# A Paladin's Bargain

## Season Two – Episode One
## Chapter Seven: Toll House, No Cookie

| ROLE | PART ONE | PART TWO | PART THREE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Rowan Lawson | X | X | X |
| Garnett | X | X | X |
| Artie | X | X | X |
| Despair | X | X | X |
| Corporal Gray | X | X | X |
| Rowan Cartwright | X | | |
| Third Rate Underboss | X | | |
| Theophany Brewer | X | | |
| Bailiff Simon Koenig | | X | |
| Stable Boy | | X | |
| Tariqa Severina | | X | X |
| Kevin Guilder (FK) | | | X |
| Old Joshua Smith | | | X |
| Domina Thalestris | | | X |

## Part One

[SFX: Combat noise and troops marching with a sergeant barking unintelligible commands. Very similar to the nightmare in Episode 3, only farther in the distance.]

YOUNG ROWAN LAWSON
Get down!

[SFX: spell crashing into rock, similar to Despair zapping the rock in Episode 2]

YOUNG ROWAN CARTWRIGHT
Lawson, what are you doing?

YOUNG ROWAN LAWSON
I'm hiding! You should do the same!

YOUNG ROWAN CARTWRIGHT
Our team was ordered to take that hill, you cowardly little shit.

YOUNG ROWAN LAWSON
Our team is dead! That caster is in a superior position and they are way above our paygrade. Get down!

THIRD-RATE UNDERBOSS (in the style of the Warriors taunt)
Guardians! Come out and play-y!

[SFX: spell crashing into rock, same as above.]

YOUNG ROWAN CARTWRIGHT
Just wait. They're not much older than us. They'll burn through their spell slots soon enough.

YOUNG ROWAN LAWSON
Those are eldritch blasts! Those don't run out.

YOUNG ROWAN CARTWRIGHT
Point: If we stay here, they keep that hill. They keep that hill, they win.

YOUNG ROWAN LAWSON
Counterpoint: We move, we die.

THIRD-RATE UNDERBOSS (taunting)
Stop hiding, Guardians! My master – Arcteryx the Black - only wants to talk to you!

[SFX: spell crashing into rock, same as above.]

YOUNG ROWAN CARTWRIGHT
(yelling) No way, soul sucker!

YOUNG ROWAN LAWSON
Hey! I have an idea.

YOUNG ROWAN CARTWRIGHT
What now?

YOUNG ROWAN LAWSON
There's a gap between the blasts. If we time it right and we move while she's recharging, maybe we can get her?

THIRD-RATE UNDERBOSS (taunting)
Come out and face me, cowards!

[SFX: spell crashing into rock, same as above.]

YOUNG ROWAN CARTWRIGHT
That's bullshit, Lawson! The time for talking is done. If you aren't going to do this, then to the seven hells with you.

YOUNG ROWAN LAWSON
Wait!

YOUNG ROWAN CARTWRIGHT
Hey! Corpse-humper! Let's fight!

[SFX: Thunder crash of a witch-bolt lightning strike and an agonizing scream from Cartwright.]

YOUNG ROWAN LAWSON
Cartwright!

YOUNG ROWAN CARTWRIGHT
(gasp) I told you before. My name is Rowan.

[SFX: The name "Rowan" echoes several times and melds into Garnett's voice.]

GARNETT
Rowan. Ro, honey, wake up.

ROWAN
(snorts awake with a cry)

GARNETT
Hey baby.

ROWAN
Hello, beautiful.

ARTIE
Are you alright, Rowan?

ROWAN
(Rowan yelps in surprise) Warn a guy! And yes, I'm fine (Garnett vocalizes her frustration.) No, I'm not.

GARNETT
Combat nightmare or boot camp nightmare?

ROWAN
This was extra special: combat IN boot camp. (beat) Hold on… Where are we?

ARTIE
We're at the Middle Finger… The inn at Gauntlet Station. One of the "party rooms".

ROWAN
Why would a bunch of adventurers need a swing?

GARNETT
I'm not that adventurous.

ROWAN
Where's Despair?

GARNETT
She went downstairs for breakfast.

