A Paladin's Bargain

Season Two – Episode Six
Chapter Twelve: Only a Free Action Away

ROLE	PART ONE	PART TWO	PART THREE
Rowan Lawson	X	X	X
Garnett	X	X	X
Artie	X	X	X
Despair	X	X	X
Ronnie	X	X	X
Brother Lotus	X	X	X
Brother Owlbear	X	X	X
Xolo	X	X	X
Tusk Bloodbath	X	X	X
Sheridan "Shart" Smithwick	X		
Ghost Talker	X		
Sharp-Tooth		X	X
Boar-Mother		X	X
Las Bo I-thul (Rogue Leader)			X

Part One

[SFX: indoors, cave.]
[SFX: Tense drums, but different than combat music.]

BROTHER OWLBEAR
You! Grab the other end of this table. Help me bar the door. Oof! Out of the way, Rowan!

ROWAN
Move where? I can't see my hand in front of my face. Can someone find a torch?

LOTUS
I can help with that.

[SFX: Lotus chanting and the foomph of the wood catching on fire.]

RONNIE
Oo! Thank you, Brother Lotus!

GARNETT
Why are you barring the door? We need to run. NOW.

ARTIE
Not everyone can run.

ROWAN
And we're not leaving them.

ARTIE
Glad we can finally agree on something.

GARNETT
Running, walking, crawling. I'll carry you myself if we have to. We need to leave.

DESPAIR
How long do you think we have before they… (come here)

[SFX: BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Pounding on the door.]

GARNETT
Glad that door's as thick as it is. Artie, any Druid zhuzh-thing you can do to reinforce that wood?

ARTIE
Eh. Maybe? Lemme see what I have.

ROWAN
Anything to slow them down.

ARTIE
Alright. Stand back, everyone. (spellcasting voice) Thorn and brier, I enthrall. Catch and bind and build a wall.

[SFX: sudden, vegetative growth. Maybe a few muffled yelps.]

XOLO
Whoa! Artemis, where did you learn how to do that?

ARTIE
The aunties actually know their stuff, dude. Maybe listen to their stories now and then?

GARNETT
We are still trapped in a room with only one way out.

SHART (calmly)
This area is Dwarven made. No dwarf worth his steel makes only one way out of a room. It’s bad luck.

RONNIE
You’re saying there’s a secret door? But where?

SHART
I’ll need a minute.

[SFX: BOOM! Pounding on the door.]

DESPAIR
It doesn’t sound like we have many left.

XOLO
The door is over there.

SHART
You want to come over here and show us?

XOLO
No way. I’m staying where I am.

ARTIE
What? If you stay here, you’re a slave.

XOLO
Artemis. I’ve seen what they do to runaways.

ARTIE
(begins to argue)

XOLO
You stupid bitch, I’m (trying to save your stupid ass.)

ROWAN (interrupting)
Hey, hot shot: For the last week, ARTIE has been a thorn in my ass talking about what HE would do for HIS pack. Sounds like you missed that lesson around the campfire. You wanna be a slave? Great. (dripping with sarcasm) Sit. Stay. Good boy.

XOLO
(growls) I will fight you, human.

ROWAN
We get out of here together, you can have the first swing.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Will you two please have your pole-arm measuring contest later?

SHART
Keep looking for the switch!

RONNIE
It’s too dim, I need another torch. Oh!

[SFX: Stone door swings open.]

SHART
The torch was the switch? Beory wept, that’s a secret? My ancestors should be ashamed.

GARNETT
(to Shart) Make up your mind. (to Rowan) Alright, Ro? You first.

[SFX: BOOM! Pounding on the door.]

ROWAN
Weapons check before we go. Lotus, Owlbear?

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Two of us against them? I almost feel bad for them.

TUSK
Give me a sword. I will fight.

ROWAN
What? No way, friend.

TUSK
Three divisions are coming. Maybe four. You need help.

ROWAN
You’re not getting mine. What about the scimitar on the guard’s belt?

TUSK
That tiny sword is shameful.

GARNETT
Is mine any better?

[SFX: Drawing short sword.]

TUSK
Acceptable.

GARNETT
(Exasperated sigh) Why do the men of every freaking species have a size obsession? Fine.

[SFX: Wolverine SNICKT!]

DESPAIR
Oh wow! Where did those come from?

GARNETT
The claws come standard. The metal tips are aftermarket.

[SFX: BOOM! BOOM! Pounding on the door.]

ARTIE
I need to carry Bau, she’s too weak.

GARNETT
Artie, you need your hands free for casting.

XOLO
I will carry Bau.

ARTIE
Nice of you to join us.

XOLO
I’m doing it to help her… and I want a swing at the bald one.

ARTIE
Yeah, good luck with that.

GARNETT
Ronnie, use your bow as long as you can. Give your shield to Despair.

DESPAIR
What? Ew. I don’t know how to use one of these things.

RONNIE
It’s really simple. Keep it between you and the bad people.

TUSK
Give the shield to me.

ROWAN
Shield and sword? Are you leading the charge or rear guard?

TUSK
I can find home. You keep up.

