

Episode 5: Stuck in the Middle with You

ANNOUNCER

And now, episode five: Stuck in the middle with you.

GARNETT

Two spiders! Despair! Don't get behind them like that!

DESPAIR

These things have fangs in the front! And they're spitting stuff!

ROWAN

The webs don't come out of their mouths!

DESPAIR

Where else would they... Eww!

ROWAN

You two, fall back and snipe. Shart, can you handle one solo?

SHART

I still remember where the pointy end goes.

GARNETT

Myrina! Cut Pike out of that webbing!

MYRINA

Don't tell me what to do!

GARNETT

Please?

SHART

Oi! Rowan! You saving that smite for a rainy day?

ROWAN

Working on it, godsdammit.

SHART

Language.

ROWAN

So help me, if one more person corrects me today.

DESPAIR

Where's Ronnie?

GARNETT

Ronnie fell. Head in the game. Focus on the spiders first.

DESPAIR

Wait, these are the spiders?

GARNETT

You're saying you don't have spiders back home? That's a relief.

DESPAIR

No! Ours have ten legs.

GARNETT

Never mind.

ROWAN

You got any more surprises in that pack of yours?

SHART

None that I can read one handed, thank you.

ROWAN

Still standing?

SHART

Takes more than that to cash me out.

ROWAN

And stay down!

SHART

Come here, y'ugly. I got something special for you. Rowan! I'll be right back.

DESPAIR

No! The spider jumped on Shart!

ROWAN

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

ROWAN

Shart! G, Despair! Help me get the spider off him!

SHART

Don't bother, lad. I'm not there.

GARNETT

What? How did you get all the way over there?

SHART

Let's just say I have ways of being elsewhere when I need to.

ROWAN

You misty-stepping bastard! That was smooth!

SHART

Language.

ROWAN

Oh, not again.

DESPAIR

Wait, wait, wait. What happened? We all saw the spider jump on you, Shart.

ROWAN

Everyone including the spider, yes. But Master Smithwick here managed to sneak out from underneath. That distraction allowed me to get in close and smite that eight-legged bas... pest. Is pest better? Oh, and Despair? Your nose is still bleeding.

DESPAIR

Thank you.

ROWAN

It does make me wonder how a fighter could manage a spell like that without a scroll.

SHART

Everyone has a past, son. I'm not an Eldritch Knight. Let's leave it there.

GARNETT

What about the others? Where are Myrina and Pike?

PIKE

A HA! Where are they? I'm ready for you!

ROWAN

Nice of you to join us, Corporal. I see you still have your sword.

GARNETT

And yes, thank you Sister Myrina for cutting Pike loose so quickly. Need to borrow my whetstone for your dagger?

DESPAIR
Where's Ranger Ronnie?

GARNETT
She fell back over that way.

DESPAIR
Here she is!

GARNETT
Is she alive?

SFX: Sound of Ronnie vomiting.

DESPAIR
Mostly?

SHART
Let me take a look at her. Well, the gods watch over fools and small children; that makes her doubly blessed. She's got a strong constitution, just not a strong stomach.

RONNIE
Oh! Hello, Master Shartwick! Did we win?

SHART
Yes, Ronnie. We won.

RONNIE
Oh good. Umm, Despair didn't see me get hit, did she? I wouldn't want her to see me being weak or anything. She's so pretty.

SHART
She's right behind you.

DESPAIR
(giggles)

RONNIE
Oh no!

SHART

It's alright. Embarrassment does minimal psychic damage, else I'd be long dead. You survived the spider, you'll survive this. She'll live, but until that poison clears her system, she'll be like a puppet with half its strings cut.

DESPAIR

So, the poison doesn't kill humans, only just slows them?

GARNETT

Better to feed on them for longer. Before the spiders attacked, Ronnie pointed out some human sized lumps up in that tree over there. Those might be some of Marley's team.

PIKE

But Private Grey said there was an ambush.

ROWAN

Maybe the rogues led them here to do the dirty work. Maybe the spiders came to clean up after. It's always easier to show up after the fight is over, don't you think, Pike?

PIKE

And just what do you mean by that?

SHART

Settle down, Corporal. Let's see if we can get them down; see if they're still with us.

PIKE

But he said I'm a coward!

SHART

Pike, there are souls up in those trees; members of your team. Part of our job is to bring them home to their families; alive, so much the better. I don't give a tinker's damn what he said to you.

ROWAN

(Tries to hide the word "language" in a cough.)

GARNETT

Shart is right. Let's get them down.

PIKE

But how? They must be twenty feet up in those trees.

GARNETT

You are just one big dump stat, aren't you? Give me your rope.
I'll be right back.

PIKE

Well, I never!

DESPAIR

Oh wow! You can really climb, Miss Garnett!

GARNETT

Thanks. It's the claws. Now... the rabbit goes around the tree,
down the hole, over the mountain, and into the cave. Loop over
the branch. Alright, grab on and hold on. Got it?

ROWAN

We've got it.

GARNETT

I'm cutting the first one!

GARNETT

There you go! Let it down nice and gently. That's it. Good.
There. One down, three to go.

SFX: acoustic pause

SHART

I must say, that was some very impressive work, Miss Garnett.

GARNETT

Thank you, Shart. We all do what we can. Most of us, at least.

SHART

Indeed. Looks like two of the posse didn't make it. But two did,
so there's a kindness. I've done what I could with my kit and
Sister Myrina has them stable.

GARNETT

Yes, thank you, Sister! Silence, of course.

SHART

I know she rubs you the wrong way, but give the Sister a chance?

GARNETT

I try not to judge others. But the way some people act makes me not want to try too hard.

SHART

Try harder, lass. Ah, Sir Rowan. What news?

ROWAN

We found another of the town guard up ahead. Looked like a pin cushion from all the arrows.

DESPAIR

So that one, plus the four in the trees, and the Grey lady who crawled back to town, all in blue cloaks. That makes the six who left with Captain Marley.

SHART

But no Marley. Either the troublemakers claim their dead like orcs, or it was a very big surprise.

RONNIE

Hey, everybody!

SHART

Be quiet, you patchwork pigeon!

RONNIE

I found something?

ROWAN

Ronnie, get back over here and... That is a remarkably nice shield. And you found this? Laying out here? Was there a body nearby?

RONNIE

Yeah, and. Wait. Yes, I found it over whoa, turned too fast, over there. And no, no bodies were around.

ROWAN

Or above?

RONNIE

Oh yeah. No bodies above, either.

ROWAN

It's clearly been here awhile. The treasure's yours, kid.

RONNIE

Really? I mean, I wasn't really much good in the fight.

PIKE

She's right, she did nothing. I'll take that.

ROWAN

I notice you already have a shield, Corporal. One that matches your uniform. If you carry a shield on each arm, I didn't think it would be possible to make you swing your sword even less.

PIKE

Well... I...

SHART

The girl found it, the girl gets it. What's more, it was her eyes what tipped off Miss Garnett that the spiders were about.

RONNIE

Oh, that's alright, Master Smithwick. I've never used a shield before.

SHART

We could tell, lass. Try to keep it between you and the ones bent on hurting you. Grow into it, and grow old.

GARNETT

Hold on. Ronnie is not coming with us. In her condition, she'll be less than useless against that group.

PIKE

The cat's right. We need to get moving!

SHART

Only makes sense to camp them here and wait for our return. Sister Myrina has her mace and I'll wager she has something that packs a punch from a distance. That right, Sister?

GARNETT

At least you got a thumb instead of the finger she gave me.

DESPAIR

And if we do this right, we should have their wagon when we return. That should help get everyone and everything back.

RONNIE

But what about me? How can I help?

ROWAN

Ronnie, are you ready for your assignment?

RONNIE

Yes, Sir Rowan!

ROWAN

Your job is to guard Sister Myrina's back. That means: whichever way she's facing, make sure you face the other way at all times.

RONNIE

But why do I need to face away from the Sis-(vomits)

ROWAN

Keep your forward firing arc away from the Sister, please.

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

ANNOUNCER

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

(ominous music)

THE VOICE OF DEEPWATER HEALTH

Whether it's the annual owlbear migration, an outbreak of Harpy Lice, or a bad fall in a dungeon - a disaster can strike at any time. Are you prepared? Remember - three days, three ways.

Prepare for disasters by:

- 1) Making a plan
- 2) Packing your bag
- 3) Hiring your healer.

First - make a plan: Make a copy of the crypt key, give your family a map to the secret mountain hideout, and make copies of your contact list.

Second - pack your bag. Everyone should have a three day supply of rations, weapons, potions, and spell scrolls. And don't forget your ten foot pole and fifty feet of rope!

Last - Hire that healer! If you don't have a healing class in your household, recruit one now! Don't be without your friendly walking first-aid kit when disaster strikes.

For a free pamphlet on crypt mapping, come to the Deepwater Health Department office, 1347 Black Death Memorial Parkway. Just up the stairs from the Morgue and Undead Cafeteria. Stay healthy, Deepwater!

ANNOUNCER

We now return to A Paladin's Bargain.

- R E T U R N -

ROWAN

Gah! This is driving me nuts!

SHART

What's wrong? Did you lose the wagon trail?

ROWAN

I could follow these tracks at night without the scroll's help. It's like they don't care who follows them.

SHART

So... Trap?

ROWAN

Every nerve in my body is screaming "trap" but there's nothing.

SHART

Not to press, but you seem to be on a very fine edge after the spiders. Have you ever heard anyone use the words "hyper-vigilance"?

ROWAN

It's nothing like that!

SHART

But you've checked for traps and tripwires?

ROWAN

Garnett checks the path a hundred yards at a time and then backtracks to check again before we move. Nothing.

SHART

Alarm and perimeter spells?

ROWAN

Checked and double checked.

SHART

Detect magic and sense evil?

ROWAN

Nothing. I'm scanning as much as I can, and Despair has yet to mention seeing any aetherial glow.

SHART

And yet, I've seen more relaxed people in a dragon's den.

ROWAN

What's more, being near something evil gives me a splitting headache. My head's clear.

DESPAIR

See? I told you I was a good person, Sir Ruprecht!

ROWAN

WHAT THE FUCK?!?!

GARNETT

Ro, honey, now isn't the best time.

ROWAN

No, Garnett. It is. I can't do this anymore.

SHART

Ah, heyya Pike, let's investigate that tree over "thar".

PIKE

But... we have to keep moving!

SHART

That tree, Pike. Move.

ROWAN

What is it with you? I've been nice to you; I bless you and heal you. Every ounce of my former life tells me I should smite you back to where you came from! But you're good! And you're happy! And you're nice! AND YOU CAN'T SAY MY NAME!

DESPAIR

Sir R... Sir. Who is your namesake?

ROWAN

What?!?!

DESPAIR

Who were you named after?

ROWAN

My grandfather. And he was also a Sir Rowan.

DESPAIR

And his namesake?

ROWAN

I never asked. Probably Rowan the Tall from the Battle of... Deepwater.

DESPAIR

You are named for a holy and sacred tree, Sir. A tree whose innate magical qualities include protection from evil and Infernal beings. As everyone likes to remind me, I am an Infernal being. Can you imagine what it's like to defy the laws of nature with my magic, and yet be unable to control the muscles in my tongue?! Do you know how much it kills me when I can't say the name of one of my only friends? Everyone else: Garnett! Artie! Lotus! Larkspur! And you. You have been so kind to me, and Every. Single. Time I can't say your name, it's a reminder of who... of what I am.

ROWAN

Despair? Give me your hands, please? Thank you. First, you are a "who" not a "what." I won't have anyone badmouth one of my friends like that. Thank you for talking to me. I didn't know why you were struggling and I couldn't see beyond my own vanity to ask. I'm sorry and I apologize. Can you forgive me?

DESPAIR

Me forgive you? What about you and your name?

ROWAN

Lawson.

DESPAIR

Lawson?

ROWAN

I was born Rowan, son of Lawrence. When I entered the order, I was one of four Rowans in my company. So, our sergeant used our family names: Smith, Cartwright, Longstrider, and me, Lawson. Back then, I answered to Lawson as easily as to my given name.

So, maybe instead of going through every other R name in the known world, call me Lawson. Would that work for you?

DESPAIR

Of course, Lawson! Thank you! Oh, big hug! Oops! Sorry!

ROWAN

It's alright. Are you going to be alright?

DESPAIR

Yup! Let's go cause mayhem. I mean, get the bad people, Lawson! I'm going to go check on Shart!

ROWAN

Yeah. Let's go get the bad people.

GARNETT

That was really sweet, Ro. How come you never told me about those other Rowans?

ROWAN

Because Rowan Smith could never keep his head down. He took an arrow to his right eye at the Battle of Briar Hill. Rowan Cartwright failed to dodge a fireball from some third-rate under-boss when the army of Arcteryx the Black attacked Rockport. And Rowan Longstrider shat his guts out with the bloody flux during the siege of Hammerfall Keep. And not a single one of them saw their sixteenth birthday. How are those for "deeds to be celebrated from now until the final call"?

