

*The Light
Guardian:
Beginnings*

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Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

- *Ephesians 6:13*

Accept, O brother, the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God in the everlasting Jesus prayer by which you should have the name of the Lord in your soul, in your thoughts, and in your heart.

- *Service of Monastic Tonsure*

Cleanse your mind from anger, remembrance of evil, and shameful thoughts, and then you will find out how Christ dwells in you.

- *St Maximos the Confessor*



A cruel and merciless heart is never purified. A merciful man is the doctor of his soul because as it were by a strong wind from his heart he drives out the darkness of the passions.

St. Ephraim the Syrian, 4th century

Raw fingers clawed gray stone and loose gravel. Muscles tensed and shuddered from cold and the effort. The bent figure half-crawled, half-drag himself up the slope. Shadows enveloped him from cliffs to the left and right of the ravine. Traces of snow were visible atop the ridge walls. Ahead lay a summit and an end, but no promise of the snow that blanketed the mountains above.

I cannot die here. My punishment has hardly begun. His lips were as the cracked stones, his eyes a dried riverbed, devoid now of any trace of tears.

He had food; it pressed on his back like another of the boulders surrounding him. Would one fall from the towering peaks and smash his bones to dust? He would become one more layer of gray sediment.

He tried to straighten, to face the purple-black clouds pierced by orange dusk. His body would not obey. A day ago, two, and the ravine's end would have been heart-beats away. But now? It was like climbing the sheer walls themselves.

You came for Shadow-weavers, but you'll die in your darkness. Was he really permitted to die, though? To simply lie down?

Like the fiery light coloring the darkness above, so the lifeless gray within his heart began to spark. "As my sister and sister-sons have no rest..." he said—the dry rasp of a wolf learning to speak, "neither shall I have rest!"

He stumbled forward, blood from torn hands and knees left on the stones. A smoldering fire masked the coldness of death that filled his limbs. *Forward. No rest. Judgment. Punishment. Revenge.*

A dying sunbeam flared at the edge of the summit. The sky opened before him. He heard the rushing of summer storm through treetops. It grew louder as he dragged himself the final distance. *Trees in this rocky tomb?* He strained his arms gripping the summit's edge. He teetered; to

fall back was to fall into his grave. With the last ray of light, he hauled himself onto the summit.

As he lay there, face driven into the cold stone, he tilted his head. The rushing wind through leaves was not there. Instead, a waterfall plummeted from the side of another towering height. A low rumble began to flow from Moisi; it may have been a laugh, or simply weeping without tears.



*An angry man, even if he is capable of raising the dead,
will not be received into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Abba Agathon, 4th century

Moisi dropped the dead-wood inside the cave. Arms sore, he pushed a loose strand of brown hair behind his ear and made his way back out into the bright sun. The churn of the waterfall far to the right was his familiar companion now and mist-rainbows almost allowed him to forget the desolation of the mountains.

He scratched at his beard. How long had he been here? Weeks? Months? He had food left, but even still, Moisi had been cruel with his body. So four months since his exile began?

He stared over the open plateau that broke the otherwise jagged cliffs and deep ravines in every direction. He could spot the forest below on clear days. But it was a memory of things forgotten—a life beyond his grasp now.

He walked toward the falls. Water pooled near the edge of another drop, pouring into the ravine below. Moisi planned to gather more star-leaved shrubs by the pool. They weren't much for filling the stomach, but they gave him renewed energy.

What I really need is a mountain goat. His mouth watered at the thought. It had been the goats that led him to the shrubs, in fact. They'd been eating them one early morning over a month ago. Their long white coats had gotten his attention first. Even in midsummer, Moisi knew the freeze was approaching. A mountain goat hide meant surviving the winter.

He basked in the sun which baked the stones all around. At least now he could forget the cold. It would be back that evening, but then he'd have his fire—and his practice. His body would heat with blood pumping through his veins. His rage and despair became a furnace then—a furnace he would learn to control. Like iron in the forge, he would smash his heated body until it became as deadly as the sword he wielded.

Reaching the first shrub, Moisi yanked it up by the roots.



The “narrow and hard way” is this, to control your thoughts, and to strip yourself of your own will, for the sake of God.
Abba Ammonas, 4th century

Moisi knelt, panting. The fire sent shadows dancing on the cave walls. The night beyond was thick and impenetrable. Holding his sword, he absently pulled his thumb along the ridges of the hilt.

“Illumine my darkness... I don’t know what next.”

His brow furrowed. He couldn’t hold all the sword forms together in his mind.

His forms were good, excellent even—*individually*—but they didn’t flow. They were choppy. He confused the movements and lost them. He worked them over and over, but the same thing evaded him: control.