[SFX: Pounding on the door.]

ROWAN
Gods above and devils below, I’m trusting an orc to lead the way. Wait. Shart? Where are you?

SHART (calmly)
I’m over here.

ROWAN
C’mon. We gotta beat feet!

SHART
The door closes too quick. Someone has to put the torch back or else they’ll know where you went.

ROWAN
What? No. We can figure something else out.

SHART (snaps)
You’re in their house, man! They see that secret door open, you won’t get fifty feet before they catch you.

DESPAIR
Oh no you don’t!

[SFX: She slaps him full across the face & Shart reacts]

DESPAIR (VERY angry)
Sheridan Jameson Smithwick, you are not pulling the martyr card! Give me that damn torch and get through that secret door now.
(spellcasting in infernal)

[SFX: whispy, slithery noise]

DESPAIR (losing it)
It’s called a mage hand. It will carry the stupid torch and drop it into the stupid slot, so you can save your sacrifice for another stupid day! Stop acting like you dying is the easiest solution to a problem. We need you. Move it.

[SFX: Stone door swings closed.]

SHART
(chuckles) Hell hath no fury, indeed.

DESPAIR
Stuff it, beard boy.

[acoustic pause]

GARNETT
Xolo was right. Food storeroom.

ARTIE
I smelled some cooking earlier. They have a kitchen?

BROTHER OWLBEAR
No time for design and décor. This takes us deeper underground.

TUSK
They will look for runaways in front of them, towards exit. We are now behind them.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Fair point.

TUSK
Next room. Two goblins, behind the stove, no weapons.

GARNETT
Do you think they'll squeal on us?

TUSK
Not anymore. This way.

(beat)

GARNETT
(quietly) interesting.

DESPAIR
What is it?

GARNETT
Look. He didn't kill the unarmed goblins, he knocked them out.

RONNIE
You're saying he has a conscience?

TUSK
I have ears, too. Food room is empty. We run.

[SFX: a few seconds of lots of running feet.]
[SFX: BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! (but much quieter)]

TUSK
Across the hall. Through double doors. Temple space. Wait for the door to break.

GARNETT
What?

[SFX: BOOM! (but much quieter) CRASH! Of door finally giving way]

TUSK
Now!

[SFX: a door opens quietly, some running feet, door closes, drums]

DESPAIR (amazed)
Oh wow. Look at that axe over the altar! That glow is intense.

ROWAN
Oh gods, my head. Yeah, it’s a temple space alright.

GARNETT
Only now it hurts?

ROWAN
Only now is it strong enough to knock me back.

TUSK
Secret door behind wall picture.

ARTIE
If you haven’t noticed, this whole room is covered in wall pictures.

DESPAIR
Hold on, those hides over there! The art looks exactly like the big mural back at the barracks.

SHART (moans)
HERE?! NOW?! ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?

[Everyone shushes him.]

GARNETT
Shart, now is not the time. We need (to be quiet.)

[SFX: click and grate of a stone door sliding open]

TUSK
Here door. We leave now.

GARNETT
Let’s move, everyone! (checking everyone off) Tusk on point. Owlbear, Lotus. Xolo, Bau. Artie, stay close to them. Ronnie, grab a candle from that altar, the passage looks pretty dark. D, what is it?

DESPAIR
Shart’s pacing the same way that hobgoblin was pacing. He knows there’s a fight coming.

GARNETT
We’re leaving. Ro! Get him moving.

ROWAN
Get going, love. I’ll catch up.

GARNETT
But…

ROWAN
No buts. You need to trust me on this one. I’ve seen this before.

GARNETT
Gah! You better catch up!

ROWAN
(to her) I will, love. (to him) Hey there, Shart.

SHART
Rowan Lawson, if you think you can talk me out of this, you’re a gods-damned fool.

ROWAN
Is this where I get after you for your foul mouth? I’ve seen that look on a soldier’s face before. I know you have to do what you have do.

SHART
A long time ago, someone told me exactly where I would die. And when the gods make a prophecy like that, they’ll tear down mountains to pave the path that gets him there.

ROWAN
I get that. Anything I can do? People to tell? Family back home?

SHART
Last of my family died fifty years ago. But yeah, there's one thing you can do for me.

ROWAN
Anything.

SHART
Promise?

ROWAN
We don't have time for an oathswearing. I promise. What do you want?

SHART
Traditional. Dwarven. Funeral.

ROWAN
Oh, FUCK off!

SHART
You going back on your promise?

ROWAN
No, but… Aaargh! Goody Brewer will never forgive you for that.

[SFX: something like Rowan's medallion]

SHART
Here. Big key's for the front door. Rent's paid til New Year's Day. Little key's for the trunk at the foot of my bed. Find the bottom and there's enough to cover the funeral plus some. Below that, might be a thing or two you could use.

ROWAN
I'd rather you give it to me directly.

SHART
I've told you before, long shanks. I'm not that kinda dwarf.

ROWAN (dry laugh)
But tell me before you go: How sure are you that this is the hour?

SHART
Oaths of vengeance and compelled duels… They cut both ways, you know?

