

## Episode 6: This One Time at Bandit Camp

ANNOUNCER

And now, episode six: This One Time at Bandit Camp.

(scene shift)

ROGUE #4 (Daffyd)

It's dangerous out there, Charlie. Want me to come with you?

ROGUE #3 (Charlie)

I didn't need to know that you like being pissed on, Daffyd.

ROGUE #4 (Daffyd)

Anything for you, sweetness.

ROGUE #3 (Charlie)

Sit your ass down and don't you dare follow me. I swear, I'll break your leg like I broke Gray's.

ALL ROGUES react

(scene shift)

DESPAIR (telepathically)

She's walking straight toward you, Miss Garnett. Can you climb?

GARNETT (telepathically)

I'm good, I'm not that good. (beat) Can you see the horses?

DESPAIR (telepathically)

There are seven on a tree line and four still hitched to the wagon. Which ones?

GARNETT (telepathically)

Doesn't matter. Tell me when she's almost to my tree, then talk to the horses. Make them laugh or something.

DESPAIR (telepathically)

How do I make a horse laugh?

GARNETT (telepathically)

I don't know, say "HAY!"

DESPAIR (telepathically)

Alright, she's coming. Three... two... now!

SFX: The horses all whiny loudly.

ROGUE #3 (Charlie)  
Hey!

GARNETT  
Yes. That's it. It's all over now. Just relax. You're sleepy now. Close your eyes. Yes. Yes. Good night.

GARNETT (telepathically)  
Thank you, D. I owe you one.

(scene shift)

ROGUE #5 (Eddie)  
Hey there, Captain. When we gonna split the money?

ALL ROGUES murmur in agreement.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)  
Yes. We have done our share of risk. Now is time for our share of reward.

(scene shift)

SHART  
Saint Cuthbert's hangnail, what are they doing?

ROWAN  
Looks like Marley is pulling something out of his tent.

SHART)  
What sort of something?

ROWAN  
He's got a little dark wooden barrel. Fits under his arm, not too heavy.

SHART  
Copper fixtures on the barrel and a green mark on the front?

ROWAN  
How'd you know?

SHART  
That's a sextel keg. That's what Theophany Brewer puts the good stuff in!

(scene shift)

ROBERT MARLEY

All right, all right. Shut up, all of you! Before we get to the money, I want to share something else that's near and dear to your black hearts: Whiskey!

ALL ROGUES cheer.

ROBERT MARLEY

I'll have you know: This is not Theophany Brewer's best. This is Theophany Brewer's father's best. This barrel is twenty years old. It was a gift from my predecessor.

ROGUE #6 (Frank)

Enough with the foreplay, let's have it!

ALL ROGUES cheer.

ROGUE #4 (Daffyd)

Hey, Charlie! Hurry up! You're missing out!

(scene shift)

ROGUE #4 (Daffyd)

Charlie?

GARNETT

Here goes nothing. (impersonating Charlie) Fuck you, David! Leave me alone!

(scene shift)

ALL ROGUES laugh.

ROBERT MARLEY

Do you want this or are you candy asses going to wait for the girl to finish taking a leak?

(scene shift)

SHART

Are we going to do anything while they desecrate that lovely keg?

ROWAN

If you're planning an intervention about my battle stress, we're talking about your breathtaking alcohol knowledge next.

PIKE

What are you waiting for?

ROWAN

I don't know! I'm waiting for...

(scene shift)

ROBERT MARLEY

I offer you filthy rogues a toast!

ROWAN

Oh! Hold on! Wait for the toast to burn!

PIKE

What?

SHART

The math witch! Shut up and listen, man!

(scene shift)

ROBERT MARLEY

(Spellcasting voice) Hey friends, I want to thank you for risking your lives today. After all this, you get what you deserve and I get to retire. Drink up!

ALL ROGUES cheer with sounds of drinking.

ROBERT MARLEY

What's the matter, Laz? Does whiskey offend your delicate Elvish sensibilities?

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)

It is quaint you think something so young is unique. I have had your whiskey before. It tastes like anger and regrettable sex.

ALL ROGUES begin to sound sick, as if they've all been poisoned.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)

And in my profession, one does not reach the age of a hundred and fifty with a poor perception.

