

A Pane of Glass

*"And you look out and behold terror itself--  
complete emptiness... Yes, you have a thing  
or two to learn."*

## EXT. SPACE - PERPETUAL NIGHT

We see drifting through the inky black of space a small reddish moon. In orbit around it is a space station so massive it looks like a floating mountain.

There is a flash of light to the right of the station, and a spaceship appears. It looks like an old galleon without masts or sails. It approaches one of the many pier-like protrusions at the base of the space station and docks.

All the while, a man's voice narrates.

EDMOND (V.O.)

I had arrived at Grausam Station aboard my ship, the Trieste, with the intent of repaying an old debt. Two old debts, in fact: only one of them monetary. Having sold several relics gathered during my exploration of the distant Cinistra Quadrant, I had lately come into a small fortune. Little did my old friend, Modrus Feuerbach, know this when I arrived at his station. Given his habit of underestimating me, he had assumed, like the rest, that the trip to the far reaches of space had been the end of me. He feigned pleasure in his response to my message of the week before, telling him I was coming and challenging him to a friendly game of Blindman's Harrow--the very game by which, ten years before, he had nearly ruined me, taken my fortune, and--what weighed most heavily on my mind--insulted me most unforgivably. This was, of course, before he'd married Lizbeth, and long before she borne him his sole child.

## INT. THE TRIESTE - SAME

Moving across the bridge of the ship, we see it also resembles an old sailing vessel, with wainscoted walls and a large wooden steering wheel. But there is also an assortment of lights and electronic displays fitting for a starship.

EDMOND (V.O.)

The first debt I would pay in credits, letting it seem as though the sum were the last of my once vast estate. As for the second debt... My plan was simple: to make a preposterous bet, withal to strip Modrus of everything he had in a single hand..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EDMOND D'ARCY, a tall thin man with dark eyes and black curls, sits at a large round table. He wears a wide-brimmed hat and a heavy cloak that gives him an air of drama and mystery.

Sitting across from him is a pale but striking woman, ELIZABETH FEUERBACH, beautifully attired in a lavish Victorian dress. She leans over to him and takes his hand.

ELIZABETH

I beg you not to do this, Edmond. For it is sheer folly.

EDMOND

But I must. I owe him the money, for one thing, and--

ELIZABETH

Has he ever asked you for it? Has he ever once brought it up?

Edmond looks away, tensing his jaw.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

We're comfortable here, we don't need the money. And Modrus is more than happy to help an old friend.

EDMOND

(banging his fist on the table)  
No! A gentleman's debts must be paid, Lizbeth.

He turns from her and gazes out of the enormous window that lets out onto empty space.

ELIZABETH

Then pay it as a debt and do not squander your remaining fortunes on a game!

EDMOND

But, my dear...  
(he chuckles)  
...that's part of the debt, don't you see? Modrus has long waited for this opportunity to destroy me--

ELIZABETH

Destroy you! Edmond, what new madness is this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EDMOND

He's long sought to see me spend the last of my inheritance. Shall I spare him that pleasure? After all he's done for me? Reduced me to such lowly standing that not even my family will recognize me?

ELIZABETH

Edmond, it was your incessant and unreasonable lust for games of chance that brought you to where you are, not Modrus.

EDMOND

And is that why you left me for him?

ELIZABETH

(growing sullen)

Why? This, this self-destructiveness-- why? You weren't like this before. What's wrong? What's happened to you out there?

She follows his gaze out the large window.

EDMOND

(turning back abruptly)

Nothing. Nothing at all, my dear Madame Feuerbach.

ELIZABETH

I do hate it when you call me that...

EDMOND

It is your name.

Elizabeth turns away. Then, rising abruptly and straightening her dress, she walks quickly to the door at the back of the bridge.

ELIZABETH

But you haven't seen Agatha yet.

EDMOND

(absently)

Ah, yes.

ELIZABETH

Let me get her.

She presses a button, and the door opens. AGATHA, a little blonde of five or six wearing an elegant silken dress, stands and walks onto the bridge.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

EDMOND

Oh, my dear, how you've grown! What a perfect young lady you've become in the years since I saw you last.

ELIZABETH

Give your Uncle Edmond a kiss, Agatha.

The girl's shoes clack as she darts across to embrace Edmond.

EDMOND

What a darling!... You know, when I was traveling out at the rim of the galaxy, my dear, we saw strange luminous creatures out in space. My crew called them angels. But they couldn't be half as beautiful floating through that void as you.

He touches the tip of the little girl's nose and squints at her playfully.

ELIZABETH

Oh, but it is late. She should be off to bed.

AGATHA

Oh, mum! I want to help daddy at the game.