ROWAN
Wait, oaths of… (vengeance?)

SHART (very slowly and very clearly)
Bring your light into this dark world, Rowan. Give me your word.

ROWAN
Yes, I give you my word, Sheridan.

SHART
My friends call me Shart.

ROWAN
I give you my word, Shart.

SHART
Travel well. Fight well. Die well.

ROWAN
Fight well. Die well. Travel well.

SHART
(quietly, to Rowan) Now run.
(shouting) GHOST TALKER! KNOCK, KNOCK MOTHERFUCKER!

GHOST TALKER
Who enters the temple of the Great Red Emperor?

[SFX: stone door grinds closed]

SHART
Come out here, Ghost Talker! I’ve got a hammer, and your ugly head sure looks like a nail.

GHOST TALKER
Smithwick?!?! You killed my father! And my son!

SHART
(loud) Fourteen fathers fallen! Sixteen sons slain! (low) I’ve killed every man in your family for the last two hundred fucking years and now it’s your turn.

GHOST TALKER
But now you are in my house. You know you’ve come to die.

SHART
In your house? You make me your GUEST?!
Unbidden, I come; ill-omened, the hour!
Unsavory. I refuse your meat and your beer.
Ill-mannered. I bring no jewels for your spouse.

GHOST TALKER
The prophecy has come! At last, I avenge my forefathers!
(spellcasting voice) By fire and lightning, by blade and blood.
Giant's strength within me!

[SFX: Thunder crash]

SHART
Unwelcomed! Ill-mannered! Unpleasant! Obnoxious!
Unwanted! Foul-tempered! Unruly! (let it drip) Malicious.

GHOST TALKER
You will die, today. Alone, unmourned, and forgotten.

SHART
That's where you're wrong. (spellcasting voice) With Heaven's bright hand, I smite at thee! (A big vocal wind-up to strike.)

[SFX: a crash and some angelic choir sound effect, like from Rowan's smite]

["commercial break"]

[Note: There is no way that we are cutting to a funny commercial immediately after killing off a beloved character. Instead, I'd like to play the entire Final Call song that Jon and Melissa created.]

Part Two

[SFX: cave – close to the beginning of Episode 3, part 3]

ROWAN
Where is everyone?

GARNETT
Rowan?

ROWAN
Garnett? Where are you?

GARNETT
I'm here. Follow my voice. The path is clear. Where's Sheridan?

ROWAN
He's not coming. He said something about an Oath of Vengeance. I am not going to stand in his way with something like that.

GARNETT
I thought that was a Paladin thing?

ROWAN
Yes, but not my lineage, so I don't know for sure. We have a few other things to take care of.

DESPAIR
Lawson? I got this really weird headache, almost like the other night in the woods when you… where's Shart?

GARNETT
He's not coming.

DESPAIR
What do you mean he's not coming?

ROWAN
I mean he is under an obligation to stay there and to fight someone.

DESPAIR
But we came here to rescue him!

ROWAN
And we did. We rescued him and Lotus and Artie's packmates from their captivity. But doing that brought him to the temple. And he once heard a prophecy that said he would fall in that temple.

DESPAIR
You said yourself, we aren't supposed to leave people! You make these stupid round-world rules and then you break them! I'm going back.

ROWAN
No, you're not. And you're not yelling at him with your brain, because *maybe* that's what distracts him long enough that he gets hit. I get it. It sucks. And I would rather lose him and mourn him without risking losing you and mourning you too.

RONNIE
Please don't go back, Despair. We need you.

DESPAIR
It's so sad to think he's gone like that.

GARNETT
You're very right, and it's alright to be sad about it. He's… was a good person and we are going to miss him. And we can't stop now.

ROWAN
He bought us time to get away. We have to use that.

TUSK
Enough! The dead should not hear lamentations.

GARNETT
What's the word, Tusk?

TUSK
Deep tunnel ahead. Bad air. No flame. Breathe in. Walk two hundred paces. Breathe out.

ROWAN
Two hundred paces in the dark? That is an awful long walk.

TUSK
You breathe, you sleep.

GARNETT
We trust you. Alright, Ronnie, snuff that candle. You buddy up with Despair, I'll get Rowan through. Everyone ready?

RONNIE
Do we have another choice?

GARNETT
Stay here?

RONNIE
I thought so.

XOLO
Before we go, Arte… Artie. Can you help with Bau?

ARTIE
Yeah, I can do that.

GARNETT
Alright, on three. One, two, (deep inhale)

[SFX: Very obvious footsteps. A few seconds in, add some panicked holding it in. One person (TBD) gasps a bit and you can hear them getting woosy.]

TUSK
(Heavy exhale and gasp in) Breathe now.

[SFX: Everyone gasps for air.]

LOTUS
What was that place, brother?

BROTHER OWLBEAR
How should I know?

TUSK
Deep tunnel is from the before times. The bad air keeps enemies away.

DESPAIR
But the walls? How could they make something like that?

TUSK
Elves don’t sleep.

RONNIE
But elves don’t dig?

GARNETT
But elf slaves dig.

TUSK
She understand. Walk more now.