ROGUE #1 (Able)

It's. Oh my gods, it burns! It burns! It... (dies).

(scene shift)

ROWAN

Oh! He poisoned the whole group! They're... ugh, dropping like flies.

SHART

Wait, did Marley say the other one was Elvish?

ROWAN

I can't see his ears, his hair is down. But he's... small boned? Doesn't matter. Those two are going to throw down, I know it.

SHART

Sounds like a distraction to me.

ROWAN

This is it. Shart, you go that way, fifty paces. Pike, follow Shart and go fifty more. Despair, get on the other side of Garnett and tell her we're coming. But everybody: wait for my signal.

SHART

What's your signal?

ROWAN

I'm pretty sure it involves him standing over me and gloating.

(scene shift)

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)

Captain Marley, you have exceeded the terms of my contract and the bounds of my patience. I will take my shares and depart. Unless you care to renegotiate.

ROBERT MARLEY

You aren't the only one who can sense a motive, you pointy eared bastard.

SFX: They begin to fight.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)

Bastard? My parents were married two hundred years before you crawled out of the cesspool you call a station.

(scene shift)

ROWAN (talking to himself)

Alright, Captain. You can do this. Arrow's nocked and set. Sword guard's loose. The readiness is all.

(scene shift)

ROWAN (calling out)

You two! Lay down your swords and hands above your heads! You are under arrest.

ROGUE LEADER (Las Bo I-Thul)

*Ni care-came sinna muk.* Fail and die soon, Marley.

ROBERT MARLEY

Where did you go?... Oh, how dare you scare off my kill? Now who am I supposed to fight? You?

ROWAN

Robert Marley, I am Rowan, son of Lawrence. I have been deputized to arrest you on the charge of robbery at the Gauntlet Station bank. To that, I append charges of murder by poison of at least five persons, yet unnamed.

ROBERT MARLEY

Oh son, no. (Spellcasting voice) Hey friend, you're clearly confused.

ROWAN

I am.

ROBERT MARLEY

(regular voice) I am the Captain of the Guard at Gauntlet Station. I have spent all day convincing these outlaws I was on their side. Only now have I brought them to justice.

ROWAN

You did.

ROBERT MARLEY

Yes! Good thing you arrived when you did. Why don't you put down that longbow and give me a hand? Please?

ROWAN

I should help you.

ROBERT MARLEY

Yes! Come help me make sure all of these rogues are dead, eh? A little coup de grace to end the day.

PIKE

Sir! Sir!

ROBERT MARLEY

What the...? Pike? What are you doing out here?

PIKE

Yes, sir! Oh, I knew I shouldn't believe what they said about you! I said all along that you had a plan and really were trying to do the right thing!

ROBERT MARLEY

You are so right! That's what I was explaining to this poor washed up fighter. I do have a plan and I really am trying to make things better. But tell me, aside from you and him, how many more are out there in the woods?

PIKE

Three, sir!

ROBERT MARLEY

Excellent. Thank you. Well, I must say. I am truly happy you came to tell me all this, Leroy.

PIKE

It's Leonard, sir.

ROBERT MARLEY

I don't care.

ROWAN

Oi! Ugly!

ROWAN

Your Charm Person sucks. Try having some actual Charisma. Now, as I said, drop your weapon.

ROBERT MARLEY

And I said, no. Avathu!

DESPAIR (telepathically)

Lawson, are you alive? Don't speak, just think the words. Lawson? Think something!

ROWAN

Ow.

DESPAIR

Oh good. Where is he getting these spells?

ROWAN)

Eldritch. Knight. Warn. Others.

ROBERT MARLEY

For anyone listening: Leave now and live. That's it. Go home; say you found nothing. And your reward will be: you get to wake up tomorrow morning. Every other option ends up with you dead and your bodies unburned, (quieter) more grist for the mill of this godsdamned forest. As for you, Robert son of whoever, it's time for you to meet your ancestors.

SHART

That's gloating. Take this, knucklenuts.

GARNETT

Better late than never.

SFX: Despair casts something in infernal.

ROBERT MARLEY

Oh, thank you all for showing me where you are hiding.  
(Spellcasting voice) Tuha! Benti! Mentu!

SFX: Zot 1 and Shart grunts.

