A Paladin's Bargain

Season Two – Episode Three
Chapter Nine: Choose the Right

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	
Stella	X		
K'Thol the Defiler	X		
Tariqa Severina		X	
Theophany Brewer		X	
Fabulous Faltermeyer Jr.		X	
Primrose Milton			X

Part One

[SFX: outdoors, forest, day]

ARTIE (as Artie for this scene)
Gah! Slow down, Stella!

STELLA
Shake your tail feathers, doggie whiskers bottom thing.

SHART
We don’t have the luxury of traveling as the crow flies.

STELLA
I heard that.

RONNIE
Miss Garnett? I keep thinking about what you said last night about how all the signs in the forest tell a story about what’s happening. Thank you for that.

GARNETT
You’re welcome, kiddo. That’s a really good take away. What story is going on in front of us now?

RONNIE
Umm, it looks like a wall of trees. I can tell the cliffs are close, but there’s still a gap there.

GARNETT
It does look that way.

ARTIE (sniffs)
Is anyone going to mention that blood trail?

RONNIE
What?

ARTIE
Over there, to the left of that big maple tree. That smells and (tasting noises, spitting noises) yup! Something had boar for dinner about three or four days ago. If you get close to the ground and squint, you can see they dragged the carcass… through that gap. Back to you, Ranger Ronnie!

RONNIE
Thank you! Y'all are being so kind to me. Most of the people who come to the station either treat me like an information booth or try to get in my pants. THAT's why I'm so good with a short sword.

ARTIE
Well, as a wise woman once said, "You have to water the flowers you want to see in the world."

RONNIE
That sounds… Hey! Look at that!

GARNETT
Ronnie, stop!

RONNIE
What's wrong?

GARNETT
You tell me. What do you see?

RONNIE
It's a gold coin. No, two! Oooh! Three!

GARNETT
Hey, Ro? D?

ROWAN
Yeah, hon?

GARNETT
Shiny bits, starting about twenty paces up, to the right. Headache, no headache?

ROWAN
No headache, only a touch of existential dread.

GARNETT
So, business as usual. Despair? Same spot. Aetherial glow?

DESPAIR
None.

GARNETT
Thank you. So, back to the suspiciously obvious piece of treasure laying about in the middle of a forest. Why do you think it's here?

RONNIE
Because it's a trap, isn't it?

GARNETT
It could be. I mean, rule number two of adventuring says: If it looks too good to be true, be ready to fight.

RONNIE
What's rule number one?

GARNETT (solemnly)
Never pick up a duck in a dungeon. (laughs)

RONNIE
WHAT?

ROWAN
(to Ronnie) Don't ask. (to Garnett) And you said you would never bring that up again.

GARNETT
The real first rule is everyone comes home alive. Gold coins don't just spring up out of the ground, you know?

ROWAN
And I would rather be asked to sense evil a hundred times and be wrong than have to heal someone once.

GARNETT
And D's ability to see magical auras definitely comes in handy when we're trying to (determine if it's too good to be true.)

SHART (from a distance)
Folks, I think we're here.

[SFX: Bird noises]

STELLA
Hey! Mostly hairy, mostly bipeds. We are at the nexus.

ROWAN
Let’s take a look. Oh gods above, why? Why is it always a cave?

GARNETT
I have to say, it lacks the aesthetic intimidation of the Outpost. This one seems to say… (trails off).

SHART
“Abandon all hope, ye who enter here”?

GARNETT
Pretty much.

ARTIE
(sniffs) I recognize that smell. So Ronnie, next lesson: the “whatever” in that cave has now been upgraded to a “whoever.” And whoever is in that cave likes their boar meat cooked.

SHART
So, either they don’t care about treasure or… (trails off)

RONNIE
Or they’re leaving the coins out as a lure.

[SFX: Rustling around in a backpack]

ROWAN
Shart, I’m guessing your night vision scroll was a one time shot, so let me… Aha! One hooded lantern plus flint.

[SFX: tick, tick, tick FOOMPH]

ROWAN
Alright. Ronnie, you’re behind me.

RONNIE
Will do! Ooh! I thought of something to help!

ROWAN
Whatever it is, do it quietly, please. G, would you care to start the paranoia parade?

GARNETT
On it. I can’t hear anything. Artie? Your magic nose sense anything?

ARTIE
Nothing pleasant, that’s for sure. Trip wires?

