

Borrada felt his shirt between his finger and thumb. It was ragged but cover against the sun. Corc's mother had ran back with it as a gift for him. She had brought her husband and most of their family who had kissed Borrada's hand and had left withered flowers and three sundried wild strawberries – all they probably had for the day – before leaving him, all of them with head-halving smiles.

Borrada turned to Lorelei. "I feel like my own impersonator. Can I still call myself Tristeza Borrada, and know what that means?"

"You draw metaphysical stickmen in the ashes and ask me to name them? And but I will not entertain you. I know what I would do here among these soldiers."

Borrada showed her his palms. "You think I can save them like the child? Are these hands made to save the whole world?"

"Is that not your ambition?"

Borrada rose. Lorelei untied her horse and they walked mindful of mines among the smoking corpses. Her darkroom stare prompted him to offer his chevalier hand but she ignored and tagged behind. Daguerre backed at the louder laments from beyond the smoke. The man wailed again but they saw no-one even when the dusts stuttered to clear.

Death's fragrant perspiration washed Borrada in reminders of the war. As the ash adhered, each wipe was an arm or a head smudged across his skin. The atmosphere was smothered by the rot of those flaking masses that once smiled like humans and pistoled and yodelled anthemic national dithyrambs at every part-victory and dead, roadside Lugubrian. Borrada's eyes scarred at the images. With kindness to Lorelei, the wind in speckles coalesced the soldiers' dusts. The air subsided yet so begrudgingly, enjoying the ashy scattering, and waves of the driest culm lifted from and cascaded back upon the cremated men.

Borrada and Lorelei felt drawn through. And at their drawing, the scene took the abstract shape of the photographer's art: roasted and hewn in nominally constructed patterns.

"Hyponapalm it's called," Borrada said. "It perpetuates. That's why they're still burning. Though for NI-1 to wander in mines is uncommon." Embracing pathos he knelt, counting the bodies by the sum of their disconnected pieces.

"Your hands are red with metaphors, Tristeza Borrada. Keep blinking; blink it all away."

A gun clicked. The hammer snapped at Borrada's head: click; click. Lorelei ducked, almost rolling away under the horse. Borrada froze. Click. Click. He turned. A soldier squinted at him, thrusting his chin forward and firing the empty revolver with the ineptitude of the untrained. Borrada eased himself back like a bow on adagio strings.