Zot 2 and Garnett groans.

Zot 3 and Despair screams.

ROBERT MARLEY

Be serious. Two archers and a caster with a pitifully short spell list? I can do this all night! I will grind you all...

ROWAN

With Heaven's bright hand, I smite at thee!

SHART

Round two!

GARNETT

Dodge these.



SFX: Despair casts something in infernal.

ROWAN

That's what I love about evil people. They monologue long enough and their buff wears out.

**- I N T E R M I S S I O N -**

ANNOUNCER

And now a word from our sponsor: Fuzzy Butts Warg Rescue

SFX: cue bouncy happy music

MRS WIGGLES

I'm Mrs. Wiggles from Fuzzy Butts Warg Rescue with the Warg of the Week. Wrinkles is a 10 year old Mottled Warg mare, whose owner unexpectedly passed away. This senior girl is ready for her forever home. She loves lying by the fireplace and playing with the family cat. She is allergic to rabbits and requires daily injections for chronic Warg Hip. A generous donor has supplied a box of Warg-Ex vials to her new owner!

So come down to Fuzzy Butts Warg Rescue in Silt Bottom Flats, 22 Mistwalkers Way, Friday to Tuesday from noon to 5.

Remember - the fuzzy butt you save today could be your own!

ANNOUNCER

And we now return to A Paladin's Bargain.

**- R E T U R N -**

GARNETT

You can check him again if you want to, Ro. I've tied every knot I know. Marley is not getting loose.

ROWAN

I'm serious, G. His hands can not move at all.

DESPAIR

Why are you so concerned about his hands?

SHART

Eldritch Knights have their weapons bound to them. Doesn't matter where they are or where the blade is; a flick of the wrist and poof! Hello, pointy.

DESPAIR

That must be how he surprised Pike.

SHART

Nah, he just shanked the fool.

DESPAIR

After all that, Pike still thought Marley was innocent?

GARNETT

Pike worked for him for years. To admit Marley was wrong would mean admitting he was wrong. Do you know how hard is it for certain people to admit something like that? Ro?

ROWAN

I'm not saying a damn thing.

SHART

Language.

ROWAN

Speaking of sticking a gag in it. How's Marley's gag?

GARNETT

Hon, he'll be lucky if he doesn't suffocate.

ROWAN

Yeah, that'd be a shame.

GARNETT

Where was that sentiment four rounds of combat ago? We're...

SFX: Wagon hits a big bump.

DESPAIR

Ow! I think he cracked one of my ribs with that bolt. Sir Lawson, I'm sorry to bother, but do you have any ability to heal left today?

ROWAN

I'm sorry, Despair. Everything I have, I already split between you all. We're all hurting and we're lucky Pike didn't bleed out after Marley stabbed him. Shart, you don't have any healing potions in your bag, do you?

SHART

Apologies, that's one I don't have. But cracked a rib, you say?  
Let me see what I can do.

DESPAIR  
What are you doing?

SHART  
Oh, I know a little bit of traditional Dwarven folk healing, if you're up for it. Let go of the reins for a moment. Put your hands behind your head and lace your fingers. Good. Now, relax.

DESPAIR  
Oh! Maybe it wasn't a cracked rib after all! Oh, thank you, Shart! Big hug!

SHART  
Oi! Can't! Breathe! Oh, and it looks like your nose is still...  
Tell me, Despair, where in the world did you find that bright thing around your neck?

DESPAIR  
What?

SHART  
That silver circle.

DESPAIR  
Oh! It must've come out during the fight. We found this weird little barracks up in the mountains near Temple Pass.

SHART  
Oh my. If I were you, lass. I'd keep that beneath your shirt once we get back to the Station. Something that shiny would attract too much of the wrong kind of attention.

DESPAIR  
Oh, I will. Thank you. While we have a moment, I wanted to ask you: why do they call you...

GARNETT  
Wait up. I can see a fire ahead. Pretty big, too. Isn't that where we left the guards with Ronnie and Myrina?

ROWAN  
About there, yes. That's not good. I'll scout ahead.

ROWAN

Ugh. Slowly. I'm going to do that slowly. G, keep both eyes on Marley, please. Care to join me, Shart?

SHART

A walk in the woods after dark? Don't let the beard fool you, Sir Rowan: I'm not that kind of Dwarf.