DESPAIR
But…

TUSK (angry)
You want answers. Everyone want answers. No answers here. Only walking.

(beat)

BROTHER OWLBEAR
So, uh, Lotus. Are you feeling alright?

LOTUS
Oh, yes! I never knew my family was from the Gauntlet Valley! I’m very excited to meet them!

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Yeah, about that. We need to have a talk before we get there.

LOTUS
What is it, Brother?

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Well. You see, there are some things you need to know. Things we weren’t planning on telling you until closer to your 100th birthday.

LOTUS
Silly, orcs like me only live to be fifty or sixty.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
(muttering) Exactly. (regular) Let’s try it this way: Do you remember much from before you came to Sunnyvale?

LOTUS
No? I only know what I've been told from our siblings. Everything before that is a blur. My parents died and the monastery took me in, to raise me as one of your own, or ("one of their gnome.")

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Yes, yes. As one of our "gnome." I want to lovingly kick Sister Bumblebee in the shins for that pun. It's outlived her.

LOTUS
She meant well. May her spirit return to the All.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
As the river returns to the sea. But you see, there's more to it.

[SFX: Pounding on wooden door]

SHARP TOOTH
Who comes?

TUSK
Tusk returns, in victory!

SHARP TOOTH
Tusk is dead.

TUSK
I live. I bring others who can tell my story true.

SHARP TOOTH
Tusk was captured by goblins.

TUSK
I live, rat-biter! See my face and pierce my flesh to know me true.

[SFX: Slot slides open. Steel from scabbard. Tusk grunts.]

SHARP TOOTH
Tusk! I know your face! You are no illusion! Come home! Come home!

[SFX: Door opens]

TUSK
Thank you, Sharp Tooth.

SHARP TOOTH
Who are the strangers?

TUSK
They fought with me. I will speak for them and tell their story true.

SHARP TOOTH
But who is he? This one has our marks, but I do not know his face.

TUSK
We must tell the Chief.

SHARP TOOTH
I will go. You wait here.

GARNETT
How you doing, baby?

ROWAN
I’m lost. I’m stranded underground with an army of goblins behind me and what sounds like an army of orcs in front of me, so, not great. But for some reason, my headache is going away. Yay?

GARNETT
Yay. Can you see alright?

ROWAN
Yes, yes, tender mercies. Don’t know who makes their candles, but I can see.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Did you ever think about who your parents were?

LOTUS
Well, all of the other half-orcs I met in the world are children of a male orc and a female human. And that is often a tale of tragedy and pain. It’s one of the reasons I look forward to taking my vows and working with you and the siblings to bring peace to the world and maybe prevent such tragedy in the future.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
That’s very noble of you, Lotus. You pour out compassion for others and may it quench the thirst of many hearts.

LOTUS
You are kind to say, Brother. But what does this have to do with my parents?

SHARP TOOTH
The Chief approaches! All hail, the Boar-Mother!

LARGE GROUP
HAIL!

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
(gasp!) Blood of my blood! Skin marked by my hand! MY SON!!!!

LOTUS
Mom?

[acoustic pause]

[SFX: cave]

ROWAN
Alright, Owlbear. They're off having their mother and child reunion and we are clearly not going anywhere. What the nine hells happened?

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Sixteen hells. But it's not my story to tell.

GARNETT
I think I speak for everyone on the team when I say we will hang you from the ceiling and beat you until the candy comes out unless you tell us.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
You drive a hard bargain. This is what we've been able to piece together. About eighteen years ago, there was a minstrel named The Fabulous Faltermeyer, who came from Hightower and was heading through the Gauntlet Valley.

DESPAIR
What's a minstrel?

RONNIE
A bard. Usually a rather horny one.

DESPAIR
You mean like me? A Tiefling?

RONNIE
Umm… More like (indistinct whispering)

DESPAIR
Oh! Not like me! Not like me at all.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
And rather thick in the head, too. I mean "Vows of Celibacy" aren't really negotiable, you know? He stayed one night with us and left the next morning, heading west through the valley, by himself.

ROWAN
By himself? Wandering alone in an area like this qualifies as "death by stupid."

OWLBEAR
I said Intelligence wasn't his strong suit. To the surprise of no one, he was captured by an orc band. The raiders brought him to Chief Strong-arm, who wanted to hold him for ransom or else kill him.

GARNETT
Why not simply give him a little snip and nick his ear? That should be enough warning to most bards.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
May I finish, please? No one paid his ransom. So, they're about to chop off his bigger head and then at that very moment, The Fabulous Faltermeyer managed to sing one of those "Earth moving, angels weeping" laments, pleading for his life. The song won the heart of Strong-arm's daughter, who pleaded to her father to spare Faltermeyer.

ARTIE
You've GOTTA to be kidding. This one in a million performance convinced Strong-arm to spare him?

BROTHER OWLBEAR
No, One-arm refused. His daughter killed him, claimed the throne for herself, and married Faltermeyer. Moral of this story: when you say "over my dead body" beware of people taking you literally.

RONNIE
So, the daughter married the bard and had Lotus. How did he end up in Sunnyvale? And why did he think his parents had died?