GARNETT

Sweet mercy grace. I am so sorry. The rest of the story certainly does put a clump in the litterbox.

ROWAN

No my dear, that was Longstrider. Come on, G. Let's go get the bad people.

PIKE

Oh, are you finished having your touchy-feely, safe-space moment? Still feeling triggered, tin soldier?

ROWAN

Pike, I have already broken your nose once today. Speaking of noses, what are you smelling, Shart?

SHART

Does no one else smell that?

GARNETT

Smell? I'm more ears than- Oh yes, that's smoke from a fire and some venison.

SHART

Boar.

GARNETT

I won't argue with your stomach. Lead the way.

SFX: acoustic pause

GARNETT

Pike? If you get any closer, you're going to step on my tail. I promise you: we are not going to run away.

PIKE

Wha? Ugh, it's a foul night tonight.

GARNETT

You are up in the night. It's warm and dry and it's too early in the season for anopheles.

PIKE

Whuzzat?

GARNETT

Little blood sucking thingies? Smaller than a stirge. Like flying ticks?

PIKE

Oh, yeah. Mozzies. Definitely too early.

GARNETT

When was the last time you were out here?

PIKE

Never! I've never stepped foot in this godforsaken forest.

GARNETT

Wait, you're a man at arms, living a stone's throw from one of the most infamous campaign grounds in the world, and you've never ventured into the forest?

PIKE

Nah. I go the other way, thank you. I used to work the tree fields towards Temple Pass.

GARNETT
But not here?

PIKE
There's evil things in these woods.

GARNETT
Yes, and we've already dealt with two of them.

PIKE
And it cost us two people. Our odds are getting thin.

GARNETT
Well, what are you talking about then?

PIKE
I'm born and raised at Gauntlet Station. My whole life, I've seen adventurers like you - tourists we call you - show up full of grand talk. They spend their gold and head off seeking glory. Most never return. Some do: beaten, shallow husks of who they were when they arrived. So yes, I mean there's something evil in these lands.

GARNETT
And yet, here you are.

PIKE
I joined the guard to protect me and mine. They took what's mine and I want it back.

GARNETT
So tell me: What do those shallow husks have to say about what's out here? Besides the giant spiders.

PIKE
They say the Math Witch lives around here. And goblins and hobgoblins and bugbears and gnolls and orcs and maybe even... elves.

GARNETT
Now I know you're pulling my tail. There have been no elves around here for over a hundred years.

PIKE

What? Who told you that?

GARNETT

Who didn't tell you that? The Great Migration? The Elven Council
"shunning the contamination of this land."

PIKE

School's been closed since I was a lad. Parents teach their
children their letters and numbers; leave the book learning for
the ivory tower wizards and such.

DESPAIR

Oh!

ROWAN

What is it, Despair? Your glow thing?

DESPAIR

I'm sorry Sir Rrrrr... Lawson. This snuck up on me. It's so
strange. It's like hearing someone yell in another room? You
know it's loud but it still sounds muted somehow.

SHART

If you think that's strange, get a load of this.

GARNETT

A fence?! A white picket fence in the middle of the Boar Forest?
Is that a garden and a cottage?

ROWAN

The only time I've seen a garden this pristine was the Queen's
Quarter in the Capital.

SHART

Is that a barrel? Cut in half, full of flowers? HERE?

DESPAIR

Wait! Don't touch that!

SHART

If that's a mimic, it's stupid one.

DESPAIR

Not a mimic, still a trap.

ROWAN

Tell us what you're seeing, Despair. Because to me, it looks like someone took a storybook cottage and stuck it in the middle of a deadly forest.

DESPAIR

It's here because it is deadly. Lawson, I need you to trust me.

ROWAN

I'm listening. Please explain.

DESPAIR

So. Beelzebub's boxer shorts, how do I... So, you've heard of hexes, right?

ROWAN

I'm not a complete idiot.

SHART

Jury's still out on that. Go on, Despair.

DESPAIR

I think that barrel is a living hex.

ROWAN

What?

DESPAIR

You remember that tree we talked about? Spell components don't become magical when you pick them. That means the copper rim would act like a magic circle? Maybe the rocks to connect them?

