A Paladin's Bargain

Season Two - Episode Seven
Chapter Thirteen: Peer Pressure from Dead People

ROLE	PART ONE	PART TWO	PART THREE
Rowan Lawson	X	X	X
Garnett	X	X	X
Despair	X	X	X
Ronnie	X	X	
Rowan Smith	X		
Sergeant	X		
Tusk Bloodbath	X		
Sharp-Tooth	X		
Boar-Mother	X		
Theophany Brewer	X	X	
Gaia Brewer	X	X	
Corporal Gray		X	
Fabulous Faltermeyer Jr.		X	
Tariqa Severina		X	
Gavin Greene			X
Commander Siegfried			X

Part One

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

SERGEANT
Incoming! Fix shields!

[SFX: Clang of armor moving into place.]

COMPANY
Fixed, sir!

ROWAN LAWSON
Smith! Head down!

[SFX: Impact of multiple arrows hitting shields. Followed by more marching.]

ROWAN SMITH
Rowan Lawson, you are an insufferable shit.

ROWAN LAWSON
Yeah, well, and you're… mean.

SERGEANT
March!

ROWAN SMITH
That's the best you can do? (sigh) Our midnight swearing lessons are a failure. Seriously, why are you always nagging me?

ROWAN LAWSON
I gave the Sergeant my word. He made you my responsibility…

ROWAN SMITH (interrupting)
Responsible? You're twelve years old! I'm thirteen! I can take care of myself.

ROWAN LAWSON
I'm big for my age! Lieutenant Sideras said so!

SERGEANT
Incoming! Fix shields!

[SFX: Clang of armor moving into place.]

COMPANY
Fixed, sir!

ROWAN LAWSON
Smith! Head down!

ROWAN SMITH
Gods above and devils below, Lawso- GURK!

[SFX: Impact of multiple arrows hitting shields, plus an extra squish for Smith getting an arrow to his eye. Followed by more marching.]

ROWAN LAWSON
Sergeant! Soldier down! Sergeant!

SERGEANT
Fill the line, Lawson!

ROWAN LAWSON
But Sergeant!

[SFX: Impact of a fist.]

SERGEANT
Fill the line! Boy stuck his head out; boy paid the price. (calling out) Mark this one down for graves detail tonight. (back to Rowan) Your fuck-up, your grave to dig, Lawson.

[SFX: "Lawson" echoes several times]

DESPAIR (hushed)
Lawson! Lawson, please wake up!

ROWAN
(wakes with a snort) Despair? What is it?

DESPAIR
Soldiers are coming and they're pissed. Wake Miss Garnett, please.

ROWAN
What? Why would they be…

[SFX: Door slams open.]

SHARP-TOOTH
Oath-breakers! On your feet!

ROWAN
We're up! We're up!

GARNET
I don't know what you're talking about, but we're up!

SHARP-TOOTH
All hail, the Boar-Mother!

LARGE GROUP
HAIL!

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
How dare you! I welcomed you into my home. I granted you your request to stay the execution. And this is how you repay my hospitality?!

GARNETT
Hail great and powerful Boar Mother. Your power is great and your mercy greater. We humbly beg to know what has happened to earn your wrath.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
To know??? You begged me to spare the life of the slaver only to kill him yourself?

GARNETT
What? The elf is dead?! Where? How?

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
This morning's watch found the guard unconscious, the cell open, the prisoner's body mutilated.

RONNIE
But it wasn't us, ma'am. We were with you all night at the celebration and sleeping here since. I swear it!

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
You said you wanted to speak with him, but all you wanted was to find where he was kept! Deceivers!

[SFX: Feet running in]

TUSK
Boar-Mother! Dog-men are gone. Little owl-bear is gone, too.

ROWAN (under his breath)
Gods damn it, Artie.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
My son spoke for you all! And this is how you repay him?

ROWAN
Great and powerful Boar-Mother, please hear me. On pain of death, I am sworn to tell the truth.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
Oh yes, I have heard about your enforced oaths.

ROWAN
Oh good. So please… (hear me when I say)

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER (interrupting)
Prove it.