BROTHER OWLBEAR
This is where the story gets fuzzy. After about seven years dancing with orcs, either Faltermeyer couldn't hold still or he felt weird being the only human, or something. We think he put a sleeping potion in her drink, left in the middle of the night, and took the soon-to-be Lotus with him. This did not sit well with Chief Boar-Mother. She chased him down and she shot him with a poisoned arrow.

ROWAN
I promise I won't leave you like that, hon.

GARNETT
I promise I wouldn't miss if you do.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Do you want the thrilling conclusion or not?

ROWAN
Sorry. I use gallows humor as a coping strategy for dealing with tragedy.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
After this long, you'd think you'd be better at it. She shot him but, in true bard fashion, he managed to stretch his death scene out long enough to make it across the bridge. Because of the treaty, that put him under our protection and out of bounds for the orcs.

GARNETT
Treaty?

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Same treaty that saved your furry butts last night. So Faltermeyer didn't make it. But the poisoned arrow nicked little proto-Lotus too. Our healers did everything they could to save him. Between the poison and the antidote, he lost most of his memories from before the incident. We decided we were responsible for him, so we raised him as one of our own.

ARTIE
Or one of your "gnome."

BROTHER OWLBEAR
(low) Dammit, Bumblebee. (sigh) Yes, as one of our gnome.

DESPAIR
This is horrible!

BROTHER OWLBEAR
I mean, he's had a good life for the last twelve years. Heaven and earth, he ate well enough.

DESPAIR
I mean it's horrible that one of our friends died no more than two hours ago and you all seem to have moved on from mourning him to making jokes about a heartbreaking backstory to a truly good person.

GARNETT
D, you have to understand…

DESPAIR
Oh no, don't you two start with your round-world crap. I've had enough of your "That's just the way it is" stories. Shart is dead and there is a hole in my heart that hurts. First, he gave himself up to save Ronnie. Then he wanted to stay behind in the slave pen. Then he pulled some Kenobi-level bullshit so we could get away. And all you can do is laugh? That's cruel! It's disgusting! That's… (that's… trails off)

ROWAN (interrupting)
What if I told you that he's known for a long time that he would die in that temple? He's been making peace with that for a long time. When we spoke, the one thing that meant more to him than anything else was that we honor him in the ways of his people. A Traditional Dwarven Funeral.

GARNETT (quiet)
Oh sweet mercy grace…

DESPAIR
What does that even mean?

ROWAN
You know I can't lie, Despair. It's going to be a lot and it's going to be weird…

ARTIE
How weird?

ROWAN
But I promised him. And he looked pretty relieved when I told him I would do it. So heaven help me, we get back to Gauntlet Station, that is what I'm going to do.

DESPAIR
You mean it? It sounds like a really big deal.

ROWAN
I do mean it and yes, it is. Dwarven funerals can last for days. They've been known to result in pregnancies, marriages, divorces, vendettas, and peace treaties, often from the same funeral.

DESPAIR
What will we need to do?

ARTIE
And how weird will it be?

ROWAN
That's the catch: Attendees are bound by an oath. Anyone who hasn't been to one before cannot be forewarned about what to expect. You have to experience it.

ARTIE
Not setting us up for success, man.

DESPAIR
Have you been to one before, Miss Garnett?

GARNETT
I have, for better or worse. And don't look at me for some way to weasel out of that oath. At least with a geas, you can chalk it up to "It's magic." But you break a Dwarven oath, there will be an assassin whose sole purpose becomes tracking you for the rest of your remarkably short life.

ARTIE
Speaking of geases, because we can and you can't: Did Stella say that the orcs had captured the slaver? Loss Bowie-Thule?

XOLO
The one who took us? How would you know that?

ARTIE
Would you believe a little bird told me? That guy also fits in to a riddle these three are trying to solve, but we (can’t talk about it.)

GARNETT (interrupting)
Hold up, here comes Tusk and Sharp Tooth. What’s happening, Tusk?

TUSK
Chief Boar-Mother and Prince Shatter will see you now.

[commercial break]

ANNOUNCER
And now a word from our sponsor: The Deepwater Health Department

THE VOICE OF DEEPWATER HEALTH
It’s almost time for school! But sadly, not everybody is ready for the classroom. Adult kobolds are 75% less likely to read at the 3rd grade level than age-matched orcs, often lacking the essential literacy skills to navigate our community and find meaningful work.

Volunteer today for the Deepwater Kobold Readers Program! Make a difference in the lives of local working kobolds.

You’ll be assigned a kobold buddy and meet weekly in the local library to read the book of the month. The only requirement is an open mind and a love of reading. We’ll provide you with the books, the space, and a list of common kobold phrases.

The current book of the month is “The Happy Hobgoblin.” Follow the whimsical adventures of Harriet the Hobgoblin as she hunts for mice living under the stove.

Sign up today at the Deepwater Library, 212 Reading Rainbow Court, open Noon to 5, Tuesday through Sunday.

Keep reading, Deepwater!

ANNOUNCER
We now return to: A Paladin’s Bargain.