ROWAN

Your virtue is safe with me, Master Smithwick.

GARNETT

I don't know, Shart. He looks pretty shady. Better bring your crossbow.

SHART

Aye, that I will.

ROWAN

So, how long have you lived in Gauntlet Station?

SHART

Too long. Why?

ROWAN

I'm curious about how the "cremate people before midnight" tradition got started.

SHART

Don't ask why the tradition got started. Ask what the consequences are.

ROWAN

What do you mean?

SHART

You came through Silver Pass, yes? Notice anything missing after that?

ROWAN

I've never been here before, how would I... Gods above, the forest? That whole forest is gone to burn bodies?

SHART

Eh, not all. But a century of people dying without a century of people planting has consequences, that's for certain.

ROWAN

We're here. I see a person in a hood, but that's not the Myrina or Ronnie.

FAIRUZA

Sheridan? Rowan? Come out of the shadows, boys.

ROWAN

Lady Fairuza, what are you doing out here?

FAIRUZA

It's Mistress and against my better judgment, I'm helping.

SHART

Ronnie? What are you doing over there... and why is Sister Myrina tied up?

RONNIE

Hello Master Smithwick, sir! Hello, Sir Rowan! Is Despair with you?

ROWAN

Hi, Ronnie. She's coming shortly.

SHART

Seriously though, what's with the Sister?

RONNIE

Oh, she tried to kill me.

SHART

WHAT?

RONNIE

It's true! I was guarding her back, just like Sir Rowan told me to. But then WHAM! When I woke up, the Sister was tied up, the fire was burning, and this lady was here.

SHART

Oh my! Spider poison and a whack to the head in one night? You need to see the healer when you get back. And don't let your ma say otherwise. I'll pay myself if I have to. Go on, Mistress.

FAIRUZA

Have you ever heard a voice that made your teeth ache? One that is so annoying, you feel like you'll go insane if you keep listening?

ROWAN

I mean, Ronnie's sweet and all, but... I wouldn't say she's...

FAIRUZA

Not Ronnie. Myrina!

ROWAN

Sister Myrina? The nun with the vow of silence?

FAIRUZA

Her brain. Her thoughts. Once she got the fire started, she would not shut up about the bodies. Burn the bodies, burn them all. Apparently, her definition of "all" included Ronnie and the two survivors on top of the three actual dead people.

ROWAN

You came over here and did all of this to shut her up?

FAIRUZA

This may come as a shock to you, Sir Rowan: Murdering people in cold blood is still wrong. I may be a witch in the woods, but I still have a moral compass.

GARNETT

Everything alright?

ROWAN

Mostly. Come on in, G.

RONNIE

Oh! Hi, Miss Garnett! Hi, Despair! It's good to see you!

DESPAIR

Hi, Ronnie.

SHART

So, "shart" version: Something came over the Sister. Mistress Fairuza stopped her before she could roast Ronnie and the living guards.

FAIRUZA

I suppose that would be the "shart" version of it, Sheridan.

DESPAIR

That's not very... Wait. They call you Shart... because you're "shart"?

SHART

Everyone calls me "Shart", I'm only four foot two!

DESPAIR

I... Lawson, you are going to need to learn a resuscitation spell so I can kill him twice for that! Aaaaah! That was horrible!

EVERYONE laughs.

GARNETT

I will avoid saying "I told you so" but I really want to ask Evil Sister Myrina about why she wanted to roast everyone.

FAIRUZA

Not anytime soon. That binding includes a psychic restraint to shut her up.

GARNETT

I know it's old fashioned but we could try talking with her.

ROWAN

Ungagging her would cause a lot of damage. Your curiosity will have to remain unsatisfied for now.

FAIRUZA

That's not it. She can't break her vow of silence because she doesn't have a tongue.

GARNETT

What? That's horrible!

SHART

Beory wept.

DESPAIR

They do that here?

ROWAN

Hold on. We have no reason to believe that was part of her clerical vows. She could have arrived at the chapel house that way.

FAIRUZA

It's also probably why she developed her psychic skills.

ROWAN

She can explain her pyromania to the head of her order. We'll put her in the back of the wagon with the treasure, along with Pike and the other survivors. Hey Ronnie! If you're up for it, help me move everyone into the wagon.