GARNETT

Connect them? You're saying there are more traps like this?

DESPAIR

Hex is an old word for six. There are six sets of components in the barrel, yes. But they're all components for different spells. Breaking through one would set it all in motion.

GARNETT

So, it is a trap?

DESPAIR

It's an illusion and a ward and a trap, all centered around this house. This part points people in the opposite direction and says, "Hey, what's that over there?". If you make it past that,

the next bits say, "There is no lawn." And if you make it past that, the next part... ew.

GARNETT
Eww?

DESPAIR
Do you remember those nasty, spiky vines that Artie used on the bandit at the pass?

GARNETT
Oh yeah, it looked like it hurt the whole time he was dying.

DESPAIR
Exactly. See that thing in the middle of the barrel that looks like a... what are those weapons? Round bit on the end. Spikes coming out?

ROWAN
A morningstar? Yes, I see that.

DESPAIR
The seed pods for those vines look just like that.

GARNETT
So how in the world did we manage to get through all of that?

FAIRUZA
That is what I want to know.

PIKE
Math witch!

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

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

MRS WIGGLES
I'm Mrs. Wiggles from Fuzzy Butts Warg Rescue with an important safety announcement: Wargs everywhere are emerging from their dens which means it's time to prepare for feral warg attacks. Emerging wargs are confused and hungry. Dog walkers and rangers are likely to surprise a warg at dawn and dusk. Remember: Travel in pairs, and if you see a warg, distract it while you run and hide. You can throw a toy!

MRS WIGGLES
Or a rabbit carcass!

MRS WIGGLES
Or push your third-favorite cousin firmly and suddenly toward the warg!

COUSIN
Hey!

MRS WIGGLES
The warg will be distracted for about 10 seconds, giving you a head start and SIX percent chance of long term survival. Less, if your cousin has a high Dexterity.

Looking for your new best friend? 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
We now return to A Paladin's Bargain

- R E T U R N -

ROWAN
Good evening, Lady. Who do we have the pleasure of speaking with tonight?

FAIRUZA
With whom. And I am someone who does not appreciate weapons pointing at her in her own front yard.

SHART
Your front yard? We fought giant spiders to get here. Clay garden gnomes not your style then?

FAIRUZA
Clay garden gnomes don't say "Get off my lawn" nearly as well. But thank you for dealing with the spiders. They were getting a little too big for their eight-legged britches.

GARNETT
Pardon me for saying, but you seem remarkably at peace for someone living in the middle of a death trap.

FAIRUZA

Those hexes the Tiefling spotted were made to keep evil people and evil beasts away. You made it through, so that's a mark in your favor.

SHART

And yet, you're still living here.

FAIRUZA

This is my retirement. I live in my little bubble. I raise my own and trade for what's left.

DESPAIR

Umm, Lady? I have to say, those are really good hexes. Like, textbook perfect works of art. I would not have noticed them if I hadn't intentionally been looking.

FAIRUZA

Thank you, Mistress Despair.

DESPAIR

Wait, how do you know my name?

FAIRUZA

I know all of your names.

DESPAIR

That's funny. I was told reading people's minds without permission was rude.

GARNETT

Not now, D!

FAIRUZA

Oh, you're so sweet! That's the best laugh I've had since I left Gauntlet Station.

GARNETT

Wait, Pike said you're a.. Math? Witch?

FAIRUZA

I was the math *teacher*, among other things. They called me a witch because I made them do homework! I even had little Leonard Pike for a year or two. I see you're still hiding in the back, Leonard. Afraid of being called on?

PIKE

No, Ma'am.

FAIRUZA

But then the good people of Gauntlet Station decided that two plus two made five and anyone who said otherwise must be sent from the Infernal regions. No offense, dear.

DESPAIR

None taken; I'm getting used to it.

FAIRUZA

After that, the step between geometry and sacred geometry was a matter of degree?

SHART

We apologize for interrupting your supper, Lady. But if you know our names, you probably know why we're here. A group robbed the Station bank today and we were sent to find them.

FAIRUZA

I don't know about the bank, but a band of eight rode through my backyard this afternoon with a wagon and a large team of horses. Tore up my spring kale beds in the process. They're camped on the eastern side of that hill.

ROWAN

There's a hill? All I can see is forest.

FAIRUZA

Well, at least some of the hex still works. Go that way, cross the stream and turn east, follow the path after the holly tree and you'll find the camp there.