ARTIE
Speaking of which, would you both be willing to step out for a minute, please? I'm glad all y'all like furry old me but everyone in town is expecting "Goodman Regulus."

ROWAN
Artie, I was hoping to spend a little time with my wife.

ARTIE
So get a room.

ROWAN
We're in it. Now here, I'm rolling over. You now have more privacy than I ever did in the Sentinel Guard. Change and go get your food. Please?

[SFX: The vivid liquid and cracking sound we used for his transformation. At the same time, Rowan mutters, "I don't want to know. I don't want to know. I don't want to know."]

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
There now! All sorted. I am off to break my fast.

ROWAN
Hold on. We left our money with the wagon in the livery. How are we paying for all this?

ARTIE
One of the guards we rescued last night was the son of the lady of the house. Last night was her thank you gift.

ROWAN
Oh right, because the payment for the bank job is on hold because of (the geas)

Interrupted simultaneously by:
[SFX: geas doom knell]
GARNETT: Wait!
ROWAN: (cries out in pain)

ARTIE
Alright, what just happened? (the "the fuck" is only barely subtext.)

GARNETT
I’m really sorry, Artie. While you were bribing the night watch with your shiny rocks and winning smile, something happened to us. We can’t talk about it, except (to say that we have a geas on us.)

Interrupted simultaneously by:
[SFX: geas doom knell]
GARNETT: (cries out in pain)
ROWAN: G!

GARNETT
An unskippable side quest has been added to our agenda.

ARTIE
You lie like a rug and you’re twice as furry.

[SFX: Door slams open]

DESPAIR (in a whirl)
What happened? Is everyone alright?

GARNETT
We’re alright.

DESPAIR
It felt like someone jammed an icicle through my skull.

ROWAN
We’re learning the hard way what we can and cannot talk about. You all head down for breakfast without me. I need more sleep.

DESPAIR
But this is really important!

ARTIE
Despair, I get the feeling it can wait.
(to Rowan & Garnett) Toodle-oo, love birds.

[SFX: door opens and closes]

GARNETT
Light of my life and pain in my ass, I have never once seen you refuse a meal. What’s going on?

ROWAN
I can’t go out today, G. I hurt.

GARNETT
But the healers put you back together last night?

ROWAN
If I think about it too much, I can feel the seams where my ribs meshed back together. Do you ever think about how weird it is?

GARNETT
It’s alright. We aren’t going anywhere today. Rest. We can get Larkspur’s wagon squared away without you.

ROWAN
Can you believe I almost forgot about Larkspur?

GARNETT
Well, a few other things happened between then and now.

ROWAN
Including something that apparently we can’t talk about.

GARNETT
That was a condition of the (beat) geas? Hunh. When Thalestris said we couldn’t discuss it, she meant we couldn’t discuss it with anybody else?

ROWAN
So I can say (tentatively) “Vireck is a fallen paladin” and not get another spike jabbed through my skull? Tender mercies. “The Lord Protector of Gauntlet Station is a fallen paladin: the worst kind of turncoat traitor in the world.” The thought of him controlling this town does not sit right with me.

GARNETT
Vireck’s a fallen paladin, Marley was an eldritch knight. Thalestris is… something. And we have three weeks to figure out how Marley robbed the bank before the geas expires.

ROWAN
A broken geas is not pretty. None of us could survive a hit like that except… Wait, where’s Shart?

GARNETT
Sheridan said he keeps a room on the other side of the Station.

ROWAN
Something is up with that guy. He is hiding something.

GARNETT
He saved our butts last night.

ROWAN
Still. We've got more questions than answers.

GARNETT
And it seems like we can't ask half the questions. But in case you forgot, there's still the bit about the dead rising.

ROWAN
And a whole valley's worth of trees chopped down to burn the bodies. (soul withering sigh) This is too much. At this point, the only difference between me and those revenants is a pulse.

GARNETT
You sleep. We'll take care of business. (Kisses him on the forehead.)

ROWAN
Thank you, love. [SFX: door opens and closes]
Hello, bed. I've missed you.
(Deep relaxed sigh and a beat pause.) [SFX: door opens]

GARNETT
Up and at 'em soldier! We need you, soldier!

ROWAN
Is the building on fire?

GARNETT
No, but there's a half dozen armed guards downstairs asking for you by name. The town Bailiff wants to see us. Now.

**[Acoustic pause]**

[SFX: clunk of boots coming down wooden stairs]

GRAY
Rowan, son of Lawrence? I am Corporal Gray of the Station Watch. I have orders to bring you and your party to the Bailiff's office immediately.

THEOPHANY BREWER
Oh, Sir Rowan? Goodman Regulus? Can we speak before you go?

GRAY (polite but frazzled)
Goody Brewer, the Bailiff was rather insistent.

THEOPHANY BREWER
Oh bah. Simon likes to insist on a lot of things. One minute. Over here, boys.

[SFX: footsteps on wood]

GARNETT
You still haven't told us what this is about.

GRAY
That's assuming they told me, Miss. I'm only the messenger.

GARNETT
And a rather pointy messenger at that.

[In the distance, you hear Rowan exclaim, "HOW MUCH?"]

DESPAIR
And so many of you! Do you think we're bad people or something?

GRAY
Ladies, I promise. If I knew, I would tell you.

[SFX: footsteps on wood]

ROWAN
Alright Corporal, we're good to go. And G, we need to swing by the wagon to get our money. Rent here is not cheap.

THEOPHANY BREWER (calling out)
And if you're going to the smithy, can you tell Old Joshua: I'm still waiting on that fireplace set I paid him for a month ago.

[SFX: Door opens and soundscape changes to outdoors]

GARNETT
Hang on. Gray… Were you the Private Gray who crawled back from the ambush last night on a broken leg?

GRAY (sheepish)
Yes miss, that was me.

ROWAN
That was an heroic act – well done, soldier. And it’s Corporal now. You earned that stripe and then some. The way Captain Severina was talking, I’m surprised they have you back up on your feet already.

GRAY
Thank you, sir. The Watch has really got us jumping this season. My team says I did it so I could get a full night’s sleep.

ROWAN
I hear you. In the Sentinel Guard, we used to say, “Sleep is for the weak.”

ROWAN and GRAY together
Next week.

ROWAN
Ah! It’s good to know that disgruntled soldiers never change. Same shit, different shield.

GRAY (laughs)
Now that’s a new one! The squad will get a laugh out of that. (beat) Sir, did I hear you right, you were with the Sentinel Guard?

ROWAN
Ayup. For twenty-five years.

GRAY
Twenty-five? But you don’t look much older than (thirty).

ROWAN (interrupting)
Ten. I was ten when they conscripted me.

GRAY
But, the stories I hear the bards tell (say that the Sentinel Guard)

ROWAN (interrupting)
You see this mark on my throat, Gray? This is a little souvenir from the Sentinel Guard. It's a lifetime geas. On pain of death, I can never tell a lie. And I'm telling you: It's not all gold and glory. Never trust a war story and never EVER trust a bard. No one wants to hear the ballad of the teenage soldier who didn't jump fast enough.

(GRAY makes some apologetic noises)

GARNETT
You're not wrong about the bards, but maybe give the nice new corporal some slack?

ROWAN
I'm sorry. I didn't get much sleep last night.

GRAY
Still waiting on next week, sir?

ROWAN
Yeah, still waiting on next week. So, any guesses as to why the Bailiff wants to see us so bright and early this morning?

GRAY
Early? Morning muster was almost two hours ago, sir. As to what he wants, you can ask him yourself. We're here.

**[commercial break]**

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They said you couldn’t do it!

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[SFX: BCC signature power chord]

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

## Part Two

[SFX: Knocks on a wooden door]

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG (muted)
Enter!

[SFX: Door opens, people enter, door closes.]

GRAY
Bailiff, the party you requested is here.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Thank you, Corporal. You and your squad are dismissed.

[SFX: Door opens and closes at the same time you hear.]

GRAY
We're done here. Back to the watch sergeant; see what's next.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Who speaks for you?

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
I do, Master Bailiff. I am Regulus Tiberius. Goodman Larkspur is my uncle and I have recently taken over this trade route for him.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG (not paying attention)
Ah yes, Larkspur. I can see the resemblance. Things at the gate weren't handled in the proper manner last night.

DESPAIR
I'll say. Pike was really rude to us!

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Corporal Pike was within his orders. But when you returned last night as free people, the guards were distracted and failed to sign you in.

GARNETT
You sent a squad of soldiers because we didn't sign in?

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
And collect the entrance tax.

DESPAIR
I’m sorry. Entrance tax?

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
I don’t know where you are from, Tiefling, but this station does not run on magic beans and faerie dust. Soldiers must be paid and fed; their weapons and armor maintained. We collect a gold crown from everyone who passes through and another for every week you stay.

ARTIE
We’ll pay your fare, Bailiff. But my money box is with the wagon. Captain Severina assured me it would be safe there. May we retrieve that, please?

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Very well.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Thank you. Oh Rowan? (Loving it) Fetch, please?

ROWAN
Of course, Goodman.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
One gold crown each, plus two for the wagon. Can you do the sums?

ROWAN (through gritted teeth)
Yes, sir. I can count.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Yes, yes. Out the door, to your right. Follow your nose.

[SFX: Door opens, door closes.]

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
I suppose if you’re Larkspur’s nephew, we can start signing the rest of you in. Goodman… Regulus was it?

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Regulus Tiberius. At your service, sir.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Expected length of stay?

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
One week, at least. Possibly three. We're staying at the Middle Finger. Theophany Brewer sends her regards.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
I'm sure she does. Are you here for the faire?

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
The faire? Pardon?

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
The Springsong Faire will be at the full moon. You may have noticed that Goody Brewer takes a little extra for her rooms leading up to that.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
(muttering) Yes, that explains that.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
And you, Tabaxi?

GARNETT
Garnett.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG (only half paying attention)
Such an exotic name.

GARNETT
Gee, I've never heard that before.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG (coldly)
And you, Tiefling?

DESPAIR
Despair.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Of course. All sign here, please. If you can't sign, make your mark. Goodman Tiberius. (pause) Thank you. Tabaxi. (pause) Tiefling.

DESPAIR
Wait. There's something magical about this pen.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Oh, it's nothing. Signing the book marks you as having paid.

DESPAIR
AND?

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
And anyone who signs is… obligated to give their true name.

DESPAIR (think Gandalf's "I'm not trying to rob you" speech)
[spellcasting voice] You do not have the right, the ink, or the sanity to receive my true name, sir. [normal bright and perky voice] It's too long for that little space. How about I write my common name?

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG (only slightly shitting himself)
Very well.

[SFX: Door opens, people enter, door closes.]

ROWAN
Here's your coin-purse, Goodman.

[SFX: Coins jingling from pouch to hand]

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Four of us, plus my wagon, for six crowns.
[spellcasting voice] Here is a platinum star.

[SFX: some coin noise through the next few lines]

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
But what of that wagon we returned from the bank robbers?

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Its tax has been paid already. Here's your change. And you, Rowan is it? Sign here, please.

ROWAN
Say, Master Bailiff. How many others have come through the station, recently? A band of six or seven, perhaps?

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
I'm not sure. My memory isn't what it used to be.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Are you sure we couldn't refresh your memory?

[SFX: Sound of a metal coin pushed across a wooden desk.]

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
No groups. Only one recent visitor.

GARNETT
Thin build; straight, shoulder-length white hair? Black traveling cloak? Possibly half-elven?

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
I’m not sure.

[SFX: Sound of a metal coin pushed across a wooden desk.]

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Yes, a man matching that description came through, twice in the last two weeks. Seemed foreign, but I didn’t notice the ears. I remember he haggled with me.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
The temerity! And what was his name?

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Station records are private property.

[SFX: Sound of a metal coin pushed across a wooden desk. Pages rustling]

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Here you are: Lass Bothell.

DESPAIR (checking his pronunciation)
Loss Bowie-thule?

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
I suppose that sounds right.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Anything else remarkable about this Loss Bowie-Thule?

[SFX: Sound of a metal coin pushed across a wooden desk.]

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG

The first time he was here, he came and left with a wagon. But when he returned, he was on foot.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
That certainly is peculiar.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
That’s not it. His wagon is the one your party brought back last night from the bank robbery. Do you know this man?

ROWAN
I think I met him last night.

BAILIFF SIMON KOENIG
Given the circumstances, unless he lodges a complaint, I believe that wagon is now yours. And if he does arrive to lodge a complaint, I believe the Magistrate may have some other questions for him first.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Questions, indeed. And with that, I believe we have an appointment with the blacksmith. Thank you for your time, Master Bailiff. You have been most helpful.

[SFX: Door opens and closes and transition to outdoor noise]

ROWAN
Well that was a curious twist, don’t you think?

GARNETT
It was bullshit! Artie, why in the world did you let him shake you down so much for that trickle of information?

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Ahem. Regulus Tiberius, please. And who shook whom, my dear?

DESPAIR
It’s true. That wasn’t a real platinum coin he paid with.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
But he gave me real gold in change. Which brings up a good question: Is it really a bribe if I paid him with his own money?

GARNETT
Are you sure you wanna be a druid? Because the Thieves Guild could use someone like you.

ROWAN
Yeah, and I’m never playing cards with you either.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
No, no! Never do magic for the people you gamble with. That’s a basic rule for a happy life.

ROWAN
Can you go back in time and tell that to sixteen year old me, please?

[SFX: Loud bell]

DESPAIR (exasperated and nervous)
What is it with all these bells?

ROWAN
This is a garrison town. They run a tight schedule of watches and duty shifts.

GARNETT
Plus businesses opening and closing. Keeps people moving.

DESPAIR (incredulous)
Really? How sad would it be to live your whole life by someone else’s idea of what time is?

ROWAN
Wha? Never mind.

GARNETT
Do you think we could sell that other wagon? Might not be worth much but it would help until we get paid for the bank job. And on a related note, Goodman Regulus, can we agree it’s one thing to fake a bribe, but we should actually pay the folks at the Middle Finger?

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Of course we’ll pay them! Goody Brewer was kind to us and there’s no reason to burn that bridge. That said, while the complimentary stay last night was a good thing, we are still on the hook for a rather significant chunk of change to stay there going forward.

ROWAN
And even more once we get closer to the Springsong Faire. Which means adventuring in the Boar Forest to supplement our income in my many moments of leisure.

GARNETT
Extra adventures? What about that sleep you were begging for?

ROWAN
I have this thing for eating regularly and sleeping under a roof.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
And we're here. The Bailiff said to follow your nose to the stables, but (ugh).

STABLE BOY
Can I help you folks?

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Yes! We are here for the two wagons you're keeping for us. One arrived yesterday, midday? The other last night?

STABLE BOY
Oh yeah. They're next to each other. Down there to your left.

DESPAIR
Can we discuss what happened back there, please? That person the Bailiff pointed out in the book? Loss Bowie-thule – that's a really old Elvish name.

GARNETT
You speak Elvish?

DESPAIR (sheepishly)
Sorta? Language elective, a long time ago. Loss Bowie-thule means Leaf on the Water.

ROWAN
I remember. Last night, Marley called the guy at the wagon Laz. Yeah, that's something.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Is this the wagon you brought back… (sniff and gasp, a whine?). (code shift. As Artie) Umm folks? Things got a bit more problematic. And I don't mean the corruption or the racism.

GARNETT
What are you talking about, Artie?

ARTIE (As Artie)
Can you all… run interference for me? Make sure no one else comes by for a few minutes?

DESPAIR
What's going on, Artie?

ARTIE (As Artie)
(snaps) Please!? Heaven and earth! Can I have this?

ROWAN (calming him down)
Yeah, we can do that. You two, head that way, distract any stable hands you meet. That kid up front looks pretty clueless but I'll make sure he stays that way.

DESPAIR
Is Artie alright? I've never seen him so upset before.

GARNETT
I'm not sure, but his whole demeanor changed when he caught a whiff of something on that wagon. He didn't need to change shape for me to hear his fangs drop.

[SFX: Plaintive dog howl.]

DESPAIR
Artie!

[SFX: Running noises, coming up on Artie sniffling.]

ROWAN (quietly)
What is it? Did he say anything to you?

GARNETT
No, he's just sitting there.

ARTIE (As Artie)
You know I can hear you, right? (sniff) I apologize for barking at you all. This was a shock.