GARNETT

That wagon is loaded pretty heavy. We'll have to ride the horses back.

FAIRUZA

Miss Garnett, did I hear right: Leonard survived?

GARNETT

Just barely. Marley got him pretty bad, but he's stable now.

FAIRUZA

I'm actually happy to hear that. I saw him dead before dawn. And, did you mean Robert Marley? The Captain of the Guard?

GARNETT

Yes. But I overheard him boasting about how he was the one who figured out how to rob the bank. I doubt he'll be keeping his old job or his head.

FAIRUZA

Oh my! They harvested what they planted with that one. But if you have all those dead rogues back there, we should probably add them to the fire. It's getting close to midnight.

GARNETT

We didn't bring those bodies back, Mistress.

FAIRUZA

You what? Why not?

GARNETT

It sounded like the townsfolk wanted to hang the criminals, not bury them, but were more interested in their money. You know there's plenty out here that will compost those bodies for you.

FAIRUZA

Gah! I will not stand for incomplete work! I'll do it myself!

SHART

Where's she off to, then?



**SFX: acoustic pause**

SHART

That's the night watch. Nice to know someone's paying attention.

ROWAN

This is going to be quite the story to tell.

DESPAIR

Shar... Master Smithwick? Where do you think the rogue leader went?

SHART

Went? Like as not, he cut and ran. I'm still scratching my beard over where he came from. The Elves swore they'd never return. I mean, I say "don't let the portal hit you where the gods split you," but that's me.

DESPAIR

Never is a long time though. Maybe this one was on their own?

SHART

Well, you aren't going to win friends robbing banks.

GARNETT

It would raise a lot of gold though.

DESPAIR

How much do you think is back there?

GARNETT

I left my jewelers loop back at the Station, but there is easily fifty thousand gold in coins and jewelry riding in that wagon.

SHART

Thunder and lightning!

GARNETT

But the thieves barely had enough coins to jingle. Either they traveled light or they were dead broke. Only a few silvers each, if that. And no electrum, Ro. Don't start.

SHART

Fifty thousand! That's a retirement, alright.

ROWAN

Especially given he wasn't planning on sharing.

SHART

Anything in that mess of papers you snagged from his tent?

ROWAN

Not yet. I'm having a hard time focusing on anything after what he hit me with. It will have to wait until we get back and I get some sleep.

SHART

It's been a long day, and I even came late to the party.

DESPAIR

Oh! No more dad jokes, please! Lawson, didn't you say there's a rule against torturing people?

SHART

What's this Lawson bit?

ROWAN

Son of Lawrence. Law-son.

SHART

And you ended up a Paladin. Names have a way of saddling us, don't they?

ROWAN

What do you mean?

SHART

Jameson Smithwick? Yeah, my da is Seamus and yeah, I'm from clan Smithwick. But carrying the names of a whiskey and an ale, sets up a certain trajectory. I haven't touched a drop in ten years but everyone at the Station thinks me the drunk Dwarf.

GARNETT

Families will mess you up, that's for certain.

DESPAIR

I've never heard you say anything about your family, Miss Garnett.

GARNETT

And you never will. They're dead to me.

DESPAIR

Oh, I'm so sorry for your loss. How old were you when they died?

GARNETT

Last I heard, they were living outside Port Nyanzaru. I said they're dead to me.

DESPAIR

Oh... I...

GARNETT

Eh, they said I was dead to them, so I returned the favor. Leave it at that.

DESPAIR

But... they're family?

ROWAN

Despair, that's more than what I have ever heard about her family, and I'm married to her.

GARNETT

You know I can hear you, right?

TARIQA SEVERINA

Ho there! Is that you, Sir Rowan?

ROWAN

What's left of us.

TARIQA SEVERINA

It's good to see you all. Good news?

ROWAN

Well Captain, I've got some good news, some bad news, and something else.

## - I N T E R M I S S I O N -

ANNOUNCER

And now a word from our sponsor: Hogglesbogger's Wonder Emporium.

THEODORA HOGGLESBOGGER

Hey Adventurer! How are you going to bring your fat loots home from that dungeon, anyhow? Don't know? Try Mrs. Hogglesbogger's Wonder Mule - the first fully automated pack mule!