SHART

If they went east, why are you sending us north?

FAIRUZA

To keep you out of what's left of my kale. A woman has to eat.

DESPAIR

Thank you, Lady?

FAIRUZA

Mistress Fairuza. I look forward to seeing most of you again. Oh, and Rowan, son of Lawrence? Before you act, wait for the toast to burn.

ROWAN

Thank you! And I have no idea what you're talking about.

FAIRUZA

Neither do I. Just the messenger on that one. Sorry.

DESPAIR

Thank you again, Mistress Fairuza. Those hexes were a master class in design.

FAIRUZA

Thank you for your kind words, Despair. Now go. Go help the good people of Gauntlet Station. If there are any good people left.

SFX: Acoustic pause.

ROWAN

I've had a splitting headache since we passed that holly tree.

SHART

I've got some headache powder in my bag.

ROWAN

Actually, it's a good thing? Means we're on the right path.

GARNETT

Despair, any guesses on how the math witch's hexes block magical detection but they don't show up as magic itself?

DESPAIR

I'm guessing you won't accept "because it's magic" as an answer?

GARNETT

Tabaxi don't do well with unsatisfied curiosity. But if it's some cosmic revelation that'll make my head explode, I'm fine.

DESPAIR

It's not that. I'm still not completely certain myself. I think by splitting the components and using living plants, the magic of the hexes blends into the magic of the forest.

ROWAN

Wait, are you saying this forest is magical?

DESPAIR

Lawson, all forests are magical.

GARNETT

I was impressed with how you dissected that hex trap. How did you become an expert in the magical plants on this plane?

DESPAIR

I've been studying magic for years, but only through books and Sabbath school, not like practical magic. Otherwise, we have most everything back home that you have on the round world. Plus a few things, minus a few others. Like the missing legs on the spiders!

GARNETT

Don't remind me. It's strange because they say the Infernal realms are nothing but lakes of fire or frozen wastes.

DESPAIR

That's silly! You think that because some first edition wizard got the wrong address for his plane shift and that means my swim team practiced in lava? I mean, you have volcanoes here, right?

GARNETT

I've never seen one, but I've heard stories.

DESPAIR

But the whole world isn't a volcano, is it?

GARNETT

No, obviously.

DESPAIR

So, as above, so below.

ROWAN

Now hold on. That expression is talking about heaven and earth.

DESPAIR

It's true that direction too, with different aboves and belows. It's, what's the word, transitive!

ROWAN

But. That. Means.

DESPAIR

Miss Garnett? You mentioned heads exploding from cosmic revelations? His face right now is about what that looks like.

ROWAN

But. That. Means. Whoa.

DESPAIR

If it's any consolation, it's just as much of a mental adventure coming this direction.

SHART

Hush you all! Rowan! Front and center, soldier.

ROWAN

Finally. What do we have?

SHART

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

ROWAN

Start with the good news. It's been a hell of a day.

SHART

Always an optimist, I see. The good news: this is the right group. That's the wagon that almost ran me over leaving the station today.

ROWAN

Tender mercies. Next?

SHART

Bad news: The ambush was a total success. I count eight in camp, same as what rode through the witch's veggie patch.

ROWAN

Eight. But seven robbed the bank.

SHART

Which brings us to something else: You see that fancy tent on the far left? The one with the red cloak draped over it?

ROWAN

Ayup. Which one is Marley?

SHART

The tall one, in the breastplate. Granite hair, high and tight, and a rather pathetic attempt at a beard, if I do say so.

ROWAN

Yes, yes. We tremble in awe of your beard, Shart.

SHART

I wonder how someone in a hurry managed to pack his tent and his kit.

ROWAN

It's a mystery, but I have a good guess. Let's pull back a bit and talk with the others.

ROWAN

Alright, we've found the camp.

PIKE

Did you see the Captain?

ROWAN

Yes, and...

SHART

There's no easy way: Your man's palling around with the enemy.

PIKE

What?!

ALL shush him.

PIKE

That's impossible. Why do you say that?

SHART

Well, he's walking around in camp.

PIKE

It's customary to let ranking officers walk free on their own recognizance once they surrender their weapons.

SHART

With his sword on his hip.

PIKE

It could be a trick to lure them into over-confidence.

SHART

Drinking and laughing, slapping folks on their shoulders, congratulating them on a job well done.

PIKE

It's an illusion then!