GARNETT
Nothing.

SHART
Farward, nice and gently now.

[SFX: transition to cave ambiance]

SHART (quietly)
Alright. First fark in the path. Left or right?

ROWAN (quietly)
Right. Always right.

SHART (quietly)
I’m sure your wife loves that. I thought being retired might dim that paladin’s perpetually optimistic outlook.

ROWAN (quietly)
This isn’t optimism, it’s a stubborn refusal to die stupidly. If we always turn right at every junction, sooner or later, we can find our way through.

SHART (quietly)
When we get back to the station, remind me to tell ya about a dwarf named Emcee Escher. Next fark.

ROWAN (quietly)
Always right.

RONNIE (quietly)
Where did you learn how to explore this way, Sir Rowan?

ROWAN (quietly)
One of the last years of boot camp, we had a whole series of courses on dungeon crawling.

RONNIE (quietly)
That was a good thing, I guess.

ROWAN (quietly)
Eh. More glad we had learned basic healing before that. I've got a whole series of scars on (my back from the time…)

SHART (quietly)
Next intersection, we go right. We should be crossing our own tracks.

DESPAIR (quietly)
Um, Lawson? I hate to interrupt. I've got a really weird feeling about this place.

ROWAN (quietly)
Well, you talked last night about "as above, so below." Could this be "as without, so within?"

DESPAIR (quietly)
Make the tunnel stop spinning first, please? I'm not sure what's happening. It feels like…

ARTIE (quietly)
Hold on. This level of confusion and misdirection, inside and out? And now a bunch of passages going in circles? I've heard this story before. It's almost like we're in a…

[SFX: Minotaur roars]

ARTIE
Minotaur's lair.

GARNETT
Sweet mercy grace. RUN!

[acoustic pause]

[SFX: Combat music, running sounds, in a cave. I love you, Jon.]
NOTE: The expectation is that everyone is breathing heavily. You are running for your lives.]

GARNETT
Keep moving! He's gaining on us!

ARTIE
Another branch coming up!

ROWAN
Right! Always right! Hurry up, Ronnie!

RONNIE
Please don’t lose me!

DESPAIR
Keep holding my hand. We’ll get through this.
(starts saying something in Infernal)

RONNIE
I can’t understand you. What are you saying?

[SFX: Drums from the combat music twist and slow down into a heartbeat which throbs during her interaction with K’thol.]

DESPAIR (You can hear some slight infernal to start but turns into:)
Oh great K'Thol. Mighty is your terror. I humbly beg for your help.

[SFX: Big, heavy bell]

K’THOL (super distorted demon voice)
Little girl lost. What do you desire?

DESPAIR
I desire to live, thank you very much. But for right now, I need to slow down this beast. I offer the beast’s blood in sacrifice.

[SFX: Big, heavy bell]

K’THOL (taunting)
You cannot promise what you do not have, Despair of a Thousand Sorrows.

DESPAIR
Fine. Then take mine for now!

[SFX: Big, heavy bell]

K’THOL (a slurp like the “fava beans a nice chianti” noise)
Granted. The smallest drop heralds the flood. All the more for my feast.

[SFX: heartbeat speeds up to combat music. Despair casts something in Infernal which you hear whiz and hit the minotaur, which roars in anger.]

GARNETT
D, keep moving!

DESPAIR
I saw the shot, I took the shot.

ROWAN
Keep your feet up, Shart. You need me to carry you?

SHART
You'll carry me when I'm dead.

ROWAN
Trying to avoid that.

SHART
Twelfth right turn in a row! We're running in circles!

ROWAN
We get through this, you can say you told me so. Not until then.

SHART
You think if we stop fast and turn, we could surprise him?

ROWAN
Those horns will skewer you!

SHART
I'm too low to the ground far… Aha! I got it! Rowan, whatever you do: keep running!

ROWAN
What did you…

SHART
Dwarf bowling!

[SFX: loud crash of heavy metal hitting the ground, with an "oof" from Shart.]

DESPAIR
Shart!

ROWAN
Don’t stop!

[SFX: another crash of metal]

ROWAN
Hey! Ugly! This way!

[SFX: Roar from the minotaur]

ROWAN
Keep running! Our tank bought us some time.

ARTIE
Something’s wrong. Our stories say minotaurs run faster than this.

GARNETT
You think he’s playing with his food?