Now available for six easy payments of 50 gold!

Mrs. Hogglesbogger's Wonder Mule is made by Gnomish artificers out of the finest curse-resistant steel. Animated with magic, the Wonder Mule never gets tired, never sullies your sleeping bag, and never eats your socks! Carries as much as a standard mule with half the bother!

Come by for a test drive at Hogglesbogger's Wonder Emporium, 5055 Enchanted Alley, Deepwater.

(Disclaimer Voice: Mrs. Hogglesbogger's Wonder Mule has passed the Mule Aviation Association tests for rebound ability at a 50 foot drop. Maximum speed 50 feet per minute. May resist pulling, ignore commands, and bray during stealth checks. A natural mule odor is expected. Remember - don't lead your mule impaired! A buzzed mule is a drunk mule.)

ANNOUNCER

We now return to A Paladin's Bargain

**- R E T U R N -**

TARIQA SEVERINA

Fletcher, run ahead and wake the surgeon! Mason, go wake second squad.

MASON and FLETCHER

Yes, Captain! / Yes, ma'am!

SHART

Severina, you're not listening!

TARIQA SEVERINA

It's all so much to take in.

GARNETT

It's all true, Captain. We have the scorch marks to prove it.

TARIQA SEVERINA

You also have my former employer, bound and gagged in the back of a wagon. We'll need to question him.

ROWAN

Captain, do not touch that gag! Not until you're ready to deal with him. He's an Eldritch Knight and a combat caster. We don't know what he has left in his arsenal.

TARIQA SEVERINA

I hear you, and I'm saying I have never seen any indication of that in all the years I've known the man.

THALESTRIS

What is going on here?

GARNETT

Ro, that's Sister Myrina's boss .

TARIQA SEVERINA

Good evening, Domina Thalestris. The party found the rogues who robbed the bank and we're escorting the gold now.

THALESTRIS

I don't care about the money. Why do you have my acolyte tied up like an animal?

ROWAN

We were hoping you could help us with that.

THALESTRIS

Excuse me?

ROWAN

Apparently, Sister Myrina got a little over enthusiastic when it came to cremating the victims of the ambush.

THALESTRIS

It is important that our rites be respected, young man.

SHART

Except when it comes to burning the ones still living and breathing.

THALESTRIS

I have no reason to believe you, Dwarf. Don't you have a bottle to crawl into?

ROWAN

Domina, I am more than willing to explain it all, but first we have to get this wagon secured in the bank. Meantime, I respectfully suggest you prepare a curse removal. Something came over Sister Myrina.

SHART

See if you can regrow her tongue while you're at it.

TARIQA SEVERINA

Sir Rowan? The survivors are off to the healers. Recommendations on how to handle Marley?

THALESTRIS

You there.

RONNIE

Yes, Domina?

THALESTRIS

Escort Myrina to my quarters immediately.

RONNIE

Yes, ma'am!

THALESTRIS

You have Captain Marley back there? What did those rogues do to him?

ROWAN

They didn't do anything to him except help him with the robbery. We heard him confess to the robbery, Domina.

THALESTRIS

Unbelievable and unacceptable. You there, Pike.

PIKE

Yes, Domina?

THALESTRIS

Untie Captain Marley. Now.

ROWAN

We can't let you do that, Domina.

THALESTRIS

Hold yourselves!

THALESTRIS

Pike? Do not make me repeat myself.

PIKE

Yes, Domina.

ROWAN

Mistake.

THALESTRIS

I will be the judge of that. Robert. What happened?

ROBERT MARLEY

You won't get away with this. I quit, Maura.

THALESTRIS

Don't let me stop you.

GARNETT

Sword!

SHART

Leonard!

THALESTRIS

Don't stop now.

ROBERT MARLEY

See. You. In. Hel.

THALESTRIS

I accept your resignation. Now then... Captain, conduct the party to the Lord Protector's audience chamber immediately.

DESPAIR

(in shock) He... he cut off Pike's head!

SHART

And fell on his sword.

GARNETT

Fairuza was right.

**SFX: Acoustic pause.**

THALESTRIS

Lord Protector? The party is here.

VIERECK

I said I wanted to speak to the people responsible for Captain Marley's death, not their squires and serving girls.