ROWAN
What’s going on? Looks like you found a couple smuggler’s compartments on that wagon?

ARTIE (As Artie)
I told you why I’m here in the Gauntlet Valley.

DESPAIR
Slavers kidnapped two of your packmates and you tracked them here.

GARNETT
Xolo and Bau are their names, right?

ARTIE (As Artie)
Loss Bowie-thule had my family. In this wagon. In those smuggler’s holes. Their scents are strong and they were so afraid.

ROWAN
Hey, if this guy was able to leave and come back on foot to do the bank job, that means Xolo and Bau could still be in the Gauntlet Valley. You’re getting closer.

ARTIE (As Artie)
That man knows where they are. You say he disappeared last night, but now I know what he smells like. Get me out there and I can track him.

GARNETT
So you can find him, get the information, and get your family back.

ARTIE (As Artie)
Oh no, Garnett. You missed a very important step, I’m going to get the information, and get my family back. And then I’m going to kill him. No waiting for the Magistrate, Rowan. By thorn and bramble and blood, that slaver is mine.

**[Acoustic pause]**

[SFX: Wagon noise]

ARTIE (as Goodman Regulus)
Can we get moving, please? I want to get out there before their trail gets any colder.

GARNETT
We'll get there, Goodman Regulus. I promise. We deliver Larkspur's wagon, we get paid. We get paid, we can remain at the Middle Finger.

[SFX: horse noises]

ROWAN
Nice and easy with the horses, D. We've got some people around. Apparently, the smithy is up ahead on the right.

DESPAIR
Lawson, these are Larkspur's horses pulling Larkspur's wagon. They know the way better than we do.

GARNETT
Oh, right. They talk in their heads.

DESPAIR
Yup! Just like most people!

TARIQA SEVERINA (from a distance)
Ho there, brave adventurers!

ROWAN
Hey! Captain Severina! Good to see you!

TARIQA SEVERINA
Likewise. Everything going well? Is Goody Brewer skinning you alive for your rooms?

GARNETT
Any fancier and I'd expect a bathrobe and some catnip on my pillow.

TARIQA SEVERINA
Well, it's the beginning of our busy season here.

GARNETT
We heard. Springsong Faire?

TARIQA SEVERINA
It goes back to the founding of the station with Siegfried Silverhand and the….

[SFX: Loud bell]

DESPAIR (nervous)
Captain Severina, to be sure: All these bells are just normal, right?

TARIQA SEVERINA
Yes, of course! The station runs on a tight schedule. (sotto voce) Confidentially, half of the morning watch is missing and we're scrambling to fill in the blanks. (out loud) But yes, the bells are completely normal.

[SFX: A woman's scream in the distance.]

TARIQA SEVERINA ("oh god what now?")
That, however, is not.

**[commercial break]**

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Disclaimer voice: The HCE 2000 is not a toy. Light emitted may burn skin, curl hair, or encourage wart growth. Not for use on oozes and jellies.

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

## Part Three

[SFX: several sets of feet running]

TARIQA SEVERINA (jogging)
Sir Rowan, I told you: you don't need to get involved.

ROWAN (jogging)
You deputized me last night, Captain. And you said you're short handed. My team can get the wagon to the smithy without me. This is more my area of expertise.

TARIQA SEVERINA (jogging)
Investigation?

ROWAN (jogging)
People screaming, unfortunately. But I promise: I'm not trying to be a white knight. Put me to work. I'll follow your orders. That scream sounded like it came from over… That's the… chapel?

[SFX: Running stops]

TARIQA SEVERINA
Stranger and stranger.

[SFX: Feet approaching]

GRAY
Captain! I heard a scream!

TARIQA SEVERINA
Everyone heard that scream, Gray. Stay here and keep the spectators away. When Brewer gets here…

GRAY
Brewer's still recovering from the spider poison last night, Captain.

TARIQA SEVERINA
Damn. Sorry. I meant Fletcher. When Fletcher gets here, send him to the south door.

GRAY
Yes, ma'am!

TARIQA SEVERINA
Sir Rowan, FOLLOW my lead, please.

[SFX: Large wooden door creaks open. Transition to echo-y indoor noise.]