ARTIE
I don’t know. It’s almost like he’s…

GARNETT
Ledge! Dex check! Dive! Dive!

[SFX: several crashes of bodies diving and impact reactions from the team]

[SFX: Short roar followed by the sound of skidding on dirt and imbalanced noises from the minotaur]

GARNETT
He’s at the edge! D! Blast him!

DESPAIR
[Spellcasting: Eldritch blast]

[SFX: After the impact, you hear a plaintive cry as the minotaur gets hit and falls over the ledge. No, we can’t do a Wilhelm scream, but it calls for a good “AAAAAAAaaaaaaaaa” and a splat.]

RONNIE (winded)
We… almost… He… Wow, that's a deep chasm.

GARNETT (winded)
Yeah, he's not coming back from that one. But that explains why he kept chasing us rather than catching us.

ARTIE (winded)
Running us off the cliff? That's how we hunt aurochs back home. They say that minotaurs are not smart but that was very smart.

SHART (winded)
It's almost as if he expected us to keep turning right.

ROWAN (winded)
I know. I know. You can say it.

SHART
Let's not rush things. We can allow that "I told ya so" to hang in the air like the scent of the first spring flars. Or, ya know, ya could say those three little words that yar wife loves to hear.

ROWAN
(sigh) You were right.

SHART
That's the spirit!

DESPAIR
Ooh! I can feel my head starting to clear! Did anyone else notice that big shiny necklace the minotaur was wearing?

RONNIE
I was too busy running for my life!

DESPAIR
From what I could see, those gems looked like star rubies and dragon's eyes. Could you imagine? Those amplify and project energy. That's probably what was powering the confusion curse! I wonder if there's a way down there, maybe? That necklace would be really fun to experiment with!

ROWAN
Yes, I brought my fifty feet of rope. No, I'm not dangling you down the side of a cliff so you can go jewelry shopping.

DESPAIR
But you could… It’s so shiny!

ROWAN
I suppose the good news is that to find our way out, all we have to do is retrace our… Hold on. Those are clearly our footprints, but that wasn’t a right turn we made.

[NOTE: for the next bit until “Hey”, have all the lines blur over each other. The info isn’t as important as ignoring Ronnie.]

GARNETT
Do you think the curse messed with us that much?

ROWAN
How many turns were there? Eighteen? Nineteen?

RONNIE
Umm, Sir Rowan? Miss Garnet?

SHART
Twenty-three.

ARTIE
Oh great, now we ARE lost!

ROWAN
Wait. There was a protocol for situations like this.

ARTIE
I’m sorry, there’s A PROTOCOL? How many people had to die in mazes for your order to write a protocol?

SHART
Beory wept.

RONNIE
Master Smithwick?

ARTIE
I suppose I can try to smell our way out of this but…

RONNIE
Artie?

DESPAIR
HEY! (beat pause while everyone shuts up) Ronnie, what were you trying to say?

RONNIE
So, the day before yesterday, I was working with Mr. and Mr. Taylor in their sewing shop.

ROWAN
Alright, and?

RONNIE
And on top of paying me, they let me buy this spool of thread for really cheap. I had been planning to try to repair some of the stuff at my house, but then this happened.

SHART (boggled)
Ya played out the thread behind ya this whole time?

RONNIE (sheepishly)
Yes? I mean, mostly. It ran out right before we got to the… Oh! There's the end of it!

DESPAIR
Ronnie, you're brilliant! Oh! Big squeeze!

[SFX: Ronnie makes choking noises and everyone laughs]

GARNETT
That was some very clear thinking, Ronnie.

ROWAN
You saved our skins, kid. Well done and thank you. We can follow that out and get home.

SHART
Provided the beastie wasn't winding it back up behind us.

ARTIE
Bang up job, Ronnie. But aren't we forgetting something?

GARNETT
You want to join Despair climbing down to loot the body?

ARTIE
Yes but no but I could smell his dinner cooking from the mouth of the cave, remember? Without the confusion curse, I'll bet I could follow my nose to find his lair. If he had enough gold to leave it scattered around like bait, maybe see what else he has laying around.

SHART
I like how ya think, Artie.

[commercial break]

ANNOUNCER
And now a word from our sponsor: Mama Bolg’s Orcish Delights

MAMA BOLG (Imagine a very angry Orcish Earl Schreib)

I’m Mama Bolg, and I’m having a Fire Sale at Mama Bolg’s Orcish Delights! Yes, that’s right! It’s all your Orcish home cooked favorites, but now on fire!