ELIZABETH

Tut, tut, young lady!... Edmond, I expect Modrus is most eager to see you. You may join him in the parlor.

EDMOND

Yes, yes. But, Lizbeth, there is something--something I discovered in my travels, don't you know--that I should like to show the both of you first...

CUT TO

INT. PARLOR - LATER

A parlor full of games: blackjack and craps tables, billiards, and more. Standing over a roulette wheel is a portly, well-dressed man in his middle years. MODRUS FEUERBACH wears a full beard and pince-nez, and carries a gold-handled cane. His SERVANT spins the wheel.

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CONTINUED:

A door behind them slides open, revealing Edmond. He is sweating noticeably, and a long, wet strand of hair is pasted to his forehead. He removes his hat and pushes the lock back behind his ear before entering.

MODRUS

D'Arcy! You've arrived. How delightful to see you again, old friend!

EDMOND

I'm sure you're delighted.

MODRUS

(a bit confused)

Why, yes, of course.

Modrus steps forward and embraces Edmond, who receives him coldly.

MODRUS (CONT'D)

Please, come in... My, you look exhausted. Was it a hard crossing?

EDMOND

Not at all. Quite easy, in fact.

MODRUS

Well, I thought Elizabeth would want to greet you. Didn't she bring you here?... She was so excited for you to see Agatha again.

Edmond ignores the comment and looks about the room, moving from table to table, touching each of them in turn.

EDMOND (V.O.)

Modrus loved to twist the knife with a sly comment. Reminders that Lizbeth was his wife, Agatha his child, not mine. These subtle gibes did not go unnoticed, and they only compounded the debt I owed him. I could hardly stop myself from producing the little "insurance" I had in my waistcoat. But patience is the foundation of a deed well-done, and so I continued to con my little part as "poor old Edmond."

EDMOND (CONT'D)

So this is it--your parlor...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MODRUS

Yes, yes. Modest little set-up that it is. Nothing at all like what you had back in the day.

EDMOND

You flatter me, Modrus.

MODRUS

Not at all! That was a palace by comparison. This, a mere game room.

Edmond picks up a golden ball from the roulette wheel.

EDMOND

Well, I can see that you've spared no luxury...

He tosses it to the servant, who frowns and places it on the wheel again.

MODRUS

Have a seat, my good man, and tell me all about this adventure from which you've just got back. I'm dying to hear the details.

(to the servant)

Reginald, bring us a drink.

They sit at a bar along the wall, and the servant moves to fix their drinks.

EDMOND

There's not much to tell really...

MODRUS

Pish posh. Flying out to galaxy's end and nothing to tell of it? I've heard tales of the most fantastic worlds that rim the--

EDMOND

(mildly angry)

Frankly, Modrus, I'm sick to death of the topic.

MODRUS

Ah, yes... Ahem, well. Yes, I do suppose you've been positively bombarded with questions from everyone you've met since your return. Another day perhaps...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

EDMOND

Another day.

MODRUS

I do wonder where Elizabeth is off to. Agatha's usually put to bed round this hour. I hope you'll have the chance to see her.

The servant hands them each a drink.

EDMOND

(stiffening)

You received my offer?

MODRUS

Your what? Oh, yes. Your--

EDMOND

I've prepared to transfer fifty-thousand credits to your account here on Grausam. And as for the bet, my ship, the Trieste--

MODRUS

Well, but let's not get ahead of ourselves, old boy. Have a friendly visit, what? We've got plenty of time to gamble away our fortunes, eh? Ha!

Edmond drinks half his drink in a single gulp. He is sweating even more profusely now.

EDMOND

Well, as a matter of fact, I haven't much time, you see. I haven't much time at all. And I must--well, I'm afraid I must leave this evening. Shortly, in fact.

MODRUS

Come all this way just to stay for a single drink?

EDMOND

A single hand.

MODRUS

Elizabeth had thought you'd be staying a few days at least. Why, there are the gardens to explore and... My word, you simply must visit the beaches on the moon below. We can take a shuttle down and--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

EDMOND

No, no... I'm afraid my time here is short. It's the game I've come for, Modrus, and to pay my debt.

MODRUS

(taken aback)

I see you haven't lost any of your passion for gambling... Or your curtness, Edmond.

EDMOND

And what is that supposed to mean?

MODRUS

Exactly what you think it does... Well, come on then, if you're so hellbent on tossing away whatever you might have earned out Cinistra way...

EDMOND

Earned? I haven't earned a penny!

MODRUS

(laughing)

Then I suppose you've come here to bet the last of your fortune in an attempt to chip off a bit of all this?

He motions around the room, then smiles pityingly.

MODRUS (CONT'D)

Well, D'Arcy, if you think Lady Luck is smiling upon you this evening, by all means, let us move to the table.