TARIQA SEVERINA
Hallo! Is there anybody in here?

DOMINA THALESTRIS
In here, Lieutenant! It’s horrible! Horrible! Our sacred text has been desecrated!

TARIQA SEVERINA
Oh, that’s terrible. And…?

DOMINA THALESTRIS
AND someone has ripped pages out of my most holy book! This is an outrage! This is a disgrace! You must close the gates immediately! Turn out the Watch! Search every home!

TARIQA SEVERINA
We will take care of it, Domina. We need some information first. May we see where the book was found, please?

DOMINA THALESTRIS
This way…

TARIQA SEVERINA
Can you tell me what was happening before you discovered the book?

DOMINA THALESTRIS (a little weepy)
We had just finished our third bell devotional. I was preparing to renew the station blessing. But when I… the book… the pages…!

TARIQA SEVERINA
Oh, that’s horrible! I’m so sorry, Domina.

DOMINA THALESTRIS
Here. When it is not in use, we keep the book here.

ROWAN
That is a remarkably large box.

DOMINA THALESTRIS
What is this man doing here?

TARIQA SEVERINA
He’s working for me. We need as many good people as we can get.

ROWAN
Solid gold, is it?

DOMINA THALESTRIS
Yes, obviously.

TARIQA SEVERINA
And before that? When was the last time you saw the book? unharmed?

DOMINA THALESTRIS
Not since the day before yesterday.

TARIQA SEVERINA
No observances on the Moon’s Day?

DOMINA THALESTRIS
After… the chaos yesterday, I was in conference with the Lord Protector all afternoon and one of my acolytes performed the evening service from their copy of the book.

ROWAN
The box does not appear to have a lock on it.

DOMINA THALESTRIS
The word of the one true god is open for all.

ROWAN
Obviously.

TARIQA SEVERINA
Can you show us the damage, please?

DOMINA THALESTRIS
Yes, yes. Here.

TARIQA SEVERINA
Oh! That is beautiful script work! The illumination is truly remarkable.

ROWAN
May I ask where you received the book, Domina?

DOMINA THALESTRIS
Received? I made this book with my own hands, young man; every letter of every word. It took twenty years of my life to create what you see here. But you wouldn't know anything of what it means to sacrifice twenty years to something.

ROWAN
No clue at all.

**[Acoustic pause]**

[SFX: outside noise as the wagon rolls to a stop]

DESPAIR
(to the horses) Whoa there! Good job!

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Good job indeed! Well done, my dear. (calling out) Hello? Uhh. Joshua?

JOSHUA SMITH
I hear you, I'm coming. Ah, Larkspur! There you are!

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Close, but not quite, my good man. I am Regulus Tiberius, Goodman Larkspur is my uncle and I have (recently taken over this trade route.)

JOSHUA SMITH (interrupting)
Yeah, yeah, Larkspur. You can't fool me. This is me! Joshua!

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
I'm not fooling you, sir. I am simply not Goodman Larkspur.

JOSHUA SMITH
Oh, alright, we'll play the charade. Regulus are you now? And brought along more strays, like usual.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Friend, look at me. I. Am Not. Goodman Larkspur.

JOSHUA SMITH
(click) Oh! Oh! Begging your pardon, sir! A thousand apologies! I… I… But you're really not?

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
No. I'm not. [spellcasting voice] But why don't you tell me a story about why you were so convinced that I was someone else?

JOSHUA SMITH
Well… So, Larkspur's been coming here since before I was born. Seven hells, before my father was born. And every twenty years or so, he'd come back with a new hat and a new name, saying he was a relative of the last man. And we'd always play along.

DESPAIR
And what do you mean strays? As usual?

JOSHUA SMITH
It seems like every time he's come to visit, he'd have someone with him. Folks he hired to guard his wagon. Most often, they'd stick around to go adventuring in the Boar Forest.

GARNETT
Got that one right.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Fascinating, thank you. Now Joshua, shall we de-liver your delivery?

JOSHUA SMITH
What?

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Pay me, so you can get your stuff.

JOSHUA SMITH
Oh, see, well. There's a problem with that? I can't keep that much money sitting around. It's at the guild bank.