Rat… Flambe!
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Flaming Squirrel Nuggets… just like mom used to make!

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Open noon to midnight, seven days a week at 451 Paper Street.

Disclaimer voice: Healer General’s Warning: Extinguish flames before consuming.

ANNOUNCER
And now we return to: A Paladin’s Bargain.

Part Two

[SFX: Tavern noises with music, like episode zero, plus a poor singer]

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Ah, Master Smithwick, you are correct. Adventuring does make one rather hungry.

SHART
Something about running for yar life that makes ya want to slow down and savor things.

ROWAN
Ahhh. Indeed. I think it's time for another round. All in?

ALL
(agreement)

ROWAN
Hey there! Captain Severina! Over here! Join us for a round?

TARIQA SEVERINA
Thank you, but I'm still on duty, so not now. I'm glad to see you all made it back alright. I was hoping to find you. Sir Rowan, I need to speak with you for a moment, please.

ROWAN
Of course (standing up) I'll be back.

RONNIE
Miss Garnett, I'm going to pass on another drink, thank you. I feel weird if I drink too much ginger beer. And I've got to get home to my mom.

SHART
What? Ya're Martha's kid, aren't ya? Can't she take care of herself?

GARNETT (interrupting)
That's fine, Ronnie. You head home. You have some place safe to stash your split?

RONNIE
Yes, I'll be fine. Thank you.

ARTIE
And don’t forget to get your shield back tomorrow.

RONNIE
I will, I promise. Goodnight, everyone!

ALL
Goodnight!

RONNIE
Goodnight, Despair.

DESPAIR (no direction, play it how you want to, CJ)
Goodnight, Ronnie.

GARNETT
I’ll take care of the round. That singer sounds like someone’s strangling my cousin.

[SFX: music gets quieter]

THEOPHANY BREWER
Ah, hello Mistress Garnett! Sounds like you all are having quite the celebration!

GARNETT
We are, thank you. Another round: Two beers, one red, a mug of tea, (whispers) and a root beer, please.

[SFX: The music stops, tepid applause, and restarts without the singer]

THEOPHANY BREWER (extra loud)
Another extra stout beer for the Dwarf?!?! Where does he put it all? He’s going to drink me dry!

GARNETT
No, no, Goody Brewer. He wants a…

THEOPHANY BREWER (quiet)
I know Sheridan doesn’t drink anymore. He likes it when I help keep up appearances.

GARNETT
I’m not sure what to think about that.

THEOPHANY BREWER
Eh, that man’s always been a mystery. (beat) Heads up, kitten. Coming in fast behind you.

GARNETT
Sweet mercy grace.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR (smarmy and attempted charm)
Hi there!

GARNETT
No.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR (unphased)
I couldn’t help but notice…

GARNETT
Not interested.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
All that eye contact during my set?

GARNETT
Prey drive.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR (still going hard)
Was your daddy a thief?

GARNETT
No, but I am.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
Because you’ve stolen my heart.

GARNETT
I’m going to steal your kidneys unless you leave me alone.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
But couldn’t we just…

[SFX: A very pronounced “snickt” of one claw going up under his chin. Faltermeyer yelps in fear. Music stops and the bar quiets for a moment.]

GARNETT (slow and succinct)
That’s one. I have nine more. Do I have your attention now? (beat) Say yes.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR (terrified)
Yes, miss.

ROWAN (from a distance)
You alright, G?

GARNETT
(calling out to Rowan) I’m good, baby.

[SFX: Music restarts]

GARNETT
(to Bard) I don’t care how big of a Charisma bonus you’re packing. No means no. Do you understand?

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
Yes, miss.

GARNETT
I am going to go over there to enjoy my drink. If you bother me or my companions tonight, you will be able to use your codpiece for a colander. Do you understand?

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
Yes, miss.

[SFX: snickt and Faltermeyer exhales in relief]

GARNETT
Say good bye and walk away.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
Good bye and walk away.

THEOPHANY BREWER (walking up)
Well played, dearie. Thank you for giving my mop a rest.

GARNETT
Not my first bard on the prowl.

THEOPHANY BREWER
They say there’s a time and a place to try everything, and that’s called Bard College.