Part Three

[SFX: Cave.]

ROWAN (quietly)
Alright. I've dealt with orcs before. They are brainless, merciless killing machines who only understand two things: strength and weakness. I will do my best to negotiate, but I make no promises. Be ready to fight at any moment.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
Greetings, honored guests. I have mourned my son's death for many years, but today I learn he is alive and returned to me. You have found the blood of my blood and you have warmed my heart. We could never repay you for this gift and we are in your debt. Thank you.

ROWAN
Uh… Honey?

GARNETT
Hail, Boar-Mother! We are happy this surprise brings you such joy and we rejoice with you! We must admit that it surprises us as well. May we ask how you recognized him so quickly after all this time?

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
You are Mistress Garnett, yes? My son has told me about some of you. A mother knows her child, Garnett. And even though it has been many seasons since he was taken from me, I could draw his marks with my eyes closed.

GARNETT
His marks… His tattoos?

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
I drew those patterns on his flesh with my own hands. It was after his first successful hunt; the spring after his seventh winter.

DESPAIR
Alright, wait. I'm very sorry to interrupt, your chieftain-ship? -ness? Ma'am?

GARNETT (quietly)
Boar-Mother.

DESPAIR
Boar-Mother. I'm Despair and I'm not from around here. And I really have to know: Is there some sort of spell in play that I can't sense? How is it we can understand you so well?

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
Welcome, Despair. There is no magic in our communication. We speak the common speech. And likewise, as someone "not from around here," I commend you on your grasp of the language. That the oppressor's speech is the common speech says much about our situations.

DESPAIR
Then why do Tusk and Sharp Tooth talk the way that they do?

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
Not every-one learns every-thing equally. When strength is needed, Tusk's sword is more persuasive than his tongue. But it is advantageous to know the language of those who wish you ill. Especially when they think you incapable. Don't you think so, Sir Rowan?

ROWAN
Dur-gum batz, kla-ta-bah nik-za-chum Krusk.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
(Chuckles) Your accent is terrible, but your point is well taken. "We underestimate our opponents at our peril," yes. But be at ease, Sir Rowan. I give you my word: We mean you no harm.

ROWAN
What about the hobgoblins? Or the Crimson Emperor? You say you won't harm us but will you hand us over to them?

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
Bah. The usurper and his invaders are not welcome in our lands. We will never aid them in their treacheries. To other matters: We understand you lost a member of your party in the rescue. You have our deepest sympathies.

GARNETT
Yes, Sheridan was a good man.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER (shocked)
Hold. This Sheridan. Dwarf with russet hair, shaved at the sides with black marks beneath? Silvered breastplate with an emerald star at his heart?

GARNETT (equally shocked)
Yes, ma'am. That was him.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
And how… How did he fall?

ROWAN
I was the last to see him, Boar-Mother. He was preparing to fight a hobgoblin. Called him Ghost-Talker.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
Oh! The Doom Hammer falls! In accordance with prophecy!

TUSK and SHARP-TOOTH
Prophecy!

ROWAN
It definitely sounded like he knew what was coming.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
For more than two hundred winters, his soul has carried that death-prophecy. (musing) And then to see it? Like the first glimpse of home after a long absence.

GARNETT
You knew Sheridan? But how?

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
The Doom Hammer was the story that we told around the fire to keep the foolish close to the hearth. We always knew he carried that prophecy, so we always gave him grace in battle. No one would dare to risk interfering with that great task.

GARNETT
And would you be willing to share that great task with us, please?

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
“Fourteen fathers fallen, sixteen sons slain. At the inverted circle, when the Doom Hammer falls, the end begins.” For more than two hundred years, Sheridan has haunted this valley with an oath of vengeance against the Ghost-Talker clan. When the fifteenth Ghost-Talker assumed the mantle, people began to wonder about how the prophecy would play out. And then yesterday, our scouts reported that the junior Ghost-Talker was killed in a skirmish near the treaty bridge, along with an entire team of goblin regulars.

DESPAIR
Umm, I think that would be us or rather me, ma’am. I killed a shaman near the bridge.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
And so was the sixteenth son slain. The warp and weft of fate drew him to the inverted circle, so he could fulfill the prophecy.

DESPAIR
Wait, are you saying that by me killing the younger shaman, I… I killed Sheridan? But… No! No!

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
The trajectory of your actions was known long before now, Despair. Rejoice! You helped your friend achieve his destiny, in accordance with prophecy.

TUSK and SHARP-TOOTH
Prophecy!

DESPAIR
I’m going to need to sit and think about this for a while.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
Indeed. Meanwhile, we are preparing a celebration tonight in honor of my son’s return. We wish you will attend.

GARNETT
We will happily celebrate your reunion, Boar-Mother.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
Sharp-Tooth, please see our guests to their rooms. Tusk, I believe you have a story to tell to the War Council.

RONNIE
(quiet) Excuse me, please? Ummm… Tusk? (a little louder) Tusk? HEY!

TUSK
What do you want, little one?

RONNIE
I want my shield back. (beat) Please.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
Tusk? Why do you have this woman's shield?

