debt to this kingdom. I came to try to pay it.

CAPTAIN  
By defying the king in his own hall?

GREGORY  
By being honest with him. Which may be the first honest thing anyone in that room has done in years.

The Captain stares at him.

CAPTAIN  
That's either the bravest thing I've ever heard or the most deluded.

GREGORY  
Possibly both.

A beat. The Captain almost laughs. Doesn't.

CAPTAIN  
 Keep your head down tomorrow. The  
 Priest has a long memory.

He stands. Starts to leave.

GREGORY  
 Why are you telling me this?

The Captain pauses.

CAPTAIN  
 Because I've been in this machine a  
 long time. And I can't remember the  
 last time I heard someone say  
 something true in the Great Hall.

He goes.

Gregory closes his eyes. This time, to think.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - GREAT HALL - DAY

Larger ceremony this time. More people. The Priest has  
 arranged it deliberately - more witnesses, more pressure, no  
 room for quiet defiance to pass unnoticed.

The Captain watches Gregory from across the room. Not with  
 malice. With the look of a man watching something he can't  
 stop and isn't sure he wants to.

The incense comes. Person by person. Steady as a tide.

The Priest carries it himself this time. Steps in front of  
 Gregory.

Plants himself there.

PRIEST  
 You serve the king. You stand in  
 his hall. You breathe his air and  
 eat his bread.

He holds out the incense.

PRIEST (CONT'D)  
 You honor the goddess. This is not  
 a request.

Gregory looks at the incense. At the Priest. At the statue of  
 Anahit beyond.

He takes the bowl.

The room stills.

He holds it for a long moment.

Sets it down. Untouched.

The room reacts – louder this time. The Priest's face goes rigid.

The Captain moves. He grabs Gregory's arm.

CAPTAIN

Kneel.

Gregory doesn't resist. But he doesn't kneel.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

(harder)

Kneel. Now.

Nothing.

Tiridates raises a hand. Silence falls instantly.

He steps down from the throne. Walks toward Gregory with the patience of a man who has nowhere more important to be.

TIRIDATES

I gave you an instruction  
yesterday.

GREGORY

You did.

TIRIDATES

You understood it.

GREGORY

Completely.

TIRIDATES

Then this—

He gestures at the untouched incense.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

is a choice.

GREGORY

Yes.

Tiridates stares at him. The room is so quiet the torches can be heard.

TIRIDATES

Who are you?

The question he's been circling toward since yesterday.

Gregory could lie. He still could. He's thought about it carefully and the answer is always the same.

GREGORY

My father killed your father.

The room freezes.

Not the held-breath quiet of a ceremony – the airless silence of something irrevocable being said.

The Captain releases him. Steps back.

The Priest goes still.

Every eye in the room finds Tiridates.

He doesn't move. He's processing. You can almost see it – twenty-five years of rage rearranging itself around this new information.

The man standing in front of him is Anak's son.

The man who refused to bow. Who said forgiveness. Who looked at him with those unreadable eyes and gave him the truest answers he's heard in a decade–

Is Anak's son.

A slow smile moves across Tiridates' face. Not warmth. Something older and colder than warmth.

TIRIDATES

(quiet)

Of course.

He walks a slow circle around Gregory. Taking him in differently now.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

Blood remembers. I used to believe that. My father used to say it.

He stops. Face to face.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
 And Anak's son walks into my house.  
 Refuses my goddess. Tells me he  
 believes in forgiveness.

He leans in.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
 Is that what you came for?  
 Forgiveness?

Gregory holds his gaze.

GREGORY  
 I came to offer it.

That was not the answer Tiridates expected.

He looks at Gregory for a long moment. Something moves behind his eyes – quick, complicated.

Then it closes. The king returns.

TIRIDATES  
 (to guards)  
 Take him.

Guards seize Gregory. The Captain watches but doesn't move.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
 Let him think about forgiveness–

He looks at Gregory one last time.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
 in the dark.

Gregory is dragged toward the doors. No struggle. No plea.  
 Just presence.

The Captain's eyes follow him out.

CUT TO:

EXT. EXECUTION PIT – DAY

A vertical shaft cut into the rock outside the palace. Deep.  
 The opening is a dark mouth in the ground.

Wind breathes up from it – cold and old.

Guards drag Gregory to the edge. He looks down. Nothing but  
 black.

One of the guards – younger, new to this – hesitates.

YOUNG GUARD

(low)

Say the word. We can tell them you  
fought back.

Gregory looks at him. The kid means it.

GREGORY

What's your name?

The guard blinks.

YOUNG GUARD

Vahan.

GREGORY

Don't lie for me, Vahan. Not today.  
Not ever on my account.

The other guards grow impatient. Vahan steps back.

Gregory looks into the pit one more time.

Then – not defiance, not resignation, something stranger – he  
steps forward.

Falls.

Darkness swallows him.

SILENCE.

IMPACT.

Vahan stands at the edge. Looking down.

Nothing.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. THE PIT – UNKNOWN TIME

Black.

Then breathing. Ragged. Animal.

A thin shaft of light – far, far above. A pale coin at the end of a long dark throat.

Dust drifts through it.

Revealing:

GREGORY. On his side. One arm bent wrong. Face against stone.

He breathes in. Pain hits everywhere at once.

He tries to move. Can't yet.

He stays still. Breathes. Listens.

The pit is not silent – stone has sounds if you listen. Water somewhere. The wind through the opening above, a low hum.

He opens his eyes.

Looks up at that distant coin of light.

He said he came to offer forgiveness.

He is now at the bottom of a pit.

Something in his face shifts – it might almost be called a smile.

Not because it's funny.

Because he expected this. Because he knew the cost and came anyway.

Because the offer still stands.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. EXECUTION PIT – DAY

The opening. A mouth in the rock. A GUARD peers over the edge – listening for what the pit does to people.

He drops a stone.

We hear it fall.

Fall.

Then – a distant clack.

The guard nods. Satisfied. Walks away.

VAHAN lingers a moment longer. Looking down.

Then he too walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT - DAY

Light from above. A thin shaft of it, clean and indifferent.

Gregory is on the ground. He's been here a while. Long enough to take stock.

He moves one arm. Pain – sharp and specific. Something wrong in the shoulder. He catalogs it. Files it.

He moves his legs. Better.

He rolls to his side. Sits up. Stays there.

He looks up at the light. Measures the distance with his eyes. Forty feet. Maybe fifty. Straight up.

The walls are cut stone – rough, but near-vertical. Not unclimbable. Not yet climbable either.

He looks at the floor. Studies it. Studies the walls again.

He is not panicking. He is thinking.

He tries to stand. His legs give. He sits back down.

He waits.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT - NIGHT

The light is gone. Total dark.

Gregory's breathing – steady now, deliberate. He's been controlling it.

Then – a sound. Faint. Irregular.

Drip.

He turns his head. Locates it by sound alone – the acoustic shape of the pit. There. Left wall. Low.

He crawls toward it. Hands finding stone. Moving slowly. No rush.

He finds it – a slow seep down the wall. He cups his hands.  
Drinks.

It isn't enough. But it's something.

He sits with his back to the wet wall. In the dark.

And after a long time – he speaks. Quietly. Not prayer  
exactly. Something more like argument.

GREGORY

(hoarse, low)

You said forgive them. I heard you.  
I understood you.

Silence.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

I came here to do that. I walked  
into that man's house and I told  
him what I believed and I told him  
who I was. Both true. Both mine.

He waits. As if for a response he doesn't expect but needs to  
make space for anyway.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

(quieter)

I have a wife. Two sons. I'd like  
to see them again.

The dark doesn't answer.

He closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. GREGORY'S HOME - NIGHT

Mariam sits by the fire outside. The flames low. She isn't  
warming herself – she's thinking by its light.

A piece of rope in her hands. She turns it over slowly.

Vrtanes appears in the doorway.

VRTANES

You've been out here a long time.

MARIAM

I know.

VRTANES

Are you going somewhere?

She looks at the rope. Then at him.

MARIAM

Not tonight.

He pads over and sits beside her. Pulls his knees up.

VRTANES

Is he in a pit?

She looks at him sharply.

MARIAM

Why would you say that?

VRTANES

That's what they do to people who won't bow. Yusuf in the market told Aristakes. He said they put them in the Khor Virap and leave them.

The name lands on her like a stone. She keeps her face still.

MARIAM

Don't repeat that name.

VRTANES

Is he there?

She's quiet for a moment.

MARIAM

I think so.

VRTANES

Then what does the rope do?

She looks at her youngest son. Eight years old. Eyes like still water – taking everything in, giving nothing back.

MARIAM

It keeps him alive while I figure out the rest.

VRTANES

I want to come.

MARIAM

No.

VRTANES

I'm quiet. You know I'm quiet.

MARIAM

Vrtanes.

VRTANES

I won't slow you down. And if something happened to you out there alone—

She stops him with a look. Then — because he's right, and she knows it — she reconsiders.

MARIAM

You tell no one. Not Aristakes. Not anyone. You understand?

He nods. Serious as a stone.

MARIAM (CONT'D)

We leave before the moon sets.  
Sleep for an hour first.

He goes inside. She sits alone with the rope and the dying fire.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - GREAT HALL - DAY

Tiridates sits in judgment. A PRISONER kneels before the throne — middle-aged, a merchant by the look of him. Terrified.

The Priest stands to one side. Watching with the satisfaction of a man whose system is working correctly.

PRIEST

He refused the offering at the eastern temple. Three times.  
Witnesses confirmed.

Tiridates looks at the merchant. Not with anger. With the mild interest of a man watching an insect that has wandered onto his table.

TIRIDATES

Three times.

The merchant trembles.

MERCHANT

My lord - I meant no-

TIRIDATES

Three times is a position, not a  
mistake.

He waves his hand. Guards move. The merchant is dragged out  
screaming.

The court watches. The lesson is received. The Priest nods,  
satisfied.

The Captain, standing near the door, watches Tiridates.

Tiridates is not watching the merchant being removed.

He's looking at the space where Gregory stood.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - TIRIDATES' CHAMBER - NIGHT

Tiridates stands at the window. The city below. Fire and  
movement and the ordinary business of power.

The Captain enters. Waits.

TIRIDATES

(without turning)

He's still alive.

Not a question.

CAPTAIN

As of this morning. Yes.

TIRIDATES

Most men last two days.

CAPTAIN

He's not most men.

Tiridates turns from the window. Looks at the Captain.

TIRIDATES

He said he came to offer  
forgiveness. Not ask for it. Offer  
it.

CAPTAIN

Yes.

TIRIDATES

To me.

He moves to his chair. Sits heavily – not exhaustion, something more like weight.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

Anak's son came to my house to forgive me.

CAPTAIN

That appears to be what he said.

Tiridates is quiet for a moment.

TIRIDATES

And I put him in the pit.

CAPTAIN

You did.

Another silence. Longer.

TIRIDATES

Leave me.

The Captain goes.

Tiridates sits alone with that.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE ABOVE THE PIT - DEEP NIGHT

Dark. The stars thick overhead. The palace walls visible in the distance, torchlit.

Mariam moves through the scrub on the hillside. Low. Silent. Vrtanes behind her – he was telling the truth, he is quiet. Barefoot in the grass, leaving no sound.

She finds the iron ring set in the rock – the anchor point for the pit cover, which lies off to one side. Not guarded. Why would it be? No one gets out.

She looks down into the dark. Nothing.

She ties one end of the rope to the ring. Holds the bundle in her hands.

Looks at Vrtanes.

He crouches beside her. Ready.

She lowers the bundle slowly. Hand over hand. The rope uncoiling. The bundle descending into nothing.

She counts the rope by feel. Thirty feet. Forty. The rope goes slack.

She waits.

Nothing.

She pulls back slightly – testing. The rope moves freely. The bundle hasn't been touched.

She looks at Vrtanes. He mouths: Try again.

She lowers it again. Lets it sit.

A long silence. The wind moves through the grass.

Then – resistance. The rope pulls taut.

She exhales. Just barely.

She waits until it slackens – he's taken what's inside. Then she pulls the rope back, hand over hand, slow and even.

Vrtanes keeps watch on the walls. The torches. The pattern of the guards.

She pulls the last of it up. The empty cloth. She holds it for a moment.

Then she looks down into the pit one more time.

No signal. No sound. Just the dark.

She stands. Touches Vrtanes on the shoulder. They move back into the scrub. Silent. Gone.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT – NIGHT

Gregory sits with the bread in his hands.

He hasn't eaten yet. He's thinking.

He looks up at the opening. Empty now. Whoever it was – gone.

He examines the cloth the food came in. Studies it in the thin moonlight filtering down.

He knows this cloth.

He sits very still for a long moment.

Then he eats. Slowly this time. Deliberately. Not desperation  
– commitment.

He's staying alive on purpose now.

GREGORY  
(to himself, low)  
Alright.

He looks at the walls. Studies them properly for the first  
time – not as an obstacle, but as a problem to be solved over  
time.

There's a crack running diagonally up the left wall. Wide  
enough for a hand. Maybe. If you're patient.

He reaches out and touches it.

He'll need weeks.

He starts tonight.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT – DAY

Light again. Gregory's hands are cut. He's been at the crack  
in the wall for hours.