(both laugh)

THEOPHANY BREWER
So, two beers, one red, a mug of tea, and Sheridan’s special, that’s one silver and seven, please.

GARNETT
Thank you, here’s (pause, click) Oh, you DOG!

[SFX: screech/growl followed by G tackling Faltermeyer. Music stops]

ROWAN (from a distance)
You sure you're alright?

GARNETT (calling out to Rowan)
Purr-fectly

[SFX: music restarts]

GARNETT (quiet, barely constrained anger)
My coin-purse, please.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
(sigh) Pocket’s on the back side of my doublet, lower left.

GARNETT
The good news is: that was slick, I’ll let you live.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
The bad news?

GARNETT
I told you I was a thief, but you were too busy chasing my tail. The Guild and The College have some remarkably specific rules about professional courtesy.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
(big gulp) What are you going to do?

GARNETT
What I'm going to do is hand you over to this strapping young member of the town guard. But what I'd like to do? Pfft. You're not worth going back to prison.

[SFX: Audience cheers]

[acoustic pause – possibly mixed with a rewind sound]

[NOTE: For this section, lines in italics are the exact same as earlier.]

TARIQA SEVERINA
I was hoping to find you. Sir Rowan, I need to speak with you for a moment, please.

ROWAN
Of course (standing up) I'll be back. (beat) What's going on, Captain?

TARIQA SEVERINA
I wanted to thank you for bringing Marley's cloak back to me. That means a lot.

ROWAN
You're welcome. Battlefield promotions are never easy. I figured maybe it would help the troops too. "When in doubt, follow the red cloak."

TARIQA SEVERINA
Good point. One problem, though. When I put it on, I found some papers hidden in one of the inside pockets.

ROWAN
It wouldn't be a signed confession saying, "This is how I did it"?

TARIQA SEVERINA
I admit, I'm also very curious about how he pulled off the bank job, but no. But what WAS in there creates a whole new set of questions. Take a look.

ROWAN
(loud) Gods above that's (catches himself) That looks like pages from Domina Thalestris' holy book.

TARIQA SEVERINA
And if he had them… I'm not saying Marley did it, but the timing means those pages were ripped out before the bank job yesterday.

ROWAN
What did the Domina say when you told her?

TARIQA SEVERINA
I haven't. And until I get more answers, this is evidence in an active investigation.

ROWAN (Like the end of Casablanca)
Why Captain Severina, I'm remarkably happy you feel that way.

TARIQA SEVERINA
Please, call me Tariqa.

ROWAN
Tariqa, would you be alright with me calling in an expert on this?

TARIQA SEVERINA
The Tiefling? Delirium? Destruction?

ROWAN
Despair. But yeah. She's rather proficient on arcane stuff like this, even if she does randomly freak me out occasionally.

TARIQA SEVERINA
Go ahead. I could tell she wasn't from around here. Is she even from this planet?

ROWAN
That is an excellent question. And heads up: when she says, "aetherial glow" do what we do: smile and nod.

[SFX: Music stops and the bar quiets for a moment.]

ROWAN (up close)
You alright, G?

GARNETT (from a distance)
I'm good, baby.

[SFX: Music restarts]

ROWAN
Hey, Despair? Can you come over here, please? (to Tariqa) So, what happened with those missing guards from this morning? Bottle flu?

TARIQA SEVERINA
I wish I knew. They're missing with a capital M. No sign of them anywhere in the station since yesterday morning.

ROWAN
How in the world could they disappear like that?

DESPAIR
What's wrong, Lawson?

ROWAN
Nothing's wrong. I'd like you to look at a few things for the Captain, please. Look very carefully and tell us what you see.

DESPAIR
No pressure, right?

TARIQA SEVERINA
None.

DESPAIR
Alright, well. (beat) Is this a joke? It's blank?

ROWAN
We know that much, smarty. Dig deeper, please?

DESPAIR
It's parch… no, it's vellum. Yes, vellum.

ROWAN
And what does that mean to you?

DESPAIR
That means it's classy. A sheet this big is pretty rare. Back home, most of the quality makers work for the guild houses, serving wizards and sorcerers and… other kinds of magic users.

[SFX: screech/growl as G tackles Faltermeyer, music stops]

ROWAN (calling out)
You sure you're alright?