Moisi continued to trace his hilt. “Illumine my darkness...” *What am I doing wrong?*

He had forced himself. His arms and chest were a fleshly imitation of the gray stone; his legs were as sturdy as the mountain goat on the crags;

a rushing waterfall of sweat and blood had fallen from him for months. He was the visible image of self-control. And yet...

Moisi hopped up and slashed horizontally at eye-level. The weakness of the eyes: the insulting gesture of Natan, the cocky first-mate; the appraising smile of Zaisias' wife; the thick money-belt of Ebion. Each of these had stolen his control. Two quick slashes—down left, down right. The weakness of the ears: the taunts, the distractions, the soft-whisperings. Blade down and to the left—attack the sword hand. He knew too well the evil of uncontrolled hands: the thefts, the blows, the caresses. When had Moisi not lived like that? He cursed and sprang forward: slash at a man's middle—the seat of desire; thrust to the heart—plug the muddied fountain.

Moisi fell to his knees, bombarded by memories. He was crushed by a boulder of despair. How much evil had erupted from his belly, from his heart? What rage, what twisted desire had not spewed forth from him? Roinin, wreaking of gin, bloodied and lying unconscious on the inn floor; Leani sleeping deeply beside him; Captain Altaini, a dueling knife in his thigh; And Oiren...

Moisi groaned putting his face to the stones and wept. He knew the result of his uncontrolled

rage. He squeezed his eyes shut and willed the cave to become a rending maw.

His thoughts were an avalanche of rock, burying him stone by stone. For the thousandth time he saw faces and deeds, smelled the scents of blood and perfume and fine wine. These were his judges. These were what *controlled* him. They were gone, but they were killing him. These mocked him in his struggle for self-mastery.

We are your accusers. You never had any control and you never will! The voices screamed in his head.

“I know, I know...” he wept. “Illumine my darkness...” he whispered into the dirt. *Where can I find control?*

The moment stretched.

Then a quiet clarity silenced the voices that sought vengeance on him: *thoughts*. These were choking him. It was his *thoughts* that he needed to master.

Moisi gripped the hilt of his sword. He had abandoned it amid the wave of memories drowning him. He clung to it. *Control begins with the mind*. Thoughts overwhelmed him, thoughts distracted and ruined his sword forms. He even saw now how uncontrolled thoughts had led to every fall, every misdeed.

“Cut the thought, cut the desire. Remain in control!”

Moisi lifted his blade—his mind empty of all but his blade. His forms became a dance on the wind, continuing until dawn dispersed the outer darkness.



“All temptations of the enemy are destroyed by humility.”

Abba Dorotheos of Gaza, 6th century

Thunder reverberated in the cave. Streaked lightning split the night illuminating a sweat-drenched Moisi bare to the waist.

“Where are you?” he roared. He spun, his blade a blur: from *pluck the eyes to serve the belly to hands free from evil*. “Why won’t you face me?”

He blocked with *turn neither to the left nor the right* and snapped his sword up in *preserve the heart unsullied*. He was a starved predator—four years and no sign of prey.

“Don’t you come to kill in such chaos? Show yourself!”

Thunder struck louder... A heart-beat, two. The lightning blinded him. Silver trees shimmered before his eyes.

Sudden laughter.

A cold hand seized Moisi's heart, a thick knot in his stomach. His body started to tremble... from this laughter.

Light illumine me. Courage.

Then he saw it. It leaned on the cave wall at the edge of his fire's light. It was so dark it could have been Moisi's shadow cast by the flames. But it wasn't. Red eyes shone from a blackness so thick it stood out against the night.

"Well this is new?" A mouth of red flame danced. "I've been called by many—to kill, to be cursed, to be *worshiped*. But never has a man hunted *me*, come for me in the places where my kind dwells. And never one bound so tightly." Smoke curled from the creature, blurring the edges of its form as if swallowing the light.

Gripping fear froze Moisi. Exteriorly he was a statue, but interiorly he shook with shuddering vibrations that could shatter stone. *Such power!*

"You come, a child to fight a king. You are pathetic." Its eyes actually flared.

Iron bands of terror bound Moisi, but they were not unbreakable. "Come into my light," he said. Sweat ran down his brow, and his body quivered all over. "You will find no child when you do."

The living darkness laughed again—a hideous, mind-rending sound. It moved into the light and grew larger and more terrible. Its armor was a

cloak of impenetrable shadow. It drew a massive sword as dark as ebony; this was the kind of weapon that cleaved down trees.

“My blade is not for trees, Man,” it said as if reading Moisi’s mind. “It is for humankind, whom I bind and slaughter at will.” Its mouth was flaming fire, its eyes coals of blood.

This was indeed a shadow-weaver.