He tries to climb. Gets six feet up. Slips. Falls.

He lies on the ground. Breathes. Gets up.

Tries again.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT – NIGHT

The rope descends again. Another bundle.

Gregory reaches it this time without crawling. He's stronger.  
He pulls it in.

Bread. Water. And – something new. A small piece of cloth  
with marks on it.

He holds it up to the thin moonlight.

Three marks. Lines. Counting days.

He looks up at the opening. Then back at the cloth.

He finds a sharp edge of stone. Adds his own mark beside hers.

Then he folds it carefully and keeps it.

CUT TO:

INT. GREGORY'S HOME - NIGHT

Aristakes sits by the lamp. A small blade in his hands - not a knife exactly, something improvised. He's been working it against a stone. Methodical.

Vrtanes appears in the doorway. Fresh from outside. He says nothing about where he's been.

VRTANES  
What are you doing?

ARISTAKES  
Preparing.

VRTANES  
For what?

Aristakes looks up. Studies his brother.

ARISTAKES  
Whatever comes next.

Vrtanes sits down across from him. He looks at the blade.

VRTANES  
Father wouldn't like that.

ARISTAKES  
Father is in a pit.

The words hit the room like thrown stones. Vrtanes doesn't flinch. He just watches his brother.

VRTANES  
He knew that might happen.

ARISTAKES  
I know.

VRTANES  
He went anyway.

ARISTAKES

I know.

VRTANES

So what does the blade do?

Aristakes sets it down. Looks at his hands.

ARISTAKES

Makes me feel like I'm doing something.

Vrtanes is quiet for a moment.

VRTANES

We are doing something.

He says it evenly. Not mysteriously. But he doesn't elaborate.

Aristakes looks at him.

ARISTAKES

What does that mean?

VRTANES

It means mother has a plan. And I think we should trust it.

Aristakes picks up the blade again. Turns it over.

ARISTAKES

And if her plan doesn't work?

Vrtanes looks at him honestly.

VRTANES

Then you can sharpen it more.

A beat. The first genuine thing that's passed between them in days. Aristakes almost smiles.

He sets the blade down.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT - DAY

Light. Gregory sits in it like it's something to be used. He's been keeping track. Many days now. The marks on the cloth.

He's thinner. But not diminished – leaner, in the way that a blade is leaner than raw metal.

He stands. Goes to the wall. Begins to climb.

His hands know the holds now. His body knows the route. Six feet. Eight. Ten.

Thirteen.

He slips. Falls.

He doesn't make a sound. He's stopped making sounds when he falls. It doesn't help.

He lies on the floor. Stares up.

He speaks to the ceiling – or whoever might be past it.

GREGORY

(flat, honest)

I'm not angry. I want you to know that. I have been, I won't lie to you. The first week I was furious. At you. At myself. At the fact that doing the right thing seems to reliably produce this.

He sits up. Looks at the light.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

But I've been thinking about Tiridates. Down here with nothing else to do. And I think he's in his own pit. Has been for twenty-five years. The one my father put him in.

A beat.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

So I don't think I'm the only one who needs to get out.

He gets up. Goes back to the wall. Starts climbing again.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE – CORRIDOR – DAY

The Captain walks beside the Priest. Their footsteps echo.

CAPTAIN

The eastern villages are restless.  
Three tax collectors turned away  
last month.

PRIEST

Then make an example.

CAPTAIN

We've made examples. The unrest  
spreads anyway.

The Priest stops walking. Turns.

PRIEST

Fear is the foundation of order. It  
has always been.

CAPTAIN

Fear works until the thing people  
are afraid of stops feeling worse  
than the thing they're already  
living with.

The Priest studies him.

PRIEST

That sounds like something a man in  
a pit might say.

He walks on. The Captain watches him go.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE MARKET - DAY

Mariam moves through the stalls. She has less to trade than  
last month. The Merchant watches her coming. He already  
knows.

She lays out what she has. He weighs it slowly. Deliberately.

Offers her half of what it's worth.

She looks at it. Looks at him.

MARIAM

We both know that's not right.

MERCHANT

Your husband isn't here. Prices  
change.

She doesn't look away from him.

MARIAM

My husband isn't here because he's in the king's prison for refusing to submit to something he believed was wrong. I wonder sometimes if you'd have the courage to do the same.

The Merchant blinks. That wasn't what he expected.

MARIAM (CONT'D)

I'll take what you offered. Because I need it and I won't pretend otherwise. But I want you to know that I see exactly what you're doing.

She takes the goods. Turns to go.

MERCHANT

(quieter)  
Wait.

She stops. Doesn't turn.

MERCHANT (CONT'D)

Take the rest.

A long pause.

She turns. He's holding out the full measure. Something in his face that wasn't there a moment ago.

She takes it. Nods once. Walks away.

Aristakes is waiting at the edge of the market. He saw everything.

ARISTAKES

How did you do that?

Mariam keeps walking.

MARIAM

I told him the truth about what I saw him doing. And I let him decide what kind of person he wanted to be.

Aristakes walks beside her. Thinking.

ARISTAKES  
That's what Father does.

MARIAM  
I know.

ARISTAKES  
Does it always work?

She looks at him honestly.

MARIAM  
No. But it worked today.

He nods. Files it away. The way his father files things away.

She notices. Doesn't say anything. Just keeps walking.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT - NIGHT

The rope comes down. Gregory reaches it immediately - he's been waiting near the center, under the opening.

He takes the food. Then holds the rope for a moment.

He ties something to it - the cloth with the marks. He adds a new one below hers. Then he tugs the rope twice.

Above - Mariam feels the tug. She pulls up slowly.

She finds the cloth. Holds it up in the moonlight. Reads the marks.

Counts them.

She looks down into the dark. She can't see him. He can't see her.

She lowers the rope again and tugs it twice.

Below - Gregory feels it. He holds the rope.

For a moment they are connected - across forty feet of dark - by a length of rope and the weight of two hands at each end.

Then she pulls up. Gone.

He sits in the dark. Eats. Looks at the wall.

Eighteen feet tomorrow.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT - DAY

Gregory climbs. Eighteen feet. Twenty.

His arms are shaking. His shoulder - the bad one - screaming.

Twenty-two feet.

His hand slips.

He falls.

Hard. Harder than before. He hits the ground and stays there.

Long silence.

He doesn't get up.

The light shifts. Hours pass.

He's still on the ground.

Not unconscious. Something else. He's hit a wall that isn't stone.

He stares at the opening above. The light going gold. Late afternoon.

GREGORY

(flat)

I won't ask to be saved.

He means it. Not as defiance. As a statement of terms.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

I don't think that's the point. I don't think you reach in and lift people out. I think that's not what this is.

He sits up. Slowly.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

But I'd like to understand why this particular dark. Why this particular man. Why forgiveness needs to cost this much before anyone believes it's real.

He waits. As always.

And as always – not silence exactly. Something harder to name. A quality of the dark that feels less empty than it did at the start.

He looks at his hands. Cut. Calloused. Changed.

He gets up.

Goes to the wall.

Starts again.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. PALACE – GREAT HALL – DAY

A court session. Routine. Tiridates presides from the throne.

A COURTIER steps forward.

COURTIER

The northern villages have refused  
the autumn tax for a second season.  
We've had no response to the king's  
messengers.

The room waits. Tiridates looks at the Courtier.

The pause is a beat too long.

TIRIDATES

Burn the granary. Not the village.  
The granary. Let them feel the  
winter.

The Courtier bows. Moves away.

The Priest watches Tiridates from the side of the hall. Not the order – he's heard worse. The pause. The quality of it.

Something is wrong with the king.

The Captain catches the Priest's eye. Looks away first.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE TIRIDATES' CHAMBER NIGHT

Tiridates sits at the table. A meal in front of him, untouched. A cup of wine he's been refilling.

He's been in here since the session ended. Alone. He prefers it that way lately.

He looks at the polished metal reflector on the wall. His own face looking back.

He's trying to remember something. Or trying not to.

He picks up the cup. Sets it down without drinking.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
(to himself, low)  
Anak's son came to forgive me.

He says it like a man checking a wound to see if it still hurts.

It does.

He stands. Moves to the window. The city below – fires and movement and order, all the machinery of a kingdom running the way it's supposed to run.

He built this. He maintains it. Twenty-five years.

He grips the window ledge.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
(quieter)  
And I put him in the pit.

He turns away from the window. Looks at the room. The stone. The weight of it.

He sits back down. Pours wine. Drinks it this time. Fast.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT – DAY

Light from above. Gregory at the wall – not desperate, not frantic. Methodical.

He places a foot. A hand. Moves up three inches. Tests the hold. Commits.

Another foot. Another hand.

He's mapping the wall by touch. Learning it the way you learn a language – one word at a time, through repetition and failure.

Fourteen feet. Fifteen.

His shoulder gives a warning. He reads it. Adjusts his weight.

Sixteen feet.

He slips. Falls.

He exhales on impact. No cry. He's past crying. He lies there a moment, not resting – noting. What gave way. Which hold. Which angle.

He gets up. Goes back to the wall.

Starts again at foot one.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE ABOVE THE PIT - DAY

Mariam moves through the scrub grass. Low. Practiced now. She knows the route – which stones to avoid, where the guards' sight lines end, how the hill folds to give her cover.

She reaches the iron ring. Ties off the rope.

Lowers the bundle.

Waits.

Today it takes longer than usual. She watches the walls. The guards change. She stays still.

Then the rope goes taut. He's taken it.

She exhales.

One tug up. One tug down. Their shorthand now. I'm here. I hear you.

She pulls up. Goes.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE CORRIDOR DAY

The Captain falls into step beside the Priest. Neither wanted this conversation. Both know it's necessary.

PRIEST

How long has he been like this?

CAPTAIN  
Three weeks. Give or take.

PRIEST  
Since the prisoner.

The Captain doesn't confirm it. Which confirms it.

PRIEST (CONT'D)  
The man is still alive.

CAPTAIN  
So I'm told.

PRIEST  
That shouldn't be possible. No one survives the Khor Virap past the third week.

CAPTAIN  
This one does.

The Priest stops walking. The Captain stops too.

PRIEST  
The king is being haunted by a man he put in the ground and the man won't die. You understand what that does to a ruler's authority.

CAPTAIN  
I understand what it does to a man.

The Priest studies him.

PRIEST  
End it. The prisoner. Before this gets worse.

The Captain looks at him evenly.

CAPTAIN  
The king gave no such order.

PRIEST  
The king is not in a condition to give orders clearly. That's the point.

A long beat.

CAPTAIN  
I serve the king. Not the interpretation of him.

He walks on. The Priest watches him go.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - DAY

A column of soldiers moves through. Unhurried. Certain of their right to be anywhere.

Aristakes watches from the edge of the road. Still. Studying them.

One soldier shoves a merchant's cart aside without breaking stride. The merchant scrambles after it. Says nothing.

Another soldier pulls an apple from a stall as he passes. The stallkeeper looks away.

No consequence. No hesitation. Pure, clean power.

Aristakes watches their faces. The soldiers don't look cruel. They look comfortable. That's the part that stays with him.

Vrtanes appears beside him. Also watching.

ARISTAKES

(low)

That's what it looks like. Winning.

VRTANES

Is it?

ARISTAKES

No one argues with them. No one makes them pay for anything. They just - take. And the world rearranges around it.

VRTANES

Father says that's the system. Not winning.

ARISTAKES

Father is in a pit, Vrtanes.

Vrtanes is quiet for a moment.

VRTANES

I know where he is.

The soldiers pass. The road settles. The merchant re-stacks his cart. The stallkeeper straightens his goods. Life resumes.

Aristakes watches that too. The resuming. The acceptance.

ARISTAKES

I won't be that. Someone who just –  
resumes.

VRTANES

What will you be?

Aristakes looks down the road where the soldiers went.

ARISTAKES

I don't know yet.

He says it like a decision, not a confession.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT - NIGHT

Deep dark. No moon tonight. The opening above is just a  
slightly lighter shade of nothing.

Gregory sits. Still. Eyes open.

Then – a sound that isn't there. He knows it isn't there.  
That doesn't help.

ARISTAKES (V.O.)

(memory)

Someone has to lose eventually.

Gregory exhales. The voice of his son. The market. The blade.  
Aristakes ten years old and already learning the arithmetic  
of force.

ANAK (V.O.)

(memory, older – rough)

You take. Or it is taken from you.  
That is the only lesson this world  
teaches.

Gregory presses both palms into the dirt. Ground himself.  
Real.

His father's voice. Twenty-five years and it hasn't gone  
anywhere.

GREGORY

(quiet, controlled)

No.

He says it the way you say it when you've been saying it your whole life and you know you'll be saying it again tomorrow.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
 You were wrong. About what the world teaches. You looked at a broken system and called it nature.

The voices don't answer. They never do. They don't need to - they live in him.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
 (quieter)  
 I am not you. My sons are not me.  
 That chain ends.

He sits in the dark for a long moment. Then he reaches out and touches the wall. Finds the crack.

Tomorrow he'll climb again.

Tonight he just holds onto the stone.

CUT TO:

INT. GREGORY'S HOME - NIGHT

Mariam comes in late. She moves quietly, assuming the boys are asleep.

Aristakes is sitting in the dark. Waiting.