GARNETT

We are responsible for Marley's arrest, but his blood is on his own hands.

THALESTRIS

You will address the Lord Protector as "Sire" or "My lord."

VIERECK

I do not have the time for this. Guard! Take my cloak, Don't wrinkle it! Leave us.

ROWAN

My lord!

VIERECK

Now then. Answer my questions, tell me no lies. Do you understand?

ROWAN, GARNETT, DESPAIR, and SHART

Yes.

VIERECK

Very well. Who are you?

ROWAN

Lord Protector, I am Rowan, son of Lawrence.

VIERECK

Well, Rowan, son of Lawrence, I want you to tell me everything that happened tonight. Begin with your premature release from our prison cells. End with the death of my best friend. Oh, and, be certain to include the death of the man who put you behind bars. Odd coincidence, don't you think? Be aware, this truth spell does have a particularly nasty way of punishing falsehoods. Begin.

**SFX: Acoustic pause.**

VIERECK

I must say, all these stories have left me rather disappointed.

ROWAN

I'm sorry, Lord Protector. The betrayal of a friend is never taken easily.

VIERECK

No. You misunderstand. I have known Robert Marley for twenty years of war and peace. I am disappointed because you suggest



that he decided to rob his own people, murder soldiers under his command, and... run away? I should have your head for this.

ROWAN

Lord Protector, we have answered your questions. Even without your truth spell, any lie would've struck me dead to tell it, and yet I stand here. Meanwhile, Marley is dead by his own hand, as witnessed by the Domina and half the town.

VIERECK

Indeed. Well then. If you are so convinced that Captain Marley was the mastermind behind this heist, it should be quite simple for you to find evidence to that fact.

DESPAIR

My lord, we heard him confess!

THALESTRIS

The abomination will not speak.

VIERECK

If a man confesses in the forest and the only ones to hear him are a thief, a heretic, the town drunkard, and some jumped up farm boy in second-hand armor, did he truly confess at all?

ROWAN

Fine. You want us to do this. And what will we get for it, Lord Protector?

VIERECK

You tell me, Sir Rowan of the Hallowed Host. Don't they teach you that truth is its own reward?

GARNETT

At least we have the finders fee from returning the money to the bank.

VIERECK

Oh no, these things are linked, certainly. I believe the reward will be conditional on you solving this riddle first.

GARNETT

What a load of... (howls in pain).

SHART

Hey now. We can prove it, my lord, and we will prove it.

VIERECK

Oh yes. Yes, you will. Domina Thalestris? I need your help, please.

THALESTRIS

Of course, my Lord Protector.

VIERECK

You have heard the specious claims of these four people. I believe we should provide some motivation.

THALESTRIS

Speak your mandate, Lord Protector.

VIERECK

Proof that Robert Marley plotted the robbery of our bank including how he did it.

THALESTRIS

When must they do this, Lord Protector?

VIERECK

Was the Greenleaf moon seen tonight at sunset?

THALESTRIS

Yes, Lord Protector, and the night before.

VIERECK

Let no one say that I am unreasonable. Until the next new moon.

THALESTRIS

A geas upon thy head, Rowan, son of Lawrence. A geas upon thy head, Sheridan, son of Seamus. A geas upon thy head, Garnett, daughter of Growltiger(1). A geas upon thy head, Despair, daughter of Oblivion. Thou shalt present proof of this conspiracy to the Lord Protector before the first sighting of the Salmon moon, twenty-six days hence.

ROWAN

You will have your proof, Lord Protector.

VIERECK

Oh, that's not all. Continue, Domina.

THALESTRIS

Until the task is complete, thou shalt not leave the Silver Gauntlet valley and thou shalt not discuss the terms of this binding with any living soul. If you break any component of this contract, a shroud will be upon you and your life will be forfeit. This covenant is now written in the Book of Life and Death. Go now, and may the One True God have mercy on your souls.

VIERECK: You are dismissed.

GARNETT

Did I just hear that right? We're stuck in town, without access to Larkspur's wagon or his money, with no way of leaving the area, and another damned side quest to complete, this time with a sword hanging over our heads.

ARTIE (AS REGULUS TIBERIUS)

Hey there! Welcome back, brave adventurers!