GARNETT (from a distance)
Purr-fectly

[SFX: music restarts]

TARIQA SEVERINA
(calling out) Fletcher! Escort the bard to a holding cell, please. Yes, I know you were off duty. I promise your beer will be there when you get back. Hop to it!

ROWAN
What about a church or monastery?

DESPAIR
Maybe? A whole vellum book like this would cost a lot of money.

TARIQA SEVERINA
So much that the church could afford to keep it in box made of solid gold?

ROWAN
Keep it in a gold box and have the thieves take the paper and not the box.

DESPAIR
But the weird part is… It has an aetherial glow? But the page is blank? There shouldn’t be anything at all.

ROWAN
Perfect. Thank you. So, next question: what about this page?

DESPAIR (you have just been handed a Ferrari)
Oh! Oh, oh, OH! Oh, WOW.

TARIQA SEVERINA
Wow?

DESPAIR (Wonder ADD niche love: ENGAGE)
It’s the same vellum, but oooh! The silver leafing on the border? That’s… oh, that’s lazuli ink for the text! See the gold flecks? Oh. And that diagram is (sniffs) Beelzebub’s boxer shorts, that’s dragon blood ink.

TARIQA SEVERINA
I thought dragon’s blood was a fancy name for a fancy incense?

DESPAIR
Nonono. This is Dragon’s. Blood. Ink.

ROWAN
Tender mercies. (beat) So, any chance you can read any of the text? Another language elective?

DESPAIR
I’ve never seen anything like it.

ROWAN
And to be certain: aetherial glow?

DESPAIR
Duh, lots! But Captain Severina, where in the worlds did you find this? There are people who would kill to get their hands on this.

TARIQA SEVERINA
I think they already did. I took both pages out of Marley’s cloak.

DESPAIR
Marley? Lawson said Marley was an Eldritch Knight. No way this was his.

ROWAN
That’s where things get complicated.

[commercial break]

ANNOUNCER
And now a word from our sponsor: Bard *Community* College

THE VOICE OF BARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE
National Bard Community College is proud to present a continuing education seminar for all practicing bards in the Deepwater metropolitan area.

Fresh off his “Iron Eunuch” tour, Dr. Gerald “Funkmaster” Clinton, PhD, will be presenting his research entitled, “Nobody Wins: Bagpipes versus Accordions in Open Combat.”

Followed by a recital of his recent hit, “Turn Undead.”

[SFX: riff from Electric Funeral.]

The evening of the Full Salmon Moon.
Doors and cash bar open at 6, presentation begins at 7.
1234 Greensleeves Court, Beowulf Auditorium Annex.

Your future is in your hands.
They said you couldn’t do it,
Now it’s time to prove them wrong!

[SFX: BCC signature power chord]

ANNOUNCER
And now we return to: A Paladin’s Bargain.

Part Three

[SFX: very quiet music in the distance, feet on wood forward]

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Alright, Rowan. One foot in front of the other.

ROWAN (sloshed)
I'm fine.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Yeah, you're fine and I'm the prince of all Praetorium.

ROWAN (sloshed)
If you're the prince, where's your shiny hat?

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
I sold it to pay your bar tab.

ROWAN (sloshed)
After today? We found so much…

GARNETT
(Shushing noises) Let's not advertise, shall we? Is there anything else we need to do tonight before going to sleep?

ROWAN
Lay down. I never did get that nap you promised me.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Might I suggest a Greater Restoration spell?

GARNETT
Tomorrow can be a rest day, alright? We don't have to do anything until we go ransom the Guildmaster tomorrow evening.

DESPAIR
Let me get the door for you.

[SFX: Key in a lock, door opens, shuffle, closes]

Ummm… Miss Garnett?

GARNETT
What's… (sees it) Well, that's never a good sign.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
What's going on?

GARNETT
While we were downstairs, someone slid a letter under our door.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Are you going to let it sit there?

GARNETT
Same drill as before. Ro? D?

DESPAIR
No glow and no explosive runes. Probably isn't trapped.

ROWAN
I got nothing, love.

GARNETT
Thanks?

[SFX: paper tearing and unfolding]

GARNETT
"To Sir Rowan and company. We know what you are looking for. You will find the answers you seek within the Boar Forest." It gives some directions and says "The Hermit will guide you to your ultimate destination." They even drew a map on the back.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
So, another trip to the forest tomorrow?

GARNETT
Looks like.