She stops when she sees him.

ARISTAKES  
 Where do you go?

She sets down her things. Calm.

MARIAM  
 To bed. So should you.

ARISTAKES  
 You leave in the middle of the night. You come back before dawn. You do it two or three times a week and you think I haven't noticed.

She looks at him.

MARIAM  
 You're twelve years old.

ARISTAKES

I'm the man of this house right now  
and I want to know where you go.

The phrase – I'm the man of this house – lands between them. She doesn't laugh at it. She doesn't dismiss it. She holds it.

MARIAM

You are not the man of this house.  
You are my son. Your father is the  
man of this house and he is alive  
and I am making sure he stays that  
way.

Silence.

ARISTAKES

(slowly)  
You're feeding him.

MARIAM

Yes.

ARISTAKES

In the Khor Virap.

MARIAM

Yes.

ARISTAKES

If they find out they'll kill you.  
They'll kill all of us. You know  
that.

MARIAM

Yes. I know that.

ARISTAKES

Then why

MARIAM

Because he is your father. Because  
he went into that city to try to  
fix something that has been broken  
since before you were born. Because  
he did it knowing this might happen  
and he went anyway. And I will not  
let him die in a hole in the ground  
for that.

Aristakes stares at her.

ARISTAKES

He chose this. He left us.

MARIAM

He chose something that cost him us  
for a while. That's different from  
leaving.

ARISTAKES

It doesn't feel different.

She crosses the room. Sits in front of him. Eye level.

MARIAM

I know. And that's real, Aristakes.  
That anger is real and it's yours  
and I'm not going to tell you it's  
wrong.

He looks at her. Something in him wanting to hold onto the  
anger because it's the only thing that feels solid right now.

MARIAM (CONT'D)

But I need you to trust me. Not him  
right now – me. Can you do that?

A long beat.

He doesn't say yes. He doesn't say no.

He looks at the floor.

Which, from Aristakes, is the same as yes.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - GREAT HALL - DAY

Another ritual. The fires burn high. The incense heavy. The  
Priest leads the chant with extra force today – as if volume  
can substitute for something else.

Tiridates sits on the throne. He's dressed correctly. He's  
present. But his eyes keep moving to the corners, to the  
doors, to the space in front of him where Gregory stood.

A SERVANT approaches with the ritual incense.

The servant's hands are shaking. He knows better than to  
appear nervous in front of the king. Knowing doesn't help.

Tiridates watches the shaking hands.

His own hand shoots out and grabs the servant's wrist.

Not to take the incense. Just – grabs. Hard.

The servant freezes. The room freezes.

Tiridates holds for three seconds. Four. Then releases.

Waves his hand. The servant backs away fast.

The Priest steps forward. His voice is smooth. Practiced.

PRIEST

The goddess requires our full  
presence. Our full attention.  
Distractions of the mind are an  
offering in themselves – we release  
them here.

He means it as a life raft. Tiridates doesn't take it.

He's looking at the space in front of his throne again.

TIRIDATES

(very quiet)  
He said it ends things.

The Priest leans closer.

PRIEST

My king–

TIRIDATES

Forgiveness. He said it ends  
things.

A beat.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

Does it?

The Priest has no answer for that. He doesn't deal in  
endings. He deals in continuation.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE ABOVE THE PIT - NIGHT

Mariam at the iron ring. The rope lowered. She waits.

The rope goes taut. He's taken it. Then – something unusual.  
The rope moves. Not the two-tug signal. Something slower.  
Deliberate.

She frowns. Holds the rope. Listens to it with her hands.

He's tying something to it.

She pulls up slowly when it stills. Finds the cloth – their counting cloth, the marks in a row. But below the marks, something new. A shape scratched into the fabric with a sharp stone.

She holds it up to the moonlight. Studies it.

A door. Open.

She stares at it for a long moment.

She finds a stone. Scratches her reply onto the cloth. Lowers it back down.

Below – Gregory pulls it in. Holds the cloth up to his sliver of moonlight.

Her mark: the same door. But she's added something inside it.

A figure standing in it.

He looks at it for a long time.

He folds it carefully and tucks it into his shirt, against his chest.

GREGORY  
(to the dark above)  
You shouldn't still be here.

Above – she hears it. Faint. She smiles. Pulls the rope up.

MARIAM  
(whispers)  
Neither should you.

She coils the rope. Disappears into the dark.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE – TIRIDATES' CHAMBER – NIGHT

Tiridates paces. The room is warm but he's sweating as if it's cold.

He stops at the window. Grips the ledge. Something moving in him that he hasn't let move in twenty-five years.

He turns. Looks at the room. The luxury of it. The stone. The fire. The trappings of a man who has never lost.

He hears something. Turns fast.

Nothing.

TIRIDATES

Who's there?

Silence. Just the fire.

He crosses to the table. Picks up the wine. Puts it down. Picks it up again. Drinks. Sets the cup down too hard – wine splashes across the table, across his hand.

He stares at his wet hand.

He's thinking about something. We can't see what. But we can see it costs him.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

(low, to no one)

I was seven years old.

He sits. Slowly. Like a man sitting down for the first time in a very long time.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

My father was – he was not a good man. But he was my father. And I watched him die. I was seven.

He looks at the fire.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

And I built all of this to make sure no one could ever do that again. To me. To anyone who served me.

A beat.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

And the man who could have made me understand that – I put in the ground.

He sits alone with that for a long time.

The fire burns lower.

He doesn't call for more wood.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT - DAY

Light. Gregory at the wall. He begins to climb.

His body knows this now - not perfectly, but the way a body knows a hard thing it's done a hundred times. Muscle memory carved from stone and failure.

Ten feet. Fifteen. Twenty.

He breathes in a controlled rhythm. Shoulder held at the angle that hurts least.

Twenty-five feet. Halfway.

He stops. Presses himself to the wall. Breathes.

Looks up. The opening - still far. But real. A circle of actual sky. He can see clouds.

He's never been able to see the clouds before.

He reaches for the next hold.

His foot slips.

He scrabbles. One hand catches. Holds.

He hangs there. One hand. Breathing.

He finds the wall with his foot. Presses in. Gets both hands on stone.

Stays there for a long moment. Doesn't go up. Doesn't go down.

Just holds on.

Then - slowly, deliberately - he climbs back down. To the bottom. Sets his feet on the ground.

He looks up at the opening.

Twenty-five feet. He got to twenty-five. He knows where to put his hands now. He knows where the wall gives and where it holds.

Tomorrow he'll go to thirty.

He sits beneath the shaft of light. Lets it fall on his face.  
Closes his eyes.  
Clouds. He saw clouds.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - DAY

Soldiers moving through again. Different unit, same posture.  
The village has learned to go quiet when they come.

An OLD MAN sits in front of his door and doesn't move fast  
enough. A soldier shoves him aside. He falls. Doesn't get up  
immediately.

Aristakes is watching from the far side of the road. He has  
the blade. His hand is on it.

He takes a step forward.

Stops.

He's done the math. One soldier sees him. Then all of them  
see him. Then his mother has no sons.

He stands there. Hand on the blade. Not moving.

The old man gets up on his own. Dusts himself off. Doesn't  
look at the soldiers. Doesn't look at Aristakes. Just goes  
back inside.

The column passes.

Aristakes takes his hand off the blade.

He's shaking. Not fear - something worse. Restraint without a  
reason he fully believes in yet.

CUT TO:

INT. GREGORY'S HOME - NIGHT

Aristakes and Vrtanes. The lamp low. Aristakes with the blade  
again, turning it over.

VRTANES

You're going to do something.

ARISTAKES

Maybe.

VRTANES  
Something with that.

ARISTAKES  
I don't know yet.

Vrtanes watches him. Eight years old. The still water eyes.

VRTANES  
Father would say you're planning  
from anger instead of from purpose.

ARISTAKES  
Father would say a lot of things.  
Father isn't here.

VRTANES  
He's here enough.

Aristakes looks up.

ARISTAKES  
What does that mean?

VRTANES  
It means every time you pick that  
up I think about what he'd say. And  
I think you do too. Otherwise you'd  
have used it already.

A long silence. Aristakes looks at the blade.

ARISTAKES  
(quiet)  
I hate that you're right.

VRTANES  
I know.

Aristakes sets the blade down. Doesn't put it away. But sets  
it down.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT - DAY

Light pouring in. Gregory sits beneath it, bread in his  
hands. He's been in the pit long enough that the light feels  
like a visitor - something to be received, not chased.

He eats slowly. Thinks.

He speaks upward. Not prayer. Something more like working through a problem out loud.

GREGORY

(quiet)

Tiridates was seven years old when my father killed his father. I was five when the soldiers came for ours. We were the same age, essentially, when the same event destroyed both of our families.

He sets the bread down. Looks at the wall.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

He built a kingdom to make sure it never happened again. I built a family. Same wound. Different walls around it.

A beat.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

The difference is I know my walls aren't the answer. And I think some part of him knows his aren't either. That's why I'm down here. Not because he's cruel. Because I frightened him.

He picks the bread back up. Finishes it.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

(softer)

I need to get out of this pit.

He stands. Goes to the wall. Begins to climb.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - TIRIDATES' CHAMBER - NIGHT

Tiridates sits with the Captain. No Priest. No court. Just the two of them in the firelight - two men who have been in each other's orbit for twenty years.

TIRIDATES

How long has it been?

CAPTAIN

Forty-three days.

Tiridates absorbs this.

TIRIDATES  
He's still alive.

CAPTAIN  
He is.

TIRIDATES  
You know someone is feeding him.

A beat. The Captain is careful here.

CAPTAIN  
The men have heard that.

TIRIDATES  
Do you believe it?

CAPTAIN  
A man doesn't survive forty-three  
days in the Khor Virap on  
conviction alone.

Tiridates stands. Moves to the window.

TIRIDATES  
Find out who. But—

He stops himself.

CAPTAIN  
My king?

TIRIDATES  
Find out who. Don't act on it  
without telling me first.

The Captain studies him. That is not a standard order.

CAPTAIN  
Understood.

He moves to leave.

TIRIDATES  
(without turning)  
Bring me something he said. From  
the Hall. Something you remember  
him saying.

The Captain stops. Thinks.

CAPTAIN

He said forgiveness ends things.  
That strength keeps the wound open  
but forgiveness closes it.

Silence.

TIRIDATES

He believed that.

CAPTAIN

He walked into your hall and told  
you who he was knowing what you'd  
do. Yes. I think he believed it.

Tiridates nods once. The Captain leaves.

Tiridates stands at the window for a long time.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE ABOVE THE PIT - DUSK

The light going amber and flat. Mariam approaches from the east - a longer route she's been using. More time, less exposure.

She reaches the crest of the hill. Stops.

Something is wrong. She doesn't know what yet. She knows the feeling.

She stays low. Watches.

The pit entrance. The iron ring. All normal.

She moves forward. Slowly.

A faint sound - metal on rock. From her left.

She stops. Drops. Presses into the scrub.

Two SOLDIERS emerge from behind a fold in the hill. Moving carefully. Searching.

They haven't seen her. Not yet.

She lies flat. The rope coiled against her body. The bundle of food pressed into the grass. She breathes through her mouth. Slow.

SOLDIER #1

(low)  
Tracks here. Fresh. Two days old  
maybe.

SOLDIER #2

Someone's been coming up this hill  
regular.

They move toward the pit. She watches them from the grass,  
ten feet away.

One of them leans over the edge and looks down.

SOLDIER #1

He's alive. You can hear him  
breathing.

SOLDIER #2

So someone wants him that way.

They stand up. Scan the hillside.

Mariam doesn't move. Doesn't breathe.

SOLDIER #1

Spread out. They might come  
tonight.

They split. One moves south – away from her. The other moves  
north – directly toward where she's lying.

She has three seconds. Maybe four.

She sees the drop to her left – a steep slope of loose shale.  
Thirty feet down and then flat ground and dark.

She shifts her weight. The rope tight against her. The bundle  
left behind – no time.

A stone shifts under her hand.

CLACK.

SOLDIER #2

There!

She runs.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Mariam hits the shale slope running. Bad decision. The only decision.

The shale gives - she slides - grabs at dry brush - it tears - she slides further - her feet find a rock - she stops herself two feet from the drop.

The soldier reaches the top of the slope. Sees her. Starts down.

He's heavier. The shale gives worse under him. He slips. Goes down hard on one knee.

Mariam scrambles sideways along the base of the slope. Into the dark. Into the scrub.

She runs.

Behind her - the soldier regains his feet. Shouts to the other. They follow but the ground is against them and she knows this terrain and they don't.

She doesn't stop running until the voices are gone.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT - CONTINUOUS

Gregory hears it - muffled through stone and distance. Shouting. Movement. The particular sound of pursuit.

He stands under the opening. Listening.

Then silence.

He waits a long time. The rope doesn't come.

He sits down on the ground.

GREGORY  
(barely audible)  
Go home. Please. Go home.

He sits in the dark. Listening to nothing.

CUT TO:

INT. GREGORY'S HOME - NIGHT

The door opens hard. Mariam comes in covered in dirt and scrapes, breathing in controlled bursts. The boys are up immediately.

ARISTAKES

What happened?

She goes straight to the shelf. Starts moving things - the small amount of food, the coin she's been keeping. Her hands are efficient. No wasted motion.