GARNETT

Hey there, Goodman Regulus. That's one less thing to worry about.

DESPAIR

It's good to see you. I needed to see another friendly face.

SHART

This a friend of yours then?

GARNETT

Oh, yes. Goodman Regulus, allow me to introduce you to our new partner in doom, Master Sheridan Smithwick. Master Smithwick, this is our esteemed employer, Regulus Tiberius.

SHART

Good evening, Goodman Regulus. Please, call me Shart.

ARTIE (AS REGULUS TIBERIUS)

And good evening to you, Master Shart. Might I inquire why...

DESPAIR

Don't ask, please.

SHART

Folks, I'd love to stay and chat, but fighting always makes me hungry. If I listen close, I can hear my supper calling me.

GARNETT (hushed aside)

Shart, in case you missed it, we have a geas on us to solve this thing or die.

SHART

Yes, I heard. And the puzzle won't be solved tonight and it won't be solved on an empty stomach. (to all) Catch up all you want, but meet me at the public house - it's called the Middle Finger and the first round is on me, but be warned: it's root beer.

ROWAN

We'll catch up. Believe me, I need a drink. Or six.

SHART

And that's one more thing for us to discuss, Sir Rowan. Goodman Regulus. Ladies.

ARTIE (as REGULUS TIBERIUS)

Are you all alright? What happened in the woods? And in there?

DESPAIR

Well, we have some work to do, that's for sure. And we'll tell you as much as we can. But Artie, what happened to you here? How did you get out of the stockade?

ARTIE (as REGULUS TIBERIUS)

Right after you left, the bailiff let me go with a fine of twenty gold. It was a shakedown.

ROWAN

That's not right.

ARTIE (as REGULUS TIBERIUS)

Rowan, this is a Human settlement. Any time they say something is "punishable by a fine" they really mean "It's legal for rich people."

GARNETT

Did you have twenty gold?

ARTIE (AS REGULUS TIBERIUS)

No, but I did have some shiny rocks and a winning smile.

GARNETT

I hope that illusion holds long enough. What have you been up to while we were out in the woods?

ARTIE (AS REGULUS TIBERIUS)

I recently departed from Rosie's Fun House.

DESPAIR

Ooh? Really? I've only ever heard about those in books! Can we go?

ROWAN and GARNETT

No.

ARTIE (AS REGULUS TIBERIUS)

I was looking for Xolo and Bau.

DESPAIR

Those are your packmates?

ARTIE (AS REGULUS TIBERIUS)

I can smell they were brought into the station, but this human nose doesn't work as well as my real one. They were not in the house, which is good for them but bad for me.

GARNETT

You'll find them. And we'll be there to back you up when you do.

ARTIE (AS REGULUS TIBERIUS)

I hope so. There is a storm approaching, so I need to find them before the trail washes out even more. But for tonight, I want to hear more about your adventure and... Sir Rowan, are you alright? Really truly, man, you don't look well.

DESPAIR

And you've been quiet, too. For you, that's saying something.

ROWAN

You know how I say being around evil people gives me a headache?

DESPAIR

Yes, of course. I'm still glad it's not because of me.

ROWAN

You know how I insist I'm not one of the fallen?

GARNETT

We know, honey.

ROWAN

So, fun fact: Compelled work geasas are a form of slavery. The Grand Conclave of Faiths outlawed them about fifteen years ago. Also, torturing truth spells are a product of the Chaos realms. And, yeah I had a headache when we fought Marley, but when Viereck took off his cloak, I thought my head was going to split open. I have no idea who the Domina really is, but the Lord Protector of Gauntlet Station is a fallen Paladin, I'd bet my life on it.

GARNETT

Sweet mercy grace. And we're working for him.

DESPAIR

K'Thol's chocolate cloaca, we're in trouble.

ANNOUNCER OUTRO

- O U T -

- (1) The name "Growltiger" is adopted from "Growltiger's Last Stand" in "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats" by T. S. Eliot. Copyright 1939, which has expired in the UK, but in the US is currently held by Faber and Faber.
- (2) "daughter of Oblivion." "Hi, Oblivion! How's the wife and Kids? Your wife, my kids." callback to The Rocky Horror Picture Show. Public domain.