ROWAN
Oh gods, no, please? You promised me some sleep not five minutes ago.

GARNETT
Hold on. This doesn't add up.

[SFX: knock on the door]

ROWAN
Who in the seven hells is that?

DESPAIR
Ni-ine, Lawson.

ROWAN
Seven hells, ni-ine hells, or seventy-two demons dancing on Beelzebub’s backside. Nobody knocks this late with good news.

GARNETT
(calling out) Just a moment! (quietly) Artie: grab your club and get behind that door. D, get across the room so you have a clear shot. Something goes wrong, I’ll jump that way, away from Artie. You blast at leg level. Got it?

ROWAN
And me?

GARNETT (quietly)
Save projectile vomiting for round two, please.

[SFX: door squeaks open]

GARNETT
Hello?

PRIMROSE
Are you the adventurers who dealt with the guild bank robbers last night?

GARNETT
That’s us.

PRIMROSE
I need to speak with you, please. My husband’s life is in danger.

GARNETT
And you are a hooded stranger standing at our door at midnight.

PRIMROSE
My name is Rose Milton.

GARNETT
Oh! Yes. Come in, please.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
What are you doing? Who is this?

[SFX: Door closes]

GARNETT
I wish it were under different circumstances, but pleased to meet you. I'm Garnett. This is Sir Rowan, Despair, and our esteemed employer, Regulus Tiberius. This is the wife of the Guildmaster.

DESPAIR
Oh, the… (guy who we're supposed to ransom tomorrow?)

GARNETT (interrupting)
Please, have a seat. How can we help you, Goody Milton?

PRIMROSE
Please, call me Rose. As you said, my husband is the Guildmaster here. Last week, he went to Hightower for business. This morning, I woke up to find this under my door.

ROWAN
Does this station have some invisible midnight postal service that I'm not aware of?

GARNETT
Hush now, (emphasizing) Sir Rowan. May we see the letter, please?

PRIMROSE
Certainly. Here.

[SFX: Paper being removed from an envelope.]

GARNETT (reading)
My dearest Primrose. I have been kidnapped! The goblins grabbed us on the Forest road. I need your help, my sweet darling. In the room that was going to be our nursery, lift the rug beneath my desk chair. One panel looks different from the others. Under, there is a small bag. Oh, my dear Primrose, please bring that bag to the milepost sign on the Forest road, near the bridge. Bring it on All-Father's night at sunset, and come alone! But please, please, do not tell anyone, especially those fools at the guild. Your loving husband.

DESPAIR
That’s a remarkably strange letter.

PRIMROSE
It’s bullshit.

GARNETT
Excuse me?

PRIMROSE
Yes, it sounds sweet and desperate; and it is completely unlike the man I’ve been married to for five years. The man I know is more interested in his work and his gold and his secretary.

ROWAN
Do you think this was some sort of a coded message? Telling you he’s under dur… Dur… That he’s in trouble?

PRIMROSE
He’s saying out loud that he’s in trouble. And yet, he can never bother remembering that I prefer Rose, not Primrose. And for us to turn his office into a nursery would require us being awake and in the same room for a round or two.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Well, more than a…

PRIMROSE (interrupting, dead pan and disappointed)
He’s a one-shot encounter in more ways than one. Trust me.

GARNETT
So, that’s a very suspicious letter with some unsettling backstory. What’s the rest of the story?

[SFX: A very large bag of coins. I’m thinking heavy chain in a sack.]

PRIMROSE
This is what was hiding under the floorboards.

ROWAN
That is not a small bag.

PRIMROSE
There are over a thousand platinum stars in that bag. I counted. Twice.

GARNETT
I’m guessing that’s more than your husband’s take-home pay.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Oh, he took it home alright.

DESPAIR
So, where do we come in? The letter said to go alone.

PRIMROSE
And if you believe that, it’s a miracle you’ve survived in this valley for so long.

DESPAIR
We arrived yesterday?

PRIMROSE
My point exactly.

GARNETT
We understand, Rose. Were you wanting us to deliver the ransom or are you looking for an escort there and back again?

PRIMROSE
Escort, please. I don’t know what he’s up to, but I’d like some friends so I’m not alone in the woods, carrying a very large amount of money. I can pay you. I mean, he obviously has enough.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
If you don’t mind my asking, if he isn’t that great of a partner, why would you be willing to risk your life for him?