MARIAM

They were waiting. They know someone's been feeding him.

Aristakes goes still.

ARISTAKES

Did they see your face?

MARIAM

It was dark. I don't think so. But they know the route now.

VRTANES

So you can't go back.

She stops moving. Sets down what's in her hands.

MARIAM

(quietly)

Not the same way.

ARISTAKES

There's no other way.

She looks at him.

MARIAM

There's always another way. I just haven't found it yet.

Aristakes stares at her. Something is moving in him - something being slowly dismantled and rebuilt.

ARISTAKES

You're not afraid.

She looks at him honestly.

MARIAM

I'm terrified. I've been terrified every night for six weeks. That's not the same as being stopped by it.

A beat.

ARISTAKES

Tell me what to do.

She looks at her son. Really looks. Something has shifted in him – he's not asking out of anger now. He's asking out of trust.

MARIAM

Tonight – nothing. Sleep. Tomorrow I find a new route and you help me check it.

He nods. Goes to his mat. Lies down.

She watches him. Then Vrtanes, already back in his corner, already still.

She sits by the cold hearth. Alone with the problem.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT – NIGHT

Dark. No rope. No food. The water trickle on the wall. That's all.

Gregory lies on his back. Hands folded on his chest. Eyes open.

He's been here before – this particular kind of night, where the body is quiet and the mind won't follow.

He thinks about his father. He does this sometimes, down here, now that there's nothing else to do but be honest.

GREGORY

(to himself, low)

You weren't all bad. I want to be clear about that. In my own head if nowhere else.

He stares at the dark.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
 You taught me to ride. You taught  
 me to read - which you couldn't do,  
 so that cost you something. You  
 laughed at things the way I laugh  
 at things. I got that from you.

A long pause.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
 And then you killed a king. For  
 what you were told was a good  
 reason. And everything after that -  
 everything I've been trying to  
 build and protect and carry - it  
 all came from that one moment.

He closes his eyes.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
 I don't know if I've forgiven you.  
 I think I've been telling myself I  
 have for a long time. Down here I'm  
 not so sure. But I'm trying. For  
 your sake and for mine and for my  
 sons who shouldn't have to carry it  
 after me.

The dark is very quiet.

He opens his eyes. Looks up.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
 (softer)  
 It ends with me. Whatever else  
 happens. It ends here.

He says it like a man making a vow. To his father. To  
 himself. To whoever might be listening.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - GREAT HALL - DAY

The court assembled. The ritual beginning. But the room has a  
 different quality now something uncertain has settled into it.  
 The machinery still runs. The gears still turn. The people  
 just aren't sure anymore what it's building toward.

Tiridates enters. He looks present. More present than he's  
 been in weeks. Which in a way is more alarming.

He sits. The ritual proceeds.

The Priest steps forward. His voice carries the particular authority of a man who knows he's losing ground.

PRIEST

The goddess has spoken through the sickness of the land. The eastern villages reject the covenant. The northern roads are unsafe. And here in this hall

He pauses. Everyone knows what he's about to say.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

A man sits in the pit who refused the goddess not once but twice. And the king's peace has not been restored since that day.

He looks at Tiridates.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

The goddess requires completion of the sentence. Then the covenant is restored.

The court watches Tiridates. Waiting.

Tiridates looks at the Priest for a long moment.

TIRIDATES

You're telling me the kingdom is unwell because a man in a pit is still breathing.

PRIEST

I'm telling you the covenant

TIRIDATES

I heard what you're telling me.

He stands. Looks at the room.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

Leave us. All of you. Except the Priest.

The court empties. Fast. They've learned not to linger.

The Captain pauses at the door. Tiridates gives him a small nodstay within earshot. He stays.

The doors close. Tiridates and the Priest, alone in the vast hall.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

(quiet)

Say what you actually want to say.

PRIEST

The man is dangerous. Not to your body. To your authority. The longer he lives the more people ask why.

TIRIDATES

Why what?

PRIEST

Why the man who told the king the truth is in a hole in the ground.

A silence. That landed differently than the Priest intended.

TIRIDATES

(carefully)

You just called it the truth.

The Priest realizes his mistake. Tries to recover.

PRIEST

I meant—

TIRIDATES

I know what you meant.

He walks past the Priest. Toward the door.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

I'll decide about the prisoner in my own time.

He pushes through the doors. Gone.

The Priest stands alone in the empty hall. Not satisfied. Not finished.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

A different approach. Coming from the north, lower, longer. Mariam moves through it while there's still light — walking it, learning it.

Aristakes is with her. He doesn't say much. He watches everything she watches. The sightlines. The cover. The ground.

She stops. Points silently at a gap between two rocks – barely wide enough to move through sideways.

He looks at it. Nods.

She moves through it. He follows.

On the other side – a natural shelf in the hillside. Hidden from the road below. Hidden from the path above.

She crouches. Tests the angles.

MARIAM

(low)

From here I can see the pit  
entrance. And they can't see me.

ARISTAKES

How do you get the rope down  
without being seen from below?

She points to a second route – looping wide around the back of the hill, coming at the iron ring from the east instead of the west.

ARISTAKES (CONT'D)

That adds twenty minutes.

MARIAM

Twenty minutes is nothing.

He studies the terrain. Thinks.

ARISTAKES

I should watch from here. While you  
go. So if someone comes you have  
warning.

She looks at him.

MARIAM

That means you're out here in the  
dark.

ARISTAKES

I know.

She studies her son's face. The jaw set. The eyes steady. He's frightened. He's not letting the fright make his decision.

She recognizes it. She knows exactly where he learned it.

MARIAM

Three signals. Stone on stone -  
once means stay still. Twice means  
move now. Three times means run and  
don't look back.

He nods. Memorizes it.

MARIAM (CONT'D)

(quieter)

Your father would be proud of you.

ARISTAKES

(a beat)

I'm not doing it for him.

She holds his gaze.

ARISTAKES (CONT'D)

I'm doing it for you.

She looks at him for a moment. Then nods. Moves on.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT - NIGHT

Dark. Gregory is weaker than he's been since the first week.  
Three days without food. The water barely enough.

He sits against the wall. Not climbing today. No energy for  
it.

He looks at his hands. The cut palms. The stone-worn  
fingertips.

He's been in this pit so long he can't clearly remember what  
it felt like to not be in it. That's the most frightening  
thing that's happened to him down here.

GREGORY

(very quiet)

I know what it costs now. I want  
you to know that I understand. I'm  
not angry about it anymore.

He leans his head back against the stone.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

I just don't know how much longer I can hold onto what I came here to do. The body has limits. I've found most of them.

A long silence.

Then – from above. Faint. The sound of rope on stone.

He opens his eyes.

The rope descends. Slow. Coming down the far side of the wall – the new route, a different angle. It reaches him.

He sits there for a moment just looking at it.

Then he takes it. Holds it. Two tugs down.

Above – one tug back. Then a second.

He exhales. Pulls in the bundle. Eats.

When he's done he holds the rope one more time. Not to signal. Just to hold.

A minute. Maybe two.

Then he lets go. The rope pulls up and disappears.

He lies down. Closes his eyes.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Alright. Tomorrow I climb.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT – NIGHT

Total dark. Gregory asleep against the wall.

Then – a change in the quality of the air. Not sound. Not light. Something before both.

Gregory's eyes open.

The pit is the same. The dark is the same. But something has entered it.

A faint luminescence begins – not from above, not from any source Gregory can locate. As if the stone itself has remembered something. It grows slowly. Patient.

Dust lifts from the floor. The air thickens.

Gregory doesn't move. He watches. His mind cycling through explanations – exhaustion, hunger, sickness. He catalogs them all.

None of them feel right.

A FIGURE takes shape in the light. Not descending. Already there. As if it has been there the whole time and the light is simply allowing Gregory to see what was always present.

Armor. Not ceremonial – worn, scarred, the armor of something that has been in a fight.

Wings. Folded. Close.

A face that is not quite anything Gregory can hold in his mind – not because it's alien but because it is entirely, impossibly calm.

Gregory gets to his feet. Slowly. Not from reverence. Because lying down does not feel right for what is happening.

GREGORY

(quiet, steady)

If you're here to end it – end it.  
I'm not going to ask you not to.

The figure doesn't speak. The light shifts. A resonance – not sound exactly, something felt in the chest. Gregory winces. Steadies himself. Doesn't back away.

The resonance again – stronger. Images surface without his choosing them: fire, a crowd moving toward water, a hand pressed against stone, a door opening.

Gregory shakes his head. Tries to hold onto the present.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

Don't show me. Say it. Whatever you  
came to say – say it plainly.

The figure steps forward. Just enough.

The wings shift. The light intensifies. And the voice, when it comes, is very quiet.

Almost gentle.

ANGEL

(in Armenian, soft)

Rise.

That's all.

No prophecy. No thunder. Just that word, in his language, in the voice of something that has never needed to raise it.

Gregory looks at the figure. Waiting for more.

Nothing comes.

The light intensifies until the walls of the pit are visible – and beyond them, somehow, as if the stone has become transparent – the world above. The hills. The city. The lake in the distance.

The world he came from.

Gregory digs his hands into the dirt. Pain in his arms. In his shoulder. Real. He uses it.

He pushes.

Fails.

Pushes again.

Gets one foot under him.

Stands.

The light hits – then goes. Dark returns completely. The figure is gone. The air is just air.

Gregory stands alone in the dark. Breathing hard.

No wounds healed. Nothing changed in the stone around him.

Just standing. In the dark. When a moment ago he couldn't.

He looks up at the black shaft above him.

GREGORY  
(barely a whisper)  
I will.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. PALACE - GREAT HALL - DAY

The ritual is in progress. The Priest's voice filling the hall – louder than usual, as if volume is a form of control. The court arranged in their places. Everything outwardly correct.

Tiridates sits on the throne. He is present. He is also somewhere else.

His hands grip the armrests. His eyes track something that no one else can see – moving across the floor, up the walls.

The Priest watches him. Keeps chanting. Keeps the machine running.

The court is watching Tiridates. Not the ritual. Him.

Then – Tiridates stands. Abruptly. The chanting stops.

TIRIDATES  
(tight, scanning)  
Do you hear it?

No one answers. No one knows what he means.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
(louder)  
It doesn't stop. It hasn't stopped–

He steps down from the throne. The Priest moves toward him – carefully, the way you approach something unpredictable.

PRIEST  
My king–

Tiridates grabs him. Both hands. Shoves him back hard enough that he stumbles.

TIRIDATES  
Make it stop. Make it–

He presses his hands over his ears. Stands in the middle of the great hall, in front of the entire court, and claws at his own head.

The court recoils. Not from danger – from recognition. Something is gone. Something that was supposed to be permanent.

The Captain moves. Reaches Tiridates. Gets a hand on his arm – not grabbing, steadying. Tiridates looks at him. For a moment, recognition. Then it slips away.

The Priest rights himself. Looks at the court. Looks at Tiridates.

He understands exactly what this moment means. And what it requires him to do next.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

The Captain half-carries Tiridates out of the hall. A physician and two guards close around them. The door shuts behind.

The Priest remains in the hall. Facing the court.

They're looking to him. Of course they are. That's the structure. When the king fails, the institution holds - and he is the institution.

He could use this to consolidate. He knows it. They know it.

PRIEST

(measured, firm)

The goddess tests those she has chosen. The king is being tested. We will hold the covenant while he endures it.

A beat. The court accepts this. Not because they believe it. Because it is something to stand on while the ground shifts.

The Priest looks at the space Tiridates just vacated.

He's thinking about the pit.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - TIRIDATES' CHAMBER - NIGHT

Tiridates on the bed. The physician has given him something - he's calmer, but not present. The Captain sits nearby. Waiting.

Eventually Tiridates speaks.

TIRIDATES

(slow, hoarse)

What do they think?

CAPTAIN

That the goddess is testing you.

TIRIDATES

And what do you think?

The Captain is careful.

CAPTAIN

I think you haven't slept properly in seven weeks.

(MORE)

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
I think you've been alone with  
something you can't put down.

TIRIDATES  
It's his voice. I hear it when I  
close my eyes. Forgiveness closes  
the wound. He said it like he'd  
been carrying it his whole life.

A long silence.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
Because he has. His father did what  
my father - what Anak did. And he's  
been living with that his whole  
life. And he came here not to take  
something back. Just to - close it.

He puts his hands over his face.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
And I put him in the ground for it.

CAPTAIN  
(very quiet)  
He's still alive.

Tiridates lowers his hands. Looks at the Captain.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
Forty-nine days. Someone has been  
keeping him alive. He's still in  
the pit.

Tiridates stares at him. Something shifting in his face - the  
first clear thing in weeks.

TIRIDATES  
(barely audible)  
Bring him up.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - DAY

Soldiers moving through. Systematic now - not a column  
passing, a search. Door to door. Rough.

An OLD MAN is dragged from his home. He has nothing they  
want. They take his bread anyway. Drop him in the road.

Aristakes watches from twenty feet away. His hand on the  
blade.

He's past calculating. He's already decided. He's moving.

He steps into the road.

ARISTAKES

Leave him.

The soldier who dropped the old man turns. Takes in Aristakes – twelve years old, a blade he barely knows how to hold, standing in the road like he belongs there.