ROWAN
What?

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
Prove to me that you must tell the truth. You will answer five questions honestly. Only then I will believe what you tell me about the slaver’s death. If you lie, we will watch you die from a broken geas. But if you refuse? If you equivocate? Your party will pay instead. Take them!

[SFX: Swords drawn. Garnett, Despair, and Ronnie react.]

ROWAN
Whoa, whoa, whoa! I’ll do it! I’ll do it.

GARNETT
Ro, what are you doing?

ROWAN
G, I love you. The only way out is through. (beat) Boar-Mother, I accept your terms.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
What were you taught about orcs? Not the half-humans that roam the world, I mean tribal orcs.

ROWAN
I was taught that they (are killing machines.)

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER (Interrupting)
I am not "they!" Say it to my face. What were you taught about me?

ROWAN
(sigh) I was taught that you and your kind were brainless, merciless, killing machines who only understand strength and weakness. And since then, (I have learned…)

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER (Interrupting)
When was the first time you spoke with a tribal orc?

ROWAN (starting to breathe heavier)
Yesterday. (And I was amazed…)

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
When did you first kill a tribal orc?

ROWAN (you can see where this is going)
I was eighteen.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
How many of our kind have you killed?

ROWAN (struggling)
I don't remember.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER (ramp up)
You don't remember or you don't want to remember?

ROWAN (whimpering)
Please don't ask me this. Not in front of them.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER (ramp up more - did you order the code red)
Why don't you know how many orcs you have killed?

ROWAN (snaps)
I don't know because we never counted the bodies.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER (ramp up - I want the truth)
Because there were too many?

ROWAN
Because they were too small! (beat and then all in a rush) Because it was before dawn and our officers told us to fire the first volley low because they were still asleep in their tents and then our artillery launched the oil and only then they told us to light our arrows for the second volley so they would be even more afraid. And I left that world behind me but I still think about it every goddamn day and every goddamn night it’s me in those burning tents. And I wish could say that I was following orders as if that was some sort of pardon but I know I was the one who fired the shot.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
Is there anyone in this world that you hate more than our kind?

ROWAN
Yes. (beat) Myself.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER (calmly)
Tell me what happened to the slaver.

ROWAN (Slow and beaten)
I don’t know. We had no plans to kill him. Doing that would hurt us and our cause. That is why we begged to stay his execution: to save our own skins.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
Who do you think killed him?

DESPAIR
That’s eight questions. You said five.

ROWAN (ignoring her)
I don’t know. We all heard Artie swear to kill him. Repeatedly. But we don’t know for certain that he did it. Yeah, he’s a good man and I wouldn’t put it past him.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
The Canidae is still a member of your party. Under your command.

ROWAN
I acknowledge that we came under your roof together, and even though I have no control over him, the killer's actions affect us all. I humbly beg your mercy to leave you and your son, and to depart your lands in peace, never to return.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
You had to remind me of my son, didn't you? (sigh) Your party has done me a great favor and a great insult. Go. Leave now and do not look back. So it is said.

TUSK and SHARP-TOOTH
So it shall be!

ROWAN
Thank you, gracious Boar-Mother.

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
And Sir Rowan?

ROWAN
Yes, ma'am?

[SFX: She punches Rowan in the face and he reacts]

CHIEF BOAR MOTHER
Never come back.

[acoustic pause]

[SFX: Day, forest sounds. Thunderstorm in the distance.]

GARNETT
Alright, love. We're safe.

ROWAN
O mickle is thy powerful grace.

[SFX: angelic healing choir]

Despair? Ronnie? I am very sorry you had to hear all that. I have done a lot of foul shit in my life. You have to know: everything I've done in the last few years is trying to make up for stuff that I can't undo.

RONNIE
I know it’s not everything, but it sounds like maybe you decided to start watering the flowers?

ROWAN
There is no amount of flowers that can begin to make up for this.

RONNIE
Maybe it’s not the flowers that change the world, Sir Rowan. Maybe it’s the act of watering them.

[SFX: some sort of twig snap]

ROWAN
Ow!

GARNETT
What is it?

ROWