

Prelude

Our clash ended more quickly than I'd expected. Maybe Arivor had gotten as weary of our struggle as I had, but I doubted it. Once he lost his side of the fight, he enjoyed our games too much for that to be true.

As he slumped over my sword, he laughed with blood bubbling on his lips.

"Why do you keep doing this?" he gasped. "We'll only return, given time."

"I know," I said, "but maybe next time will be different. I'll see you soon."

I kicked him off of my blade, and his crazed laughter faded into a gurgle. Tossing my sword to the blood-soaked ground, I trudged toward my once-friend's throne.

Outside, the sounds of battle drew closer. When the rebel commander found her overlord dead with me gone, she'd no doubt claim the kill as her own, but that was fine by me. I wouldn't be here to care.

Settling in my seat, I mimed raising a glass.

"To the coming years of peace," I said. "May our return be long delayed."

Bumping my head against the back of the chair, I let my hands fall as the backlash came. Flames engulfed me, and I collapsed into ash.

Text-to-Speech (TTS) Prelude

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