The soldier laughs. Starts to turn away.

ARISTAKES (CONT'D)

I said leave him.

The soldier stops. Turns back. Looks at Aristakes differently now – not with amusement. With the particular attention that comes before violence.

He steps forward. Shoves Aristakes hard in the chest.

Aristakes stumbles. Doesn't fall. Brings the blade up.

He's close enough to use it. His hand is not shaking.

The soldier goes still. Reassessing.

The other soldiers have noticed. Four of them, drifting toward this.

Aristakes sees them. Does the math instantly – the math he's been doing since he was ten years old. One of them, maybe. Four of them, never.

And beyond the math – a different voice. Not his father's. His own.

He lowers the blade.

Not in surrender. In decision. Those are different things and he knows it now.

The soldier shoves past him. The others follow. They leave.

The old man pulls himself up from the road. Looks at Aristakes. Says nothing. Goes inside.

Aristakes stands in the empty road.

He felt it – the moment of choice. He made it. He's still not sure he made the right one. But he made it as himself, not as an echo of anything.

He puts the blade away.

CUT TO:

INT. GREGORY'S HOME - NIGHT

Mariam is packing. Not everything - the essentials. They may need to move fast.

Aristakes comes in. She reads him immediately - something happened. Something he's still processing.

MARIAM

What happened?

He sits. Sets the blade on the table between them.

ARISTAKES

I stepped in. Between a soldier and an old man. I had the blade out.

She waits.

ARISTAKES (CONT'D)

I didn't use it.

MARIAM

Why not?

He thinks about this honestly.

ARISTAKES

Four of them. One of me. It would have ended badly.

MARIAM

That's strategy. What's the other reason?

He looks at her.

ARISTAKES

I thought about what it would start. Not just for me. For the old man. For anyone watching. One dead soldier and twenty more back by morning and nothing actually changed.

Mariam is quiet for a moment.

MARIAM

Your father says violence keeps the wound open.

ARISTAKES

I know what Father says.

A beat.

ARISTAKES (CONT'D)

I don't entirely disagree with him anymore. I still think there are times—

MARIAM

There are.

He looks at her — surprised she said it.

MARIAM (CONT'D)

Your father isn't saying never fight. He's saying know what you're fighting for. Know what comes after. Today wasn't the time. You saw that. That's not weakness.

He looks at the blade on the table.

ARISTAKES

It felt like weakness.

MARIAM

It always does at first. Ask me how I know.

He almost smiles. Doesn't quite.

Vrtanes appears from the back room. He's heard all of it.

VRTANES

There's a rider on the road. Coming fast.

They all look at the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD — CONTINUOUS

A RIDER pulls up hard. Dusty. Urgent. He's been riding since before dawn.

Mariam steps out to meet him. Aristakes and Vrtanes behind her.

RIDER  
(catching breath)  
You're the wife of the man in the  
Khor Virap.

MARIAM  
I am.

RIDER  
He's out. They pulled him up this  
morning.

The words don't land cleanly at first. She processes them.

MARIAM  
Alive.

RIDER  
Alive. But they have him. The  
palace.

He leans down from the horse.

RIDER (CONT'D)  
The word from the city is they want  
him for the king. That the king is  
unwell and someone thinks the  
prisoner can help.

Mariam looks at her sons.

Aristakes is staring at the rider. His jaw working. Something complicated moving through him.

ARISTAKES  
(quietly)  
He went to forgive the king. And  
now the king needs him.

No one responds. It doesn't need a response.

MARIAM  
(to the rider)  
How long to the capital?

RIDER  
Half a day. If you leave now.

She looks at the house behind her. Everything she's built. Everything she's been protecting for forty-nine days.

She turns back to the rider.

MARIAM  
Can you take us?

CUT TO:

EXT. PIT EDGE - DAWN

The rope is thick. New. Nothing like the one Mariam used.

It drops into the pit.

Gregory looks up at it. Studies it. He knows the difference between a rope that wants to pull you up and one that wants to pull you somewhere else.

This one is neutral. Official.

He wraps it around his arm. Two deliberate loops. Tests the tension.

He tugs once - his signal, not theirs.

They begin to pull.

He rises. Feet scraping stone. The light growing - faster than he's used to. He's been managing a thin shaft of it for seven weeks. Now it expands around him. He squints. Breathes through it.

His hands break the surface first. Then his shoulders. Then he's over the edge - hands grab him, drag him onto solid ground.

He lies flat on the earth.

For a long moment he doesn't move. He just breathes. The sky above him - enormous. Open. Real.

He can hear birds.

He hasn't heard birds in forty-nine days.

The Priest crouches nearby. Studying him the way you study a tool before deciding if it's still useful.

PRIEST  
You've survived what no man  
survives.

Gregory doesn't respond. He's still letting the sky happen to him.

PRIEST (CONT'D)  
That makes you significant.  
Significant things are useful.

Gregory slowly turns his head. Looks at the Priest.

GREGORY  
(hoarse, unhurried)  
I'm not useful. I'm here.

The Priest doesn't like that answer. He stores it.

Guards help Gregory to his feet. He stands. Unsteady but upright.

He looks at the pit behind him. The opening in the rock. The dark.

He looks away. Forward.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - INNER CHAMBER - DAY

Gregory is brought in. He walks - with help, but under his own intention.

The room is dimmer than the hall. Quieter. The Priest is here. The Captain. Two guards.

And Tiridates.

Who is sitting on the floor in the corner.

Not the throne. The floor. Back against the wall. Knees up. The posture of a man who ran out of something and sat down where he stood.

Gregory looks at him.

This is the king who threw him in a pit. This is the seven-year-old boy who watched his father die. Both things are true and visible in the same moment.

The guards push Gregory toward him. He doesn't need pushing. He moves forward on his own and crouches down - not ordered to, just - down, to be level.

Tiridates looks at him. The eyes wild and exhausted in equal measure. Recognition flickering.

TIRIDATES  
 (barely above a whisper)  
 You came back.

GREGORY  
 I was brought back.

TIRIDATES  
 I put you in the ground.

GREGORY  
 Yes.

TIRIDATES  
 Why are you—

He can't finish it. Gregory waits.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
 Why aren't you—

GREGORY  
 Angry?

Tiridates nods. Almost imperceptibly.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
 I was. For a while. In the pit, the  
 first week — I was furious. At you.  
 At myself. At the situation.

He lets that sit.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
 And then I started thinking about  
 you at seven years old. Standing  
 where I stood at five. Watching  
 something irreversible happen.

Tiridates goes very still.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
 We were the same age, essentially.  
 Same wound. You built walls around  
 yours. I tried to build something  
 else. Neither of us got it right.

A long silence.

TIRIDATES  
 (raw)  
 I don't know how to put it down.

GREGORY  
I know. That's why I came.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE INNER CHAMBER CONTINUOUS

The Priest steps forward. He's watched this long enough.

PRIEST  
The king requires restoration, not  
conversation. If you have power  
enough to survive the pit, use it.  
Restore his mind. Then we discuss  
the terms of your freedom.

Gregory looks up at the Priest. Steady.

GREGORY  
I don't restore men. I can't reach  
into someone and rearrange them.

PRIEST  
Then what use are you?

GREGORY  
I can sit with him. I can tell him  
what I know about carrying  
something like what he's carrying.  
And I can let him decide what to do  
with it.

PRIEST  
(cold)  
That's nothing. That's words.

GREGORY  
Words are what I have. They're what  
anyone has.

The Priest looks at the Captain. This is not what he planned  
for.

PRIEST  
(to Captain)  
Remove him. He goes back.

The Captain doesn't move.

A beat. The Priest looks at him.

PRIEST (CONT'D)  
I said remove him.

CAPTAIN

The king asked for him. The king is still king.

The Priest stares at the Captain. The Captain holds it.

From the floor – Tiridates.

TIRIDATES

(quiet, clear)

Leave us.

Everyone looks at him. It's the first coherent order he's given in days.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

All of you. Except him.

The Priest doesn't move for a moment. Then he goes. The guards follow. The Captain last – he meets Gregory's eyes briefly before he pulls the door shut.

Gregory and Tiridates. Alone.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE – INNER CHAMBER – CONTINUOUS

Neither of them moves for a moment. The room settles around them. The fire low. The stone cool.

Gregory sits on the floor. Cross-legged. Eye level with the king.

Tiridates watches him do this. Something in the gesture registering.

TIRIDATES

How did you do it. The pit.

GREGORY

One day at a time. One hour when a day was too much.

TIRIDATES

Were you afraid?

GREGORY

Every day. Fear isn't the problem. Fear is just information. The problem is when it becomes the only thing you're listening to.

Tiridates looks at his hands.

TIRIDATES

I've been afraid since I was seven years old. I built everything on top of it so no one could see it.

GREGORY

I know.

TIRIDATES

You can't know.

GREGORY

I watched my father kill yours. I ran through the dark when I was five and a woman I didn't know pushed me forward and said don't go back. I've been carrying that since before I understood what carrying meant.

A beat. Tiridates looks at him.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

So. Not the same. But close enough to understand the weight.

Tiridates exhales. Long. Something in him releasing pressure it's been holding for a decade.

TIRIDATES

My father was not a good man. You should know that. He wasn't - he did things I watched him do. And I still - it was still-

GREGORY

He was your father.

TIRIDATES

Yes.

The simplest exchange in the film. Two men on a floor. The weight of two deaths and forty years and a kingdom distributed between them.

GREGORY

(quietly)

What you've been hearing in your head. The thing that won't stop. What is it?

Tiridates is quiet a long time.

TIRIDATES

The question I never let myself  
ask.

GREGORY

Ask it now.

A very long silence.

TIRIDATES

(barely audible)

Is there another way to rule than  
through fear?

Gregory looks at him.

GREGORY

Yes.

No qualification. No sermon. Just: yes.

Tiridates closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE GATES - DAY

The rider brings them to the gates. Mariam, Aristakes,  
Vrtanes. Dusty from the road. Not dressed for a palace. Here  
anyway.

Guards block the entrance. Mariam steps forward.

MARIAM

My name is Mariam. My husband is  
Gregory, son of Anak. He was  
brought here from the Khor Virap  
this morning. I want to see him.

The guards look at each other. That name. That pit. That  
morning.

GUARD

He's with the king.

MARIAM

Then we'll wait.

She says it like waiting is something she has extensive  
experience with.

Because she does.

The guards confer quietly. One goes inside. The other watches the family.

Aristakes looks at the palace walls. The scale of the place. He's never been this close. Everything his father walked toward. Everything his father was willing to die inside.

ARISTAKES  
(quietly, to Mariam)  
He's really in there.

MARIAM  
He's really in there.

Vrtanes looks up at the walls. Says nothing. Takes his mother's hand.

The guard returns.

GUARD  
The Captain says you can wait  
inside.

He steps aside. The gate opens.

Mariam walks through. Her sons beside her.

All three of them looking straight ahead.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. PALACE - INNER CHAMBER - DAY

The room has been reorganized around danger. Guards flanking the walls. The Priest near the door. The Captain close enough to intervene.

Tiridates is restrained - not cruelly, but firmly. Leather bindings at the wrists. He's been like this since yesterday.

Gregory stands in the center of the room. He's had food and water now. He's still thin, still moving carefully. But present.

GREGORY  
(to the guards, quietly)  
Untie him.

No one moves.

PRIEST  
He'll kill you.

Gregory looks at the Priest. Then at Tiridates.

GREGORY

No. He won't.

He says it not as a prediction but as a fact he's already reasoned through. Something in the certainty reaches the guards. They look at the Captain.

The Captain holds Gregory's gaze for a moment. Then nods once.

The guards move to loosen the restraints. Tiridates feels it – goes rigid. The guards step back fast.

Tiridates stands. Free. His eyes tracking everything in the room at once.

Gregory doesn't move. Doesn't adjust his stance. Doesn't prepare for anything.

He just stands.

Tiridates moves – not lunging, more like something released that doesn't know yet what to do with the release. He circles Gregory slowly. Testing.

Gregory turns with him. Slowly. Keeping his face visible.

Tiridates stops. Directly in front of him. Breathing hard. Face inches away.

Gregory holds it.

Something in Tiridates falters. Just slightly. The thing he expected – resistance, fear, the reflexive response to power – isn't there. And he doesn't know what to do with its absence.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - INNER CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Tiridates grabs Gregory. Both hands in his shirt. Pulls him close.

TIRIDATES

(low, breaking)

You hear it too.

Not a question. Desperate hope.

GREGORY

No.

Tiridates searches his face. He wants Gregory to be lying. He isn't.

TIRIDATES

It doesn't stop. I hear it when I sleep. When I'm in the Hall. When it's quiet – it gets louder.

GREGORY

What does it say?

Tiridates' grip tightens. He hasn't been asked that. He's been treated – medicated, managed, prayed over. No one has asked what it actually says.

TIRIDATES

(barely audible)

That I made a mistake. That I put the wrong man in the ground. That I have been – that everything I built–

He stops. Can't finish it.

GREGORY

(quietly)

Is built on fear instead of choice.

Tiridates releases him. Steps back.

TIRIDATES

(fragile anger)

I am the one who decides what it's built on.

GREGORY

Then decide something different.