GARNETT
Are they still closed after the robbery?

JOSHUA SMITH
We can't tell. They said they'd need time to do the books and make sure everything was returned. No telling if the folks who did the rescue didn't help themselves to some of the treasure.

GARNETT
(sarcastic) I know, right? Strangers showing up and risking their lives to help people they've never met? Who does that?

JOSHUA SMITH (not getting it)
Exactly!

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius) (trying to derail the train wreck)
LET US, perhaps, take our question to the Guild Master? I'm certain they can give a more definite answer. Shall we?

JOSHUA SMITH
Oh, that's a good idea. I'll have my kids start unloading (and we can head over.)

ARTIE (as Regulus Tiberius)
Ah, ah, ah! Money first, dear Joshua.

JOSHUA SMITH
Oh, but Larkspur would always let us unload the wagon while we got the money sorted out.

ARTIE (as Regulus Tibierius)
Like I said before, friend. I am not Larkspur.

**[acoustic pause]**

[SFX: Indoors, with murmured voices]

ARTIE (as Karen Tiberius)
This is simply unacceptable! My uncle has been coming here for decades and he always speaks so highly of the people here. I demand to speak to the Guildmaster about this, now!

[SFX: Knock on a wooden door, which then opens]

KEVIN GUILDER
Pardon my interruption. I can speak on behalf of the Guildmaster. My name is Kevin. Goodman, are your traveling companions the same adventurers who dealt with the thieves last night?

GARNETT
We are! We even have names and free will to speak on our own!

KEVIN GUILDER
We may be able to work something out. Come with me, please Miss…

GARNETT
Garnett.

KEVIN GUILDER
Ooo, such an exotic name.

GARNETT
I've never heard that before.

[SFX: door closing and footsteps]

KEVIN GUILDER
Guildmaster Milton is not here right now. The Guild would be willing to extend a line of credit to your party, however we need you to do something for us in return. I would like… if I may… This is a rather… delicate situation, so I must ask for your discretion.

GARNETT
Discretion is negotiable, friend. You need to tell me what has your small clothes in a twist.

[SFX: jingle of a small coin bag dropped into a hand. Cue the customer service smile]

Since you put it that way, how may we be of service, sir?

KEVIN GUILDER
Guildmaster Milton has been kidnapped.

GARNETT
What? The last person said he was out of town.

KEVIN GUILDER
Milton was in Hightower for business, yes. But this morning, we received a message saying he was waylaid on the Forest Road. He is being held by a band of goblins for ransom, which is due tomorrow night, at sunset.

GARNETT
And what would you like us to do about that, exactly?

KEVIN GUILDER
It depends. The simple solution would be to deliver the ransom and return him to the station. For which, we would pay a simple transportation fee.

GARNETT
Simple. Why do I have a feeling there's a complicated solution?

KEVIN GUILDER
Depending on the number of goblins, you may be able to overpower his captors. That would save us the rather exorbitant ransom. And for doing so, we would add a combat bonus to your fee.

GARNETT
Stop pulling my tail. You wouldn't go through all these cloak and dagger shenanigans if you only wanted us to stab some goblins. Tell me what is really going on, or I walk.

KEVIN GUILDER
(sigh) Over the last year, Guildmaster Milton has been drifting from the asset column to the liability column.

GARNETT
You mean like how he's been dipping his quill in the company ink pot?

KEVIN GUILDER
(GASP!) How did you hear about that?

GARNETT
Lucky break on the random rumor table. Go on.

KEVIN GUILDER
The problem is: He carries the master key to all the vaults. If you were to retrieve the key in lieu of the Guildmaster, we would be willing to add a significant bonus on top of the aforementioned fees.

GARNETT
Let me guess. You're probably, the Deputy Director of the Guild bank? Maybe the entire guild?

KEVIN GUILDER
I may resemble that remark, yes.

GARNETT
You can’t prove he’s skimming the cream, but if he tragically dies in the rescue attempt, you personally get the same reward and with less paperwork.

KEVIN GUILDER
Not to mention costing the bank less money.

GARNETT
But in order to make the magic happen, you need his master key.

KEVIN GUILDER
Clever girl.

**[END CREDITS]**