RONNIE
Because he asked me for it, Boar-Mother, when we were escaping.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
He asked for your shield and you gave it to him willingly?

TUSK
Great Boar-Mother, this is not what it looks like.

RONNIE
I tell your story truly, Tusk. You asked for it and I gave it to you so I could use my bow in the retreat.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER (making absolutely sure)
You made yourself more vulnerable so that you could fight better? While allowing him to protect himself?

RONNIE
Yes, ma'am. To be fair, it was so he could lead the way back here.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
Change of plans. Sharp-Tooth, take this young woman to the chamber.

ROWAN
Wait, hold on. (What's this…)

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER (Interrupting)
I have already given you my word once today, Sir Rowan. Take her.

RONNIE
I'll be okay…

ARTIE
Excuse me, Boar-Mother. One other question before you go, please. Do you currently have a prisoner here? Possibly Elven kind? Pale skin, pale eyes, dark clothes?

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
I am not sure. Sharp-Tooth?

SHARP-TOOTH
The dog-man speaks true, Boar-Mother. We caught a licht-alf in the traps by the forest bridge. No one has claimed him.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
It seems no one will admit to knowing the elf. Do you? If you claim him, you can pay his bail. Otherwise, a first-time thief will lose a finger from his dominant hand.

ARTIE
And what if I say I've sworn to kill him?

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
Then I would ask you why you hunt this elf, Artie of the Westlands.

ARTIE
I'm hunting this elf because he kidnapped my pack-mates, Xolo and Bau. He sold them to the hobgoblins to work as slaves in their caves.

XOLO
It's true, ma'am. He took us at the last new moon. We have been working here for over a week. My partner Bau is very sick from the bad air in the deep caves.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
Oh, this changes things significantly.

ARTIE
Oh good.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
The punishment for slavery is death. He will die tomorrow at sunset.

ROWAN
Whoa, whoa, whoa! Begging your pardon, Boar-Mother, ma'am. You can't kill him.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
Please, tell me why I cannot execute justice in my own lands, Sir Rowan.

GARNETT
Apologies, Boar-Mother. We do not wish to tell you how to dispense your justice. To be certain this is the person we seek, with your permission, could we speak with the prisoner? I vouchsafe that we will not harm him while he is in your custody.

CHIEF BOAR-MOTHER
(sigh) Very well. Now go. We have celebrations to prepare.

GARNETT
Brother Lotus, you've been rather silent this whole time. How are you feeling?

LOTUS
My name is Shatter, but I thank you, Miss Garnett. And you Rowan, and Despair, and Artie. All the twists and turns of fate have brought us here and I am grateful for your friendship. (beat) And as for you, Owlbear: Some day, we will meet at the treaty bridge and we will have many things to discuss. But until then, I will remain here, where I belong.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
But, we were waiting for you to come back. You were due to take your ordination vows.

LOTUS
Please send my regards to Sibling Ascendant Wren. My future is uncertain, because today I learned how deeply Sunnyvale has lied to me over the years. I have a lot to remember; I have a lot to learn, and I have a LOT to think about. Farewell, Owlbear.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Farewell, Brother Lotus.

LOTUS
I said: My name is Shatter.

[acoustic pause]

[SFX: Cave, plus several pairs of footsteps.]

ROWAN
Damn, G. That was some impressive sweet-talking back there.

ARTIE
Where did you learn to talk so fancy?

GARNETT
Thank you. And you know, I haven't thought about all those rules in years, but it came bubbling up out of my memory when I needed it. I suppose that finishing school paid off after all.

ROWAN
Wait, what? My wife? Finishing school?

DESPAIR
What's a finishing school?

ROWAN
It's where the children of rich people learn stuff like the right way to address a tribal chieftain or which fork to use when stabbing a duke.

ARTIE
I feel like any of them would work…

GARNETT
Very funny, my dear. It's basically a crash course in all the rules that no one talks about but everyone judges you by.

DESPAIR
Oh, can I sign up?

ARTIE
Ugh. Rowan, what the hell, man?

ROWAN
What now?

ARTIE
That smell from before? It's back and it had puppies.

ROWAN

You have been everywhere I have, Artie. I don’t know what to tell you.

[SFX: Footsteps stop]

SHARP TOOTH
Here is the licht-alf cell. Boar-Mother say dog-man must keep out.

ARTIE
Are you sure I can’t kill him a little bit?

ROWAN
Not today, Artie. How do we want to play this, hon?

GARNETT
Well, you tell me: is this an opportunity for you to practice developing new skills or do you want me to get it done?

ROWAN
It is literally life or death here, hon. I promise I’ll take notes for next time.

GARNETT
I’ll hold you to that, Sir Rowan. D, stay out here with Artie but pay attention to make sure the elf is being honest.

DESPAIR
Is this one of your “reading minds is rude, but we need you to do it anyways because it’s important” things?

GARNETT
(sigh) That’s about it, yeah. Alright, Sharp-Tooth. We’re ready.

[SFX: Key in lock, door opens. Footsteps. Door closes and locks.]

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
This lump of hay is mine, I’m not moving. You two sleep closer to the shit pot.