Tiridates stares at him. That's not what kings do. Kings don't unmake what they've built. That's not strength – that's defeat.

TIRIDATES

You're telling me to surrender.

GREGORY

I'm telling you to choose. Those aren't the same thing.

A long beat. Tiridates turns away. Starts pacing – but it's different now. Less animal, more human. He's thinking, not fleeing.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE – CORRIDOR – DAY

The Captain leads Mariam and the boys to the chamber door. He stops them just outside – through the gap they can see Gregory. Standing. Talking to the king.

Mariam goes very still.

He's thinner. He moves differently – carefully, like a man who has learned not to waste motion. But he's standing. Upright. Fully himself.

MARIAM  
(whisper)  
There he is.

Vrtanes steps closer to the door. Studies his father with the same attention he gives everything. Quiet. Absorbing.

Aristakes doesn't move. He's looking at Gregory – but also at the king. At what's happening in that room. At the distance between where his father is standing and where the king is standing.

Gregory turns slightly. Sees them through the gap.

A long look. No words. He nods once – I see you. I'm here.

Mariam nods back.

Then he turns back to the king.

The Captain moves Mariam and the boys back from the door – gently, but firmly.

CAPTAIN  
(low)  
Give it time.

Aristakes looks at him.

ARISTAKES  
What's he doing in there?

The Captain considers how to answer this.

CAPTAIN  
 Something I've never seen anyone do  
 before.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - INNER CHAMBER - DAY

Gregory and Tiridates. The conversation has found a rhythm now - not calm exactly, but directed. Tiridates still volatile but engaged. Gregory patient as stone.

The door opens. A guard with water - routine. But he leaves it open behind him, and for a moment the corridor is visible.

Tiridates sees the family. Three figures. The boys.

Something moves through him - association, memory, the particular disruption that comes from seeing children near a wound.

He moves past Gregory. Fast. Into the corridor.

Before anyone can stop him - he grabs Aristakes.

Both hands on the boy's collar. Pulling him close. Face to face.

TIRIDATES  
 (wild)  
 You hear it? Tell me you hear it-

Aristakes goes rigid. Pure fear. His hand moves toward the blade - then stops. He holds himself still.

Guards surge forward. Gregory raises his hand - firm. They stop.

He steps into the corridor. Moves to Tiridates' side. Doesn't touch him. Just - presence.

GREGORY  
 (level, unhurried)  
 He doesn't hear it. He's twelve  
 years old.

Tiridates looks at Gregory. Then at Aristakes. Really looks - at the boy's age, at the fear he's causing, at his own hands around this child's collar.

He releases him. Steps back.

Aristakes doesn't run. He straightens. Breathes. Looks at his father.

Gregory puts a hand briefly on Aristakes' shoulder – steady, I see you – then looks back at the king.

TIRIDATES  
(shaken, to himself)  
I did that.

GREGORY  
Yes.

TIRIDATES  
Is that – is that what I've been–

GREGORY  
Not always. But yes. Sometimes.

Tiridates looks at his hands. At the corridor. At the ordinary, human people who've been pushed against walls by the edges of his grief for twenty-five years.

He goes back into the chamber. Sits down on the floor. Head in his hands.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE – CORRIDOR – CONTINUOUS

Mariam pulls Aristakes to her briefly – checking him. He lets her. Then straightens.

The Captain takes Mariam and Vrtanes toward the side room. Gregory stays. He looks at his son.

They stand in the corridor. Just the two of them.

Aristakes looks at his father – thin, rough-edged, carrying the pit in every line of him.

ARISTAKES  
You didn't fight. The whole time.

GREGORY  
No.

Aristakes thinks about this. He's past accusing. He's trying to understand.

ARISTAKES  
Was it hard?

GREGORY  
Every day.

ARISTAKES  
Then why—

GREGORY  
Because I knew what I'd start if I  
did. And I knew it wouldn't end  
with me.

Aristakes looks at the door to the chamber. At the king  
sitting on the floor inside.

ARISTAKES  
He grabbed me.

GREGORY  
I know. I'm sorry.

ARISTAKES  
I had the blade. I didn't use it.

Gregory looks at his son. Something quiet moving in him.

GREGORY  
I know that too.

ARISTAKES  
I wanted to.

GREGORY  
I know.

A beat.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
The wanting isn't the problem. The  
wanting is just — being human. What  
you do with it. That's the whole  
question.

Aristakes looks at him. Then at his own hands.

ARISTAKES  
I'm still angry at you. For  
leaving.

GREGORY  
I know. That's fair.

ARISTAKES  
But I think I understand it now.  
What you were trying to do.

Gregory holds his son's gaze.

GREGORY

Do you?

ARISTAKES

(slowly)

You came here to break something.  
Without breaking anyone.

Gregory is quiet for a moment.

GREGORY

That's better than I could have put  
it.

Aristakes almost smiles. Doesn't quite. But almost.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - GREAT HALL - DAY

The court assembled. The Priest at the front. The throne  
empty.

He doesn't wait for the king. He's done waiting.

PRIEST

The king is unwell. This is not  
hidden from us - we have witnessed  
it. The goddess tests those she  
loves. But a kingdom cannot exist  
in suspension indefinitely.

The court listens. Carefully. This is the speech that decides  
what happens next.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

The prisoner from the Khor Virap  
has been brought into the inner  
chamber. He is there now. With the  
king.

Murmurs. The Priest lets them settle.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

A man who refused the goddess. Who  
survived where no one survives. Who  
speaks of forgiveness and choice as  
if these are the foundations of  
power.

He pauses.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

If the king is restored by this man  
- what does that say about the  
covenant? About the goddess? About  
everything this court stands on?

He looks around the room.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Either the prisoner must fail - and  
the king be managed through proper  
means - or we face a different kind  
of crisis. One of legitimacy.

The Captain stands at the back of the room. He hears all of  
it. He says nothing.

But after the Priest finishes, the Captain leaves quietly.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - INNER CHAMBER - DAY

Gregory and Tiridates. The king calmer now - sitting,  
present, listening. Still fragile, but no longer lost.

The door opens. The Priest enters without knocking. Two  
guards behind him.

He takes in the scene - Tiridates on the floor, Gregory  
beside him. Calm. No drama. Nothing he can point to as wrong,  
which is itself alarming.

PRIEST

(measured)

Time is over.

Gregory stands slowly.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Either the king is restored to  
public function by tomorrow  
morning, or the court moves to a  
regency arrangement. Those are the  
terms.

Gregory looks at Tiridates. Then at the Priest.

GREGORY

Whose terms?

PRIEST  
The institution's. The kingdom  
cannot wait on one man's-

GREGORY  
Your terms.

A silence.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
You want him controlled. Standing  
in the right place, saying the  
right words, wearing the authority  
you manage. That's what restored  
means to you.

PRIEST  
(careful)  
I want the kingdom stable.

GREGORY  
You want the kingdom familiar.  
Those aren't the same thing.

The Priest steps closer.

PRIEST  
(low, direct)  
You are a prisoner. A man who  
refused the covenant and survived a  
pit by means no one can explain.  
You have no standing here.

GREGORY  
Then you have nothing to worry  
about from me.

A beat.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
But I notice you came in here  
yourself instead of sending  
someone. Which means you're not as  
certain of your position as you  
sound.

The Priest says nothing. Which is its own answer.

TIRIDATES  
(from the floor, quiet)  
Leave him.

The Priest turns. Tiridates is looking at him - clear. The  
clearest he's looked in weeks.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
 Leave him and go.

The Priest holds very still.

PRIEST  
 My king - the court requires-

TIRIDATES  
 I said go.

Not rage. Not breakdown. Just: the king, issuing an order.

The Priest goes. The guards go with him.

The door closes.

The Captain, who has appeared silently in the corner at some point, watches the door close. Looks at Gregory. Nods once. Almost imperceptibly.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - SIDE ROOM - DAY

Mariam sits. Vrtanes beside her. Aristakes across the room, standing, the blade on the bench beside him. Not in his hand anymore.

VRTANES  
 Will Father fix him?

MARIAM  
 He'll try.

ARISTAKES  
 That's not the same as fixing.

MARIAM  
 No. It's not.

A pause.

VRTANES  
 The king grabbed Aristakes.

MARIAM  
 I know.

VRTANES  
 Aristakes had the blade.

MARIAM  
I know that too.

VRTANES  
(to Aristakes)  
You almost did it.

ARISTAKES  
Almost.

He looks at the blade. Then looks away.

ARISTAKES (CONT'D)  
Father was right there. Watching.  
And I thought - if I use this, what  
does he see? What does it say about  
- everything he's been doing?

Mariam looks at her son carefully.

MARIAM  
You were afraid.

ARISTAKES  
Yes.

MARIAM  
And you thought about someone other  
than yourself.

He doesn't answer. But she can see it.

MARIAM (CONT'D)  
That's not nothing, Aristakes.  
That's everything.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - INNER CHAMBER - DAY

Alone again. Gregory sits beside Tiridates on the floor. No  
throne, no ceremony, no court. Two men in a room.

TIRIDATES  
What do you want from me?

Gregory considers this genuinely.

GREGORY  
Nothing.

Tiridates stares at him.

TIRIDATES

That's not possible. Everyone wants something.

GREGORY

I want you to be free of what's been driving you. But that's not something I can want for you – you have to want it for yourself.

TIRIDATES

And if I don't?

GREGORY

Then you go on as you have been. And the kingdom contracts around your fear until there's nothing left of either.

Tiridates stands. Moves to the window. Looks at the city below.

TIRIDATES

If I stop – if I change what I am – I lose everything I've built.

GREGORY

Some of it.

TIRIDATES

(turning)

You're very honest for a man in my power.

GREGORY

You put me in a pit for being honest. It didn't change anything about how I saw the situation. I see no reason to stop now.

Despite everything – Tiridates almost smiles. It's small and exhausted but it's there.

TIRIDATES

What do I keep?

GREGORY

The kingdom. If you choose it differently. The people don't need to fear you to follow you. They need to believe you're trying to serve something larger than yourself.

TIRIDATES

I've never served anything larger than myself.

GREGORY

I know. But you're asking the question. That's where it starts.

Tiridates looks at him for a long time.

TIRIDATES

If it comes back. The voice. The noise.

GREGORY

Don't answer it. Let it speak and don't answer. It loses power when you stop feeding it.

TIRIDATES

How do you know?

GREGORY

I've been arguing with my father's voice since I was five years old. I've had practice.

Tiridates sits back down. Closes his eyes. Breathes.

The room is quiet.

We hold on it. Long enough to feel the quality of the silence – not empty, not tense. Something like stillness.

TIRIDATES

(eyes still closed, very quiet)  
It's quieter.

Gregory says nothing. Lets it be true.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - CORRIDOR - EVENING

Gregory steps out of the chamber for the first time in hours. He leans against the wall. Closes his eyes briefly.

The Captain is there. He's been here the whole time.

CAPTAIN

He's sleeping.

GREGORY  
First time in weeks, I think.

The Captain nods. Studies Gregory.

CAPTAIN  
You know the Priest won't accept  
this.

GREGORY  
I know.

CAPTAIN  
If the king moves toward what  
you're suggesting – away from the  
old covenant – the Priest loses  
everything. His authority. His  
function.

GREGORY  
Yes.

CAPTAIN  
He'll move against you.

GREGORY  
Probably.

The Captain looks at him.

CAPTAIN  
You're not concerned.

GREGORY  
I've been in a pit for forty-nine  
days. Whatever comes next – I've  
had worse.

A beat. The Captain almost laughs. Controls it.

CAPTAIN  
The man in the Hall who stood in  
front of the king and said  
forgiveness. I didn't think he'd  
last a week.

GREGORY  
Neither did I, honestly.

Now the Captain does laugh. Briefly. Quietly. The laugh of a  
man who has been waiting a very long time to find something  
genuinely surprising.

CAPTAIN  
What do you need?

Gregory thinks.

GREGORY  
Time with my family. And something  
to eat that isn't bread.

The Captain nods. Moves off to arrange both.

Gregory stands alone in the corridor for a moment. The palace around him – stone and firelight and the distant sounds of a kingdom in uncertain motion.

He looks toward the side room where his family is waiting.

He walks toward it.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. PALACE – INNER CHAMBER – DAY

The room has settled into something unfamiliar – quiet. Not the quiet of suppression but of something that has been held for a very long time and is no longer being held.

Tiridates sits with his eyes closed. Breathing. Gregory beside him, not touching, just present.

A long time passes. The fire burns down. No one moves.

Then Gregory reaches out – slowly, giving it all the time it needs – and places his hand on the king's shoulder.

Not healing. Not ceremony. Contact. One human being acknowledging another.

Tiridates doesn't flinch. Doesn't react with power or submission. He simply – receives it.

After a long moment he exhales. A breath he may have been holding for twenty-five years.

TIRIDATES  
(barely above a whisper)  
It stopped.

Gregory doesn't smile. Doesn't celebrate.

GREGORY  
No.

Tiridates opens his eyes. Looks at him.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
 You stopped answering it. That's  
 different. It'll come back. But now  
 you know you don't have to.

Tiridates considers this. He wanted magic. He got something  
 more demanding – agency.

TIRIDATES  
 That's a harder thing than what I  
 was hoping for.

GREGORY  
 Yes.

A beat.

GREGORY (CONT'D)  
 But it's yours. Whatever you build  
 from here – it'll be yours. Not  
 something the fear built for you.

Tiridates looks at the room. At the stone walls. At the  
 firelight.

He looks different in it now. Not diminished – relieved of  
 something. Like a man who has been carrying armor he no  
 longer needs.

TIRIDATES  
 (quiet)  
 What do I do now?

GREGORY  
 Stand up. Go into your hall. Tell  
 them the truth.

TIRIDATES  
 Which truth?

GREGORY  
 That you're choosing something  
 different. You don't need to  
 explain all of it. You just need to  
 begin.

Tiridates stands. Slowly. Unsteady at first – his body has  
 been through its own ordeal – but upright.

He looks at Gregory. One man to another.

TIRIDATES

You should have let me kill you at the beginning. Would have been simpler.

GREGORY

For you, maybe.

A beat. Something passes between them. Not quite friendship. Something older and stranger – two men on opposite sides of the same wound who have finally, improbably, found the same room.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE – SIDE ROOM – DAY

Mariam stands before the guard finishes speaking. She already knows. Something in the air of the palace has shifted – she felt it before the words.

She looks at her sons.

MARIAM

We're going in.

Aristakes is already on his feet. Vrtanes beside her.

CUT TO:

INT. INNER CHAMBER – MOMENTS LATER

The door opens. Mariam enters first.

She sees Gregory standing. Alive. Upright. Looking back at her.

She stops walking. Everything in her chest catches at once – relief and grief and fifty days of rope in the dark and all the fear she held so that the boys wouldn't have to.

It all arrives together.

MARIAM

(soft)

You're here.

GREGORY

I'm here.

She crosses the room. He meets her. They hold each other – not dramatically, not for an audience.

Just the way people who have been afraid for each other hold each other when the fear is finally over.

Vrtanes moves to them quietly. Gregory's hand finds his son's head. He pulls him in.

Aristakes stands back. Watching. His father – thinner, rougher, marked by the pit. His mother's face pressed against Gregory's shoulder. His brother tucked under his father's arm.

He takes one step forward. Then another.

Gregory opens his other arm.

Aristakes steps in. Doesn't say anything. Neither does Gregory.

They stay like that for a long moment. The four of them.

Tiridates watches from across the room. Something moves across his face – private, complicated. He looks away.

CUT TO:

INT. INNER CHAMBER - LATER

The room has been given to the family. Tiridates has stepped out – giving them this, which is its own kind of gesture.

Mariam and Vrtanes are at the far end, talking quietly. Gregory sits with Aristakes.

ARISTAKES

You didn't fight him. At any point.

GREGORY

No.

ARISTAKES

He grabbed me. In the corridor. And you still didn't–

GREGORY

I know. That must have been frightening.

ARISTAKES

It was. And I thought – he's not going to stop this. My father is standing right there and he's not going to stop this with force.

He looks at Gregory.

ARISTAKES (CONT'D)

And then I thought – that must mean he has another way. Because he's not a coward. I know he's not a coward.

Gregory is quiet for a moment.

GREGORY

What did you do?

ARISTAKES

I stayed still. I didn't fight back. I waited.

GREGORY

And?

ARISTAKES

And it worked. He let go. Not because I forced him to. Because you stood there and something about that reached him.

He stares at the floor.

ARISTAKES (CONT'D)

I've been thinking about fighting and not fighting for two years. Arguing with you in my head every night.

GREGORY

(quietly)

I know. I could hear it.

Aristakes looks up.

ARISTAKES

From the pit?

GREGORY

From everywhere fathers hear their sons arguing with them.

A beat. Then Aristakes does something he hasn't done since Gregory left – he laughs. Short, surprised, real.

Gregory smiles.

ARISTAKES

I'm still not sure I agree with you. About everything.

GREGORY

Good. Don't agree with me. Think it through yourself and arrive somewhere. That's all I ever wanted.

Aristakes looks at his father for a long moment.

ARISTAKES

I was proud of you. When I saw you in there with him. I didn't expect to be. But I was.

Gregory holds his son's gaze.

GREGORY

(quiet)

So was I of you. In that corridor.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - CORRIDOR - DAY

Tiridates moving through the palace. More himself than he's been in weeks - not healed, not remade, but present. Choosing each step.

The Priest intercepts him at the junction near the Great Hall.

PRIEST

My king. Before you go in - there are things we should align on. The court will have questions. The covenant needs to be addressed. The prisoner's status-

TIRIDATES

His name is Gregory.

The Priest stops. That small correction carries more weight than he expected.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

His name is Gregory. His father killed my father. He spent forty-nine days in the Khor Virap because I put him there.

(MORE)

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
 These are the facts. If the court  
 has questions they can ask them.

PRIEST  
 If you walk in there and begin  
 dismantling the covenant—

TIRIDATES  
 I'm not dismantling anything. I'm  
 choosing what to keep and what to  
 let go. That's what rulers do.

PRIEST  
 (urgent, dropping his  
 voice)  
 You don't understand what you're  
 giving up. Everything that keeps  
 this court organized — the rituals,  
 the structure, the fear — take that  
 away and you have chaos. You have  
 me with nothing to offer them.

A beat. That last line was more honest than he intended.

TIRIDATES  
 (gently)  
 I know. And I'm sorry for that.  
 Genuinely. But I can't keep  
 building on it.

The Priest stares at him. He's been in this palace for thirty  
 years. He has never been apologized to by a king. He doesn't  
 know what to do with it.

Tiridates moves past him toward the doors.

PRIEST  
 (to his back)  
 They won't follow choice. They  
 follow power.

Tiridates doesn't stop walking.

TIRIDATES  
 Let's find out.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - GREAT HALL - DAY

The court assembled. More people than usual — word has moved  
 through the palace like weather. Something is happening.  
 Everyone who can be here is here.

The Priest stands at the front. He's prepared a structure for this. He'll introduce the king's return as a restoration of the covenant – he'll shape the narrative before Tiridates can.

The doors open.

Tiridates enters.

Alone. No guard formation. No processional. Just the king, walking into his hall.

The room reacts – not with ceremony, with something more raw. Uncertainty. Relief. Fear.

He looks well enough. He walks without help. His eyes are clear.

He walks directly toward the statue of Anahit.

The Priest steps forward. His moment.

PRIEST

The goddess has restored our king.  
Her covenant holds and–

Tiridates raises one hand. One simple gesture.

The Priest stops.

Tiridates stands before the statue. Looks up at it. The gold face. The empty eyes. The fire beneath.

A very long moment. The whole room holding its breath.

He turns away from it.

Not dramatically. Not in anger. He simply turns – the way a man turns away from something he has decided is no longer his direction.

He walks past the statue. Toward the throne. But he doesn't sit.

He faces the court.

CUT TO:

INT. GREAT HALL – CONTINUOUS

The whole court. Every face watching him.

Gregory stands at the far edge of the room. Against the wall. Mariam beside him. Aristakes just ahead, eyes on the king.

TIRIDATES

(quiet, steady – he  
doesn't need to shout)  
I have ruled this kingdom for  
twenty years through fear. I want  
you to know I understand that. I'm  
not going to pretend otherwise or  
find a better word for it.

The court listens. No one interrupts. Whatever they expected, it wasn't this.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

I built it on something my father  
taught me. That you take, or it's  
taken from you. That strength means  
never being vulnerable. That the  
moment you stop pressing forward,  
everything collapses.

He pauses. Looks around the room.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

I have been testing that theory for  
twenty years. And I can tell you  
what it produces. You are looking  
at it. A king who couldn't sleep. A  
court that has learned to say  
nothing true. A kingdom where  
people don't follow because they  
believe – they comply because  
they're afraid of what happens if  
they don't.

A murmur. He lets it pass.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

That is not strength. I know that  
now. It is a very elaborate form of  
fear.

He looks directly at the Priest.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

The covenant as it has been  
practiced – the rituals, the  
submission, the punishment for  
those who think differently – it  
ends. Not the structures of this  
kingdom. Not the court.

(MORE)

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
 But the part that runs on terror.  
 That ends today.

The Priest steps forward. He has to. If he doesn't speak now he never will.

PRIEST  
 My king – the people need–

TIRIDATES  
 The people need to eat. To be safe.  
 To have their disputes heard  
 fairly. To know that the man ruling  
 them is trying to serve something  
 beyond himself.

He holds the Priest's gaze.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
 I have not been doing that. I am  
 going to try to now.

He looks back at the court.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)  
 I don't expect you to trust me  
 immediately. You'd be foolish to.  
 But I am asking you to watch what I  
 do next. And judge me by that.

Silence. Long, real silence.

Then – from somewhere near the back – a sound. Not applause.  
 Not cheering. Just a person letting out a breath they've been  
 holding. And then another. And then another.

The sound of an entire room exhaling.

CUT TO:

INT. GREAT HALL - CONTINUOUS

Aristakes turns to Gregory. Something complicated working  
 across his face.

ARISTAKES  
 That's it? He just – says it?

GREGORY  
 That's where it starts. Yes.

ARISTAKES

It doesn't fix anything. People are still hungry. The soldiers are still out there. The villages are still-

GREGORY

All true.

ARISTAKES

Then what has any of this been for?

Gregory looks at his son. Not impatiently - with the care of a man giving an answer that matters.

GREGORY

The man standing up there two weeks ago would have burned those villages. The man standing up there now is going to try not to. That's not nothing, Aristakes. That's the difference between what the next ten years look like and what they would have.

Aristakes looks at the king. Then back at his father.

ARISTAKES

How long does it take? For things to actually change.

GREGORY

Longer than you want. Shorter than you fear. And it requires people who don't give up on it.

Aristakes absorbs this. Then - quietly:

ARISTAKES

Is that what you're going to do? Stay here? Work on it?

GREGORY

For a while. Yes.

He looks at Mariam. She's been listening. She nods - barely, but yes.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

(to Aristakes)

What about you?

Aristakes looks at the court. At the king. At the room full of people who just heard something true spoken from a throne for the first time.

ARISTAKES

(slowly)

I want to see what happens next.

Gregory looks at his son. Twelve years old. Sharp as flint. Slowly – slowly – becoming something that could build rather than only break.

He puts a hand on Aristakes' shoulder.

Doesn't say anything.

Doesn't need to.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE GREAT HALL LATER

The court has emptied. The fires burn low. The statue of Anahit stands in the dimming light still grand, still golden. Just no longer the center of things.

The Priest stands in front of it. Alone.

He's been in this hall for thirty years. He has outlasted four members of the royal family. He has shaped policy and managed crises and held the structure together through drought and war and succession.

And a man who spent forty-nine days in a pit has undone the foundation of it in ten minutes.

The Captain enters. Stops when he sees the Priest. Neither of them moves for a moment.

CAPTAIN

It's done.

PRIEST

It's beginning. That's different.

The Captain considers this.

CAPTAIN

What will you do?

The Priest is quiet for a long time. He looks at the statue.

PRIEST

I've spent thirty years telling people what they owe the gods. What they owe the king. What they owe the covenant.

A beat.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

I'm not certain I know what I owe anyone now that the framework has changed.

The Captain looks at him. It's the most honest thing he's ever heard the man say.

CAPTAIN

Maybe that's a better place to start than most people get.

The Priest looks at him. Then back at the statue.

PRIEST

(very quiet)  
Maybe.

The Captain leaves him there.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE - INNER CHAMBER - EVENING

Tiridates sits. Gregory across from him. The family has been given rooms elsewhere in the palace. These two men have a few last things to say.

TIRIDATES

What happens now? Practically.

GREGORY

You make decisions from what you said today instead of from what you've been saying for twenty years. Some of them will be hard. Some of your advisors will resist. The Priest will-

TIRIDATES

The Priest will adapt or he won't. That's his choice.

Gregory nods.

TIRIDATES (CONT'D)

What about you? You can't go back to what you were doing. The man in the fields.

GREGORY

No. That's true.

TIRIDATES

Stay. Help me build what I said I'd build. You know how to say the things I don't know how to say yet.

Gregory is quiet for a moment.

GREGORY

There's something I need to do first. Before anything else.

TIRIDATES

What?

GREGORY

I need to go to Lake Sevan. With my family. And whoever wants to come.

Tiridates studies him.

TIRIDATES

What happens there?

GREGORY

A beginning. The same kind you had today. But older.

Tiridates looks at him for a long time.

TIRIDATES

Can I come?

Gregory holds his gaze.

GREGORY

That's exactly the kind of choice you get to make now.

A beat. Then Tiridates nods.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD TO LAKE SEVAN - DAWN

The sky pale and vast. The road stretching east through low hills, dew on the grass, the world very quiet before the day begins.

They walk. Gregory and Mariam side by side. Vrtanes close. Aristakes just ahead – still a step ahead, still watching the road, but oriented differently now. Forward rather than for threats.

Behind them – more people than Gregory expected. Word moved through the palace and then through the city and something in the speech, in the image of the king turning from the statue, in the fifty days of rumor about the man in the pit – something pulled people out of their houses before the sun was up.

They don't all know what they're walking toward. They're walking anyway.

Tiridates walks among them. Not at the front. Not escorted. Simply – in the line, like anyone else. A few people recognize him. Look twice. Keep walking.