EDMOND (V.O.)

And there it was again: that old sneer of condescension which Modrus used to mask his perverse and persistent urge to destroy me. I'd almost come to miss it. But I would wipe that smile off his face.

They take their seats at a card table in the corner of the parlor. Modrus motions for his servant to come over.

INT. CARD TABLE - FOLLOW

As the conversation continues, Reginald shuffles a deck of cards and arranges several colored disks in front of Modrus and Edmond. Once done, he waits to be told to deal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MODRUS

Edmond, you must look round this place and wonder what it is that separates you and me. What it was that led you to near ruin--perhaps total ruin depending on this hand--even as it held me aloft, raised me up to this position of privilege and power? Certainly, you had as much of a chance as I to be successful. More perhaps.

EDMOND

Oh, praytell. What could it have been?

MODRUS

Greed, my friend. Greed was your downfall. Your compulsive lust for ever more and more--

EDMOND

Oh, a lecture! Wonderful... Let us agree, then, each to help the other profit from his wisdom. You can teach me all you know about greed, and I shall teach you about fear.

MODRUS

And what is that supposed to mean?

EDMOND

Oh, not a threat. Not a threat to be sure. It means simply that here, with all your comforts, you're fearless... But I have been to places you cannot imagine, my friend. And you have no idea what there is out there to fear.

MODRUS

(sarcastically)

Well, your stories about it are riveting, I'm sure...

His face dripping sweat, Edmond raises his hands and stares at them as though he were staring into space.

EDMOND

You have no idea... The feeling... When you're at the extreme edge. When all that separates you from an infinite expanse of nothingness is a... a pane of glass--a window.

(his eyes grow wide)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EDMOND (CONT'D)

And you look out that window and behold  
terror itself... Complete emptiness.

Yes...

(coming back to reality)

Yes... you have a thing or to learn  
yourself, Modrus.

Modrus chuckles, then lets out a sigh, leaning back in his  
chair.

MODRUS

Ah, so that's it, is it? It's that fear  
that has you in its grip--is that the  
addiction?... My dear boy, you betray  
yourself. For what has truly ruined you  
time and again--and what may serve to  
ruin you once more tonight--is your  
failure to see that your greed is little  
more than that same fear. Fear of losing  
control--a desperate need to hold on.

Modrus leans in and, cracking his knuckles, grins wickedly.

MODRUS (CONT'D)

But you've already lost control. And now,  
you could well lose your shirt... My poor  
boy. I almost feel bad playing this hand  
with you...

He winks at Edmond.

MODRUS (CONT'D)

Almost.

EDMOND (V.O.)

I very nearly drew my pistol from my  
waistcoat and killed him straightaway.  
But no. Death was too good for Modrus  
Feuerbach. He would pay, he would suffer.  
He would feel the lack, the want, that I  
had felt these many years.

EDMOND (CONT'D)

I'm sure you feel no such remorse. But  
thank you, Modrus. Thank you for your  
little sermon. It means more to me than  
you can ever know...

MODRUS

Now you flatter me, old boy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

EDMOND

Not at all. Funny, though, to hear such dissertations on fear from one who knows so little of it. For I can see you spare yourself no luxuries either. I imagine the greatest fear you face each day of your well-heeled life here above the clouds of Grausam is whether you'll manage to button that waistcoat.

MODRUS

(dismissively)

You go too far in your insults, D'Arcy.

EDMOND

I am only paying you in kind, old friend, for all those you've dealt me. I owe you as much a debt in digs as I do in gold, "old boy."

(his voice grows tense)

And when you speak to me of fear, you should check your tone. I'm not your little Agatha... And if one of us should fear the outcome of this hand, it's you. Precisely because you have so very much to lose, and I so very little...

MODRUS

Well, then--let's have at it, eh?

He nods at Reginald, who deals them each ten cards.

MODRUS (CONT'D)

I only hope your travels have puffed up your pockets as much as they have your chest.

EDMOND

It is my intent, sir, that this hand shall tend to my pockets.

EDMOND (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I could see then I had him hooked. Yes, I could see it in his eyes. And my desire to murder him all but faded away entirely. Let there be no doubt, I had the upper hand in this game.

They pick up the cards that Reginald has dealt and scrutinize them.

## MONTAGE - THE CARD GAME

The game of Blindman's Harrow plays out, each player drawing cards and collecting colored disks. As the game proceeds, the colored disks begin to amass in front of Modrus. Finally, Edmond--his cloak and hat hanging on the back of his chair, his forehead covered with wet mats of hair--has only one left.

END MONTAGE

Modrus draws a card and flips it face up on the table. Edmond winces. Placing his finger over his last disk, he slides it across the table to Modrus and lowers his head. With a smirk, Modrus gathers up the disks.