GARNETT
We’re not staying. We’re here for you.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
Do I know you?

GARNETT
Not yet. You are Loss Bowie-Thule, correct?

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
Never heard of him.

GARNETT
We were looking for a Loss Bowie-Thule who helped rob the Guild Bank at Gauntlet Station a few days ago.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
Definitely never heard of him.

GARNETT
That’s too bad. We were here to get him out of his cell.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
Perhaps I’ve heard of him. Who are you? And who’s the muscle?

GARNETT
Who we are is none of your business. We are investigating the bank robbery. A little bird told us that you were involved.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
A little bird? Have you been eating the wrong mushrooms in the forest, pussy cat?

GARNETT
(to Rowan) Wait. Not yet. (to LBIT) Little birdie’s name was Robert Marley. He said you were in charge of the bank job. Said when he arrived at your wagon, that you bolted and left your team-mates to die.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
That bastard. And what if I told you it was Marley who planned the bank job? Marley who hired me and the team?

GARNETT
Then I’d say you knew a lot for an elf who is not named Loss Bowie-thule.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
And what would happen if I am he?

GARNETT (Don Pardo, tell him what he'll get!)
Then you get a three week stay in the lovely downtown Orc Prison in scenic Gauntlet Valley!

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
Excuse me? Three weeks of stale air, foul water, and disgusting food?

GARNETT
Our option gets you three weeks to plan your escape. The other option is a rather painful execution tomorrow night at sunset.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
You really need to work on your negotiation skills.

GARNETT
I don't know, opening with "Help us or die" seems so blunt, don't you think?

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
Isn't that more your muscle's job?

ROWAN
I don't do blunt. I do sharp.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
Ni-care-came-sinamuk. You are a Paladin, yes? I have heard of your kind and your truth-telling oaths. You tell me: am I safe in accepting this offer?

ROWAN
It is true that your testimony can prove Marley is guilty, yes.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
That didn't answer my question, meat shield. Will you guarantee my safety if I agree to testify against him?

ROWAN
We will not harm you if you testify. After that, you're on you own.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
Swear it.

ROWAN
By scourge and flame, by blade and blood, I swear.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
Fine. I take you at your word, Paladin. They took most of my things when they brought me here. Look for a book, bound in green leather. There are some papers in there that Marley gave me before the robbery.

GARNETT
Excellent. Thank you, Loss Bowie-Thule.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
(correcting) Las. Bo. I-Thul. You really need to work on your accent.

GARNETT
The Great Owl of Translation stopped teaching your language after your people bailed on this part of the world.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)
No matter. But remember, Paladin: I do this because you swore I would be safe.

ROWAN
Oh you're incredibly safe. There are all sorts of doors, locks, and people with sharp things between you and the fresh air. Enjoy your stay. I'll see if they can put a mint on your straw mat before lights out.

GARNETT
Sharp-Tooth! We're done in here.

[SFX: Key in lock, door opens. Footsteps. Door closes and locks. Footsteps begin.]

ARTIE
Oh yeah, it's him. I'll never forget that scent for the rest of my life.

GARNETT
D, what's your read on him? D? Are you alright?

DESPAIR (in pain)
Mostly? He knows how to shield against mind reading. Feels like I ate a shave ice too fast.

GARNETT
It’ll pass. I’m sure there’s something hot waiting for us at that celebration feast.

DESPAIR
Yeah, meat with extra meat-y sauce. No, thank you.

ARTIE
Oooh! More for me!

DESPAIR
But wait: why didn’t you zap him with Lawson’s truth enchantment?

ROWAN
Would it were that easy. Pureblood elves are immune to some enchantments, like truth-telling and sleep spells.

GARNETT
Not to mention a heroic resistance to alcohol. Elves can drink even more than Ro can.

DESPAIR
More than Lawson? Oh wow, that’s a lot!

ROWAN
Hey now. Meanwhile, we have to figure out how we’re going to convince the Boar-Mother to extend his death sentence by… you said three weeks? And why exactly did you pick that time?

GARNETT
Because we still have to figure out the rest of how this happened. And don’t listen, Artie: If we can’t figure it out in three weeks, we’re dead anyway. I figure we could sweet talk the Chief – the one who said “I can’t possibly repay you” – into postponing his execution. We don’t need him alive forever, only long enough to testify.

ROWAN
Hold on, how did you know that wouldn’t trigger the thing with the stabby in the brane?

GARNETT
Lead paint works both ways. But we have one other thing going for us, Mister Tall, Bald, and Imperceptive.

ROWAN (sigh)
What did I miss?

GARNETT
Black chain? Ornate disc the size of a human hand with teeth on the front? Loss Bowie-Thule is wearing the bank key around his neck.

[acoustic pause – possibly mixed with a rewind sound]

[SFX: drums in the deep]
[SFX: sword pulled from a scabbard.]

RONNIE gasps in surprise as the blade is held to her throat.

SHARP-TOOTH
Feel the steel on your throat and know: what you see here, you must never speak of to anyone. Do you understand?

RONNIE
Yes.

[END CREDITS]