The Captain is there. Off to the side. He didn't plan to come. He's here.

Mariam falls a half step behind Gregory. Takes his hand. He holds it.

MARIAM

(quietly)

You knew it would come to this.

GREGORY

I knew it could. I didn't know it would.

MARIAM

What did you think about? In the pit. When it was worst.

He looks at the road ahead.

GREGORY

You. The boys. The cloth drawings going down on the rope.

She's quiet for a moment.

MARIAM

The door with the figure in it.

GREGORY

That one I kept against my chest.

She squeezes his hand.

MARIAM

What does this feel like? Walking  
toward it now.

He thinks about it genuinely.

GREGORY

Like the opposite of the pit. The  
pit was – the world reduced to the  
smallest possible space. This is–

He looks at the people around him. The hills. The pale  
opening sky.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

This is everything getting larger  
again.

She walks beside him. The road unfolding ahead.

Aristakes glances back at his parents – hand in hand, moving  
through the crowd of ordinary people walking toward something  
they don't fully understand yet.

He turns forward again. Keeps walking.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. ROAD TO LAKE SEVAN – MORNING

The sun up now. The road widening as the hills give way to  
the lake basin. People joining from side paths, from villages  
along the route – not summoned, drawn. Word travels faster  
than feet.

Aristakes walks beside Vrtanes. They haven't talked much this  
morning. They don't need to.

VRTANES

(taking in the crowd)  
There are a lot of people.

ARISTAKES

Yes.

VRTANES

Do they know what they're going to?

Aristakes watches the faces around him – farmers, merchants, a soldier who has taken off his insignia, an old woman being helped along by two younger ones.

ARISTAKES

I don't think so. Not exactly. But they know something changed yesterday. And they want to be part of whatever comes next.

VRTANES

Is that enough? To just want to be part of it?

ARISTAKES

(thinking)

Father would say the wanting is where it starts. The understanding comes after.

He says it without irony. Without resistance. As if it's simply true.

Vrtanes nods. They walk.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD TO LAKE SEVAN – CONTINUOUS

Tiridates walking. He has no retinue here, no ceremony around him. He's just a man on a road.

A FARMER walking nearby glances at him. Looks twice. Recognition.

He slows. Falls into step beside Tiridates.

FARMER

(carefully)

You're the king.

TIRIDATES

Yes.

The farmer nods. Walks a few more steps in silence.

FARMER

My grain store was burned. Two years ago. Eastern route.

Tiridates looks at him.

FARMER (CONT'D)  
 I'm not saying that to – I'm not  
 asking for anything. I just wanted  
 you to know. Since you're here.  
 Since you said what you said.

A beat.

TIRIDATES  
 I know it doesn't undo it.

FARMER  
 No. It doesn't.

They walk together in silence for a moment.

FARMER (CONT'D)  
 But I'm here. So.

He drops back. Tiridates walks on.

Something in his face has changed. He's been named. Not as a  
 king – as the person responsible for a specific thing that  
 hurt a specific person. And he held it without deflecting.

The Captain, a few steps back, watched the whole exchange. He  
 says nothing.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE SEVAN – MORNING

And there it is.

The lake. Enormous and still and blue in the morning light,  
 framed by mountains that have been here since before any of  
 them were born and will be here long after. The scale of it –  
 quietly overwhelming.

The crowd reaches the shore and spreads along it, not in  
 formation, just – people finding space.

Gregory stops at the water's edge. Looks out at it.

He's been here before – years ago, before everything. He  
 forgot how large it was.

Mariam stands beside him. Their shoulders touching.

MARIAM  
 What happens now?

GREGORY

We begin.

She looks at him.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

That's all it is. A beginning. Not an ending, not a solution. Just — here is where we come in from the dark.

She takes his hand.

MARIAM

You've been in the dark long enough.

GREGORY

(soft)

We all have. That's the point.

He looks along the shore. The people gathered. Thousands by now — more arriving on the road behind.

He looks for Tiridates. Finds him at the edge of the crowd. Standing still. Watching the lake.

Their eyes meet across the distance. A long moment.

Gregory nods toward the water.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE SEVAN - CONTINUOUS

The Priest is there. Gregory didn't expect him. He's standing slightly apart from the crowd, watching the proceedings with the expression of a man who has not yet decided what he's witnessing.

Gregory walks to him.

PRIEST

(before Gregory can speak)

I didn't come to interfere.

GREGORY

I know.

PRIEST

I came because thirty years ago I chose this work because I believed it mattered.

(MORE)

PRIEST (CONT'D)  
 That the structure – the ritual,  
 the order – I believed it pointed  
 at something real.

He looks at the lake. At the crowd.

PRIEST (CONT'D)  
 I'm not certain anymore what it was  
 pointing at. Or whether what I  
 built was the thing itself or just  
 walls around it.

Gregory stands beside him, looking at the same view.

GREGORY  
 I think you built walls. And I  
 think they kept some things safe  
 for a while. And I think they also  
 kept people from getting to what  
 was inside.

A long silence.

PRIEST  
 That's not entirely wrong.

GREGORY  
 What do you do with that?

The Priest is quiet for a long time.

PRIEST  
 (very quiet)  
 I suppose I start over.

Gregory looks at him.

GREGORY  
 That's what everyone here is doing.

He gestures at the crowd. The Priest looks at them – really  
 looks, perhaps for the first time. Not subjects. Not  
 congregation. People.

He doesn't answer. But he doesn't leave either.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE SEVAN – CONTINUOUS

The Captain on a slight rise above the shore. Below him, the  
 crowd. The lake.

Gregory moving through the people – not preaching, not performing. Just talking. One person, then another.

Vahan – the young guard from the pit – appears beside him. He's been here the whole time. Off duty. Here anyway.

VAHAN

I was the one at the pit. When they dropped him in. I offered to say he'd fought back.

CAPTAIN

I know.

VAHAN

He told me not to lie for him. He said don't lie on my account, not today, not ever.

The Captain watches Gregory below.

VAHAN (CONT'D)

I've been thinking about that every day since.

CAPTAIN

What have you decided?

VAHAN

That I've been lying for the institution for three years. Small things. Covering things. Not because I'm cruel because it was what you did.

The Captain looks at him.

VAHAN (CONT'D)

I don't want to do that anymore.

The Captain is quiet for a moment.

CAPTAIN

Neither do I.

He says it simply. No drama. Just the truth of it, finally given air.

They stand together on the rise. Watching.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE SEVAN - MORNING

Tiridates stands at the water's edge alone. Looking at the lake. The mountains behind it.

Gregory walks up beside him. They stand in silence for a moment.

TIRIDATES

I've never been here.

GREGORY

Neither had I. Not in a long time.

TIRIDATES

It's larger than I imagined.

GREGORY

Most things are, when you finally stand in front of them.

They watch the water. The light moving on it.

TIRIDATES

What am I doing here, Gregory?

He says the name simply. First time. It lands.

GREGORY

The same thing everyone else is. Coming out of wherever you've been. Choosing to be part of something that isn't only about you.

TIRIDATES

I've only ever been about me. The kingdom was me. My fear was the kingdom.

GREGORY

Yes. And today you're a man standing at a lake with a few thousand people who got up before sunrise because they wanted to believe something was changing. That's different.

Tiridates looks along the shore. The people. The ordinary faces. The farmer from the road, fifty yards away.

TIRIDATES

They're not going to trust me.

GREGORY

Not yet. Some of them never will.  
That's fair. You earn it  
differently now – slowly, by what  
you do, not by what you're owed.

A beat.

TIRIDATES

That's harder.

GREGORY

Much harder. But the things that  
are built that way last.

Tiridates looks at the water for a long time.

TIRIDATES

(quietly)

What do I do? Right now. This  
moment.

GREGORY

Step in.

He gestures at the water. Simple.

Tiridates looks at it. At his own reflection in the shallows.  
Then he takes off his sandals. Sets them on the shore.

He steps into the water.

Cold. Real. His feet on stone beneath the surface.

He doesn't flinch.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE SEVAN - CONTINUOUS

Someone sees the king step into the water. And then someone  
else. And word moves through the crowd the way it always  
moves – faster than it should be possible.

The king is in the water.

Not above them. Not watching from a throne. Among them.

One person steps in after him. A young woman. She doesn't  
know why exactly – she just does.

Then an old man. Then a family.

Then more.

Gregory watches it happen. He wasn't sure it would. He hoped. He's been hoping since he walked into the city with nothing but a name and a belief that forgiveness could close something that violence had kept open for twenty-five years.

He looks at Mariam.

MARIAM  
(watching the water)  
It's happening.

GREGORY  
It's happening.

Vrtanes takes his father's hand. Gregory looks down at him.

VRTANES  
Are we going in?

GREGORY  
Yes.

He looks for Aristakes.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE SEVAN - CONTINUOUS

Aristakes stands at the water's edge.

He's been here for several minutes, watching. Not hanging back from fear. Thinking. The way he always thinks taking it all in before he moves.

Watching the people enter the water. Watching the king no longer king in the way he was, just a man in cold water with his eyes open. Watching his father moving among them.

He thinks about the market when he was ten. The blade he sharpened. The soldiers he watched take without consequence. The old man in the road. The moment in the palace corridor when the king grabbed him and his hand went to the blade and then - didn't.

He thinks about what his father said: I came here to break something without breaking anyone.

He looks at the water.

Gregory appears beside him. Doesn't say anything. Just stands there.

A long moment.

ARISTAKES

(quiet)

I'm still figuring it out. What I believe. What I want to do with it.

GREGORY

I know.

ARISTAKES

This doesn't mean I've stopped figuring.

GREGORY

I know that too.

Aristakes looks at the water. Then at his father.

ARISTAKES

If I go in - it's my choice. Not yours.

Gregory holds his son's gaze.

GREGORY

It has always been your choice. Everything I ever did was so you'd know that.

Aristakes looks at the water one more time.

He steps in.

Cold hits him. He doesn't flinch.

He turns back to Gregory. Something open in his face - not surrender, not conversion. Something more like: I am here, and I am choosing to be here, and I am myself while I do it.

Gregory steps in beside him.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE SEVAN - CONTINUOUS

The water around their knees. Cold and clear and achingly real after everything.

Gregory looks at his son. Aristakes looks back.

No words necessary. Gregory places one hand on Aristakes' shoulder. The other on his chest.

Aristakes holds his gaze. Doesn't look away.

Gregory lowers him beneath the surface.

A moment.

Raises him back up.

Aristakes comes up gasping – not from fear, from cold. From the shock of the real.

He stands. Water running off him. Eyes open.

Something has shifted. Not dramatic. Not visible to anyone watching. But Aristakes feels it – the particular quality of having crossed something you can't uncross. Not loss. Arrival.

Gregory looks at him for a long moment.

GREGORY  
(very quiet, just for him)  
Whatever you do from here – whoever  
you become – you start from this.

Aristakes nods. He understands.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE SEVAN – CONTINUOUS

Mariam and Vrtanes in the water. Gregory moving among the people – not officiating exactly, not performing. Present. Helping. One person at a time.

Hundreds entering the lake. Thousands. The shore packed with people waiting their turn. Not in orderly lines – just the natural press of people moving toward something.

The light breaking across the water. Mountains in every direction. The sky enormous and blue and still.

Tiridates, waist-deep, stands in the middle of it. No one is serving him. No one is watching him specifically. He is simply in the water. One among many.

He looks toward the far shore. The mountains beyond.

He is afraid. Specifically, quietly, he is afraid of what comes after today – the work of it, the difficulty, all the things he said yesterday that he now has to live up to.

He holds it. Doesn't answer it.

The ripples from a thousand people moving in the water spread outward from each body and find each other and overlap and keep going until they reach the far shore and even then they don't stop – they reflect back, cross, become part of something larger than any single origin point.

Aristakes stands where he was baptized. Watching all of it.

The Captain, still on the rise above, has taken off his boots. He's walking down to the shore.

Vahan is already in the water.

The Priest stands at the edge. Looks at the water for a very long time.

He takes one step in.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE SEVAN – WIDE

We pull back. Slowly. Higher.

The lake enormous. The mountains. The sky.

The people – hundreds, thousands – moving into the water from the shore, ripples spreading outward from each one. Not spectacle. Scale.

The distinction matters. This is not a crowd being commanded. This is people choosing.

We find Gregory and Aristakes.

Standing side by side in the water. Still.

Present.

Not leading anyone. Not performing anything. Just – in it. Together.

Aristakes turns to look at his father. Gregory is looking at the far shore. The mountains. All of it.

Gregory turns and finds his son looking at him.

No words.

Everything that needed to be said has been said.

Everything that couldn't be said is here – in the cold water, in the morning light, in the fact that they are both standing in it freely.

We hold on them. Father and son. Side by side. The water moving around them. The ripples going everywhere.

Then we pull back higher, wider until they are two small figures in the middle of a vast lake on a morning when something began that would take generations to understand.

The mountains hold everything in.

The light breaks across the surface.

The water is very still at the center.

And then—

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD:

In 301 AD, Armenia became the first nation in the world to adopt Christianity as its state religion.

Gregory was imprisoned in the Khor Virap for thirteen years.

He survived.

He is known as Gregory the Illuminator.

FADE OUT.