First came the corpse.

Body of a goblin, or maybe gremlin, I can't recall. Killed with morganti and tossed lifeless on the floor with its hands and feet chopped off.

Blood trail led further into the tunnels. Looked purposeful. The next room was littered with dismembered body parts. Hands and feet. All severed with morganti. Whole thing felt purposeful to me, luring people in deeper. If you chop a corpse apart it don't naturally scatter like that.

Next we went to a room with undead. Haunts, maybe, but I don't know. They fought me, took me down cause I had nothing to harm them with. I got healed, and took a wounded party member into the next room.

More corpses killed with morganti. These weren't as dismembered as the ones previous. Wounds done with one blade. Seemed like the work of a single skilled assassin.

Me and Cassius went to the next room. Multiple corpses dismembered with morganti strung up like cattle in a butcher's shop from the walls, viscera dripping out of them onto the floor. Looked recent.

This is where I was a fucking idiot. I already knew this display was meant to lead someone deeper in. I knew some of the bodies were quite recent. Yet I didn't fucking think to not go into the very next room.

But I did.

Next room. Me and Cassius approached the door at the same time as two other party members. We opened the door.

Right in front of it was a figure holding a morganti sword at their side, a broadsword, I think. Lithe build, brown hair, human or elf sized but I couldn't see the ears. They had allies behind them, but I didn't stick around to get a good look. I suppose it was lucky I saw the blade so soon because I had the wherewithal to run immediately. Cassius got dueled before he could leave, unfortunately, but he was alright in the end.

I didn't go back in for some time. By the time I did, the party, namely Kaja and Paku I think, had killed most everyone. Including the assassin, who wisped with the sword. No one was injured or killed morganti in the fight.

I'll examine the corpses more later.

……

It was a cruel job, and it was done for show. There's a lot of theater in murder. Dismemberment like that isn't meant for the victim. Sure, you can make them hurt on the way out, but you're about to kill them. They won't remember what bits you cut off after their soul has been torn to ribbons. Dismembering bodies, stringing them up, chopping off limbs and ripping out bowels, that's all for the witnesses coming after. It's a performance.

This wasn't an assassination. Assassinations are for people who can fight back. This was a massacre. All the morganti violence was the work of one assassin, yes, and a reasonably skilled one. But it was a butcher job. The crew proves it as well. An assassin wants to get in and out quick as they can. Do your killing, done, run into the wind. A butcher brings cronies. You can't disappear with cronies. You can only carve a path back out.

They were luring people in, too. That's semi-untargeted brutality.

And cronies means you come from a group, or you're one of several being paid substantially by some higher interest. Maybe something else of that nature. But either way you're organized. Who organized this? Where does the money, the motivation, come from? Evil might be a thing that walks amongst us but evil don't pay a salary. Evil don't make morganti appear in your hand, at least, not that I've ever heard. People do that.

Maybe it's like religion. Religion motivates a lot of shit. It's all religion and money, in the end. And love sometimes. But I don't think this time. Hate too, but love and hate are sometimes quite the same thing. Most times you only hate something cause you love something else.

So who wanted these folks dead? For what purpose? They took the diplomat from Halimin too. And I think we can pretty confidently say it was them that caused the wildfires as well. That makes it seem like they just want to destabilize Halidar, but is it really that simple? Chaos for chaos's sake, evil for evil's sake, I don't think people do bad things for the sake of being bad all that commonly. Why *are* they trying to destabilize us?

If it's religion, maybe they're trying to bring something about. Prophecy shit. Foretold comings. I need to look at that paper Kaja's been decoding.

Maybe it is possession, but evil gotta take root somewhere. Possession needs a foothold. I don't know if Good is the source of all good and Evil the source of all evil, but without our minds and our thoughts they wouldn't have shit to cling onto. What mortal influences are at play here?

The species feel like a tell. If I'm remembering right, which I might not be but I think I am, they were all hobbits, elves, dwarves, humans. I don't think they're from around here. So why are they coming? Who's sending them?

What does Bellmorn know?

No. What are they gonna do next?

No. None of these are the most important question.

Why did they leave? Are they fleeing from a sickness they know is coming? Regrouping for some greater plan? Solving a mess back home? Did they leave under the influence of the thing that's about to get us all, or were they trying to escape?

The bad things of the world are here to stay. We can fight back against the black court all we want, but we can't kill it. You can't kill a concept. We can only excise the things in us as people that allow them to take hold.

Seasons and courts and metaphysics and all that bullshit will hang around all you want, but in the end, we're people. You don't try to fight the clouds in the sky when it storms, you seek shelter and bring in the crops. We don't fight ideas, we fight people. We protect people. Winter will run its course but we'll remain. We gotta fight our own demons.

……

This is the first All Hallows in my many years where I've really felt the spirit of the day. Remembering. Letting go. Making room for the future. I wish I could do more of all of those things but I'm the carrying type. The weight of my past is like sediment on me. I can't scrape any of it off because it's what I'm made up of, same as I can only ever see the reflection of my face, not the true thing.

But today I felt it. Memories like old dogs, and old dogs getting cut off leashes to run and herd the sheep.

When I left that room, I left with a party member. We were discussing whether or not to go back in and risk dying to morganti, and they asked themself "what do I have to live for?"

Well I got something to live for. I got Evangeline. I got more than that too, now. I got a future, and I will pull the weeds and burn the brush to make room for it.