MODRUS

Perhaps one day you'll see, Edmond...  
Yes, perhaps you'll realize, old chap,  
that the important things in life are not  
adventure and games of chance. And  
perhaps you'll even take a cue from your  
old friend, Modrus--settle into a  
pleasanter life, find a wife and child of  
your own, and see that the real wealth is  
there, not in credits or in...

He throws a fistful of colored disks at Edmond.

MODRUS (CONT'D)

...petty revenge.

Edmond looks sullen, beaten. His sweaty hair hangs in front of his face, and he grinds his teeth.

MODRUS (CONT'D)

(angrily)

Keep your credits, my friend. And forget  
your debt to me... But as part of our  
bet, the Trieste is mine, and I'll have  
her. If only to teach you a lesson.

EDMOND

Yes... Yes, indeed... A lesson.

Edmond rises and reaches into his waistcoat. Modrus narrows his eyes suspiciously. Edmond slowly draws his hand out again and sets a long metal key-like object on the table. Modrus smiles in spite of himself and to disguise a sigh of relief.

EDMOND (CONT'D)

She's yours... You'll find her moored at  
pier fifty-nine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He walks to the door.

MODRUS

And where will you go?

EDMOND

I've prepared for this eventuality...  
I've arranged for alternative  
transportation... I'll trouble you no  
longer. Good evening, sir.

MODRUS

And a fine evening to you, old friend.

Reginald opens the door, and Edmond exits. The servant follows him. When the door closes behind them, Modrus laughs out loud and stares delightedly at the symbol of his latest conquest, the key.

INT. CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Hanging his head, Edmond leaves the Feuerbach residence, escorted by Reginald. The servant watches Edmond disappear into the crowds that move through a vast corridor of the main station.

Edmond turns around to see that Reginald is gone. He lifts his head and smirks, then walks quickly toward a large terminal.

He stops at a metal box and reaches into his waistcoat. Pulling out a pistol and a piece of paper, he throws the pistol into the box and hurries on.

INT. DOCK - CONTINUOUS

Edmond approaches a ramp that goes up to a large space cruiser. A STEWARD in a red suit and cap stops him.

STEWARD

Ticket, sir.

Edmond hands him the piece of paper he is holding. The steward looks to either side of him.

STEWARD (CONT'D)

Baggage, sir?

Edmond smiles broadly, closes his eyes for a moment, and lets out a chuckle. Still smiling, he puts his hand over his heart and answers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EDMOND

Oh, my dear boy, I have all I need right here.

The steward motions for him board the cruiser, and Edmond ascends the ramp.

INT. CRUISER - LATER

As the cruiser leaves dock, Edmond looks out of large window. In the distance, his ship, the Trieste is visible.

EDMOND (V.O.)

I can hear you now, Modrus. I can hear you tell me that real tragedy is mine... That greed and the desire to beat you have left me empty, dead inside.

EXT. SPACE - FOLLOW

Passing through the window, following Edmond's line of sight, we cross the space between the two ships and slip into the Trieste through a side window just as Modrus is walking onto the bridge. Along the far wall, next to an airlock door, an empty spacesuit lays crumpled on the floor.

INT. BRIDGE - FOLLOW

Modrus approaches the helm and takes hold of the steering wheel. He looks around the bridge with a proud grin on his face.

EDMOND (V.O.)

But I've seen true emptiness, my friend. I've been to the edge and back--and while you have never faced that void, I embrace it.

Modrus looks to the large window, then squints at it. Something indiscernible floats in space just outside.

EDMOND (V.O.) (CONT'D)

You may have beaten me at everything else in life, Modrus. But in this I have beaten you most soundly.

Modrus's eyes grow wide, and he rushes to the window. His hands on the glass, he presses his face to it and looks out frantically.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EDMOND (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Their screams, short lived as they were before being drowned out in the vacuum of space--their screams, my friend, were a music I shan't soon forget...

The indistinct objects in space become clear: Elizabeth and Agatha, their faces white and bloated, covered in spider-webs of burst capillaries, their lifeless arms floating out to their slides, and their dresses spread out around them angelically. Each is tied to the prow of the Trieste with a long white cord.

Modrus leans his head against the glass, his body wracked with sobs. In the distance, behind the bodies of his wife and child, a cruiser pulls out of dock. He lifts his head, his eyes follow it out to the dead of space.

EDMOND (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Just that pane separates us from the vast emptiness... Just that pane. But even the tiniest bit of joy fills the void a little, wouldn't you agree?

A flash of light. The cruiser is gone.

Modrus turns away from the horrid sight, slides down the glass, and collapses in tears.

THE END