PRIMROSE
Is this an alignment check? He’s my husband. We swore an oath at Temple Pass, “till death do us part.” I intend to keep it.

GARNETT
Yes, we’ll do the job. Do you have any obligations tomorrow during the day?

PRIMROSE
Nothing.

GARNETT
Great. Rest up. We will pick you up about two hours after noon.

PRIMROSE
After noon? The instructions said sunset. The crossroads aren't more than an hour's walk along the Forest Road.

GARNETT
There's more going on than what's in that letter and it's making my hair stand on end. Bring a snack and something to pass the time.

PRIMROSE
I'll be ready. And thank you.

GARNETT
Thank you for trusting us. We're happy to help.

DESPAIR
Uh, Miss Rose? Don't forget your big sack of money.

PRIMROSE
I left the platinum at home. Leaving the bag on the table was a test to see if I could trust you. You passed. Good night.

[SFX: Door opens and closes]

ARTIE (as Artie)
Alright, can someone please explain to me what in the world happened?

GARNETT
First things first: D?

DESPAIR
She's fairly well guarded, so I couldn't tell much. But she's telling the truth.

GARNETT
That matches my read on her, yes. That's the good news.

ARTIE
And there's bad news?

GARNETT
Her husband sounds like ten pounds of offal in a five pound sack. And yet, we have now been hired to ransom this outstanding individual twice, with each person sworn to secrecy from the other. Something is going on at that crossroads.

DESPAIR
What do you think about it, Lawson? Lawson?

[SFX: snoring]

GARNETT
Sweet mercy grace, what a way to impress our new client.

ARTIE
He’s been exhausted all day. I’m surprised he didn’t fall into his tankard at dinner.

GARNETT
Let’s all get some rest. Tomorrow morning, we check out the clue from our mystery letter. Hermits aren’t big on conversation so it shouldn’t take long. After that, we pick up Rose and head out to pay the ransom for this walking hairball of a person.

ARTIE
Now now, Miss Garnett, that’s not nice. Hairballs are magically useful; this guy? Not so much.

[acoustic pause]

[SFX: Daytime, outdoor forest noises]

DESPAIR
I don’t understand.

GARNETT
Sweet mercy grace.

ROWAN
Well shit.

ARTIE (as Artie)
You… Are you sure we followed the directions right?

GARNETT
They drew us a map.

DESPAIR
And with the curse lifted, there’s no doubt about it. This is where they wanted us to be.

ARTIE
But this is the minotaur’s cave! From yesterday!

ROWAN
Yes.

ARTIE (getting worked up)
The place where we almost got skewered like shish-kabobs?

GARNETT
Yes.

ARTIE (really freaking out)
By a half-man, half-bull that was like 25 freaking hands tall! 20 stone, all muscle! (oh, the abs!) And with horns bigger than my arms can reach!

DESPAIR
Yes! Since we’re here can we loot the body now?

ROWAN
No!

ARTIE
But what does that mean?!

DESPAIR
Shiny necklace!

GARNETT (calmly)
It means that whoever sent us that note was trying to kill us.

DESPAIR
Only they didn’t know that we got here first and removed the threat. Thanks to Miss Garnett’s reflexes, Ronnie’s thread, and a side helping of gravity.

ARTIE
But! It’s!

ROWAN
Artie, is this your first time having someone want you dead? I have some pointers, if you’d like.

ARTIE
No! They DO want us dead! If we hadn’t been here yesterday, we probably WOULD be dead! “Oh excuse me, I’m looking for a hermit? Eeek! Scream! Splat!”

GARNETT
This is wonderful!

ARTIE
Girl, step away from the catnip. How is this a good thing?

GARNETT
Because whoever sent the note didn’t know that we had killed the minotaur. They now think we’re dead! And the longer we can stay away from the station, they longer they will stop trying to kill us.

ARTIE
The longer we stay away? What about the Guild job? And what about the Guildmaster’s wife? How are we supposed to escort her to the crossroads tonight?

ROWAN
D? Are you able to reach Shart from this distance?

DESPAIR
I can reach anywhere in the valley, except for inside that lead-lined outpost. What do you need me to tell him?

ROWAN
Nothing yet. We have some plans to make and some time to kill. Think any of that roast boar is still good? A little lunch?

ARTIE
Well, from what I hear, you’ll eat anything on a stick.

[END CREDITS]