SHART

Leonard, use that head for something besides your helmet. Who would the illusion be for if they don't know we're here?

PIKE

He... I... Oh bugger, you really think the old man did it?

ROWAN

The only survivor of an ambush, armed, healthy, and friendly, and with a tent of his own? Yeah, I'll be sure to ask him about that.

GARNETT

Hold on. I know that tone of voice. Why are you suggesting we talk with them?

ROWAN

What are you suggesting?

GARNETT

I'm saying: We know it's them. They're not expecting us and we can all hit from a distance. I say we fan out, we each pick two, and we make our shots count. I'll even save the boss fight for you.

SHART

I like how you think, Miss Garnett.

ROWAN

No. Absolutely not. We have to give them a chance to surrender.

SHART

Are you daft? You said it yourself: Marley's on their side. Judging by that ugly lot, they're probably on his side. In either case, there's still eight of them and five of us. I like a good scrap, but without a surprise, they'll butcher us and leave us to fertilize the math witch's kale.

GARNETT

This isn't part of your I-cannot-tell-a-lie thing. Why this? Why now?

ROWAN

I get it. Yes, Marley's a branded bastard for robbing his own people. Yeah, if we get him back to the Station, he'll probably hang. And. To shoot him outside of a fair fight or to refuse him

a chance to lay down arms? You may as well slit my throat right here.

DESPAIR

So, you're saying we need a way to give them a chance to surrender and allow us a chance at a surprise attack at the same time? Time doesn't work that way here, does it?

ROWAN

Now that you say it that way, yeah it does sound weird.

GARNETT

You heard the Captain when she deputized us. "Bring to justice with a negotiable definition of justice." She gave us orders.

ROWAN

A lot of terrible things have been done under orders, G. Ask me how I know. We used to call this a Paladin's bargain: everyone walks away from the negotiation equally miserable, but you still do the right thing.

GARNETT

That's not funny!

ROWAN

Never said it was.

GARNETT

You've said yourself: You're not a Paladin anymore. If this isn't part of your truth geas, why do you insist on playing by these stupid rules?

ROWAN

Which rules do you think are stupid, Garnett? The justice part or the equality under the law part? I'm no longer in the order but that doesn't mean I stopped believing in what's behind it.

GARNETT

I need to step away before I say anything dumber than what's coming out of your mouth! I'll go see if there's another option that doesn't require suicide.

ROWAN

Garnett, I...

GARNETT

You sit tight, right here on your little moral ant hill.

GARNETT

Alright, Captain Marley. What are you up to tonight?

(scene shift)

ALL ROGUES laugh.

ROGUE #1 (Able)

I gotta hand it to you, Captain. You were right. It was easy.

ROBERT MARLEY

You would never have gotten close if it wasn't for my help.

ROGUE #1 (Able)

How did you know they wouldn't send out a second posse?

ROBERT MARLEY

Tariqa doesn't have the guts to risk it. I've had those fools working double shifts for months. They're too busy sleeping to muster for a posse. Who are they gonna send? Pike?

ALL ROGUES laugh

ROGUE #2 (Baker)

I can understand robbing them, but betraying your own men?

ROBERT MARLEY

Eh, blue cloaks don't count. But that reminds me. I won't be needing this any longer.

ROGUE #3 (Charlie)

Oy! Don't throw that cloak on the fire now! I was getting ready to roast some more sausages.

ROGUE #4 (Daffyd)

Ugh, Charlie. How can you eat after butchering so many people?

ROGUE #3 (Charlie)

How can I eat? With my knife and fork!

ALL ROGUES laugh.

(scene shift)

DESPAIR

Miss Garnett! I'm really sorry. Don't speak. Focus and think the words you want to say.

GARNETT (telepathically)
Like. This?

DESPAIR (telepathically)
Yes! Exactly like that!

GARNETT (telepathically)
What's. Up?

DESPAIR (telepathically)
Someone is walking right towards you!

ANNOUNCER OUTRO

- O U T -

References

I'm embarrassed to say I made it through an entire episode without making a pop culture reference. The closest I got were:

"There is no lawn." Seriously, Warner Brothers? Parody of "The Matrix" Copyright 1999, Warner Brothers and two kick-ass women: Lily and Lana Wachowski.

and

"With heaven's bright hand I smite at thee" which was modeled on Herman Melville's line in Moby Dick, "from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee." Public Domain.