

*And in the dark the shadows creep  
The servants, wounded, bloodied deep  
Their hearts lie empty, full of spite  
Their voices empty, bitter, ice.*

Your sleep over the last three months has been uneasy. You keep returning in your dreams to the snowy glades of Metri, where the dark touch of Skathe first crossed your soul. You dream of the regio there, the yawning void in which dwelt what remained of Ruth of Highguard; once a proud Highborn warrior, now reduced to nothing but a puppet of the Hag Queen...

And you dream of her parlour, where sitting across from her you made a fateful pact. You see the axe, disappearing into the darkness behind her, as she cackles, knife-teeth shining in the gloom, all wickedness and cruel spite. And in the dream she speaks to you, and her words are as frozen shards, and you cannot move but hear her speak, and the sound is without sound but inside your very soul.

*Do not think you can delay the pact we have made. You have three more to bind into my service; the longer you tarry, the more you extend your own suffering; the more you extend the suffering of those who dwell in the cold halls of the Lament. Do not think I do not delight in their misery.*

*Remember: your service has not yet begun. The year begins to tick when the fourth wretch binds themselves to me, and not before. Yet my touch is upon you; you will not forget me.*

*I have a command. When there are four of you, I expect it to be carried out. You may carry it out of your own will beforehand, naturally, and spare those you bind this first task; but without their pledge it will count for nothing but the empty wind. If you hold too long, too late, the next thing I ask of you will be all the worse. Do not seek to anticipate, child, how wicked I can be.*

*My command is this: ruin the wedding between the Empress and her love. I understand, it is whispered to me, that this marriage is born of affection, attraction, those false pillars of lies which the weak convince themselves they hold within their hearts. But all things twist in the end.*

*I care not how you ruin it. Drive a wedge between the lovers; cause a scene which ruins the happy occasion; arrange a suitable curse. If I hear about it, if tales are told of this ruined beauty, I will be pleased; and the next thing I ask of you could be more palatable to you.*

*Naturally, you must not kill the Empress or her lover; that would be acting against your Empire, which I swore I would not ask of you. But an Empire needs an Empress; it needs not its Empress to know joy.*

*If you wish, seek out House Remys of Dawn. Tell them that Skathe requests of them their assistance; that if they help you in this matter they will receive reward in kind. But they may not join your bonded pact; they have forgone that right.*

*Remember: serve me well, and the curses that plague your chapter will be no more. But you must serve me to the end.*

She reaches out her long, clawed fingers, and touches you on your sword-arm, which begins to ache and burn. The pain wakes you with a start, and you realise your cheeks are wet with cold tears.

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Skathe's touch has entered your heart, and you are under a CURSE. You experience the following effects:

**Role-playing Effect:** While this curse is in effect, you feel an urge to crush anyone who treats you with disrespect. You find it easy to dwell on any incident where you feel wronged or maligned, and to concoct elaborate revenge schemes. When anyone you consider to have slighted you suffers misfortune, or comes to harm – physically, socially, or emotionally, and regardless of whether you are the source of their unhappiness – you feel a rush of dark joy.

**Mechanical Effect:** While affected by this CURSE, you cannot bond to any Weapon-type magic item. You do, however, gain an additional power. Twice each day, when you hit someone with a one-handed weapon you may call CLEAVE. This will cause the roleplaying effect caused by this CURSE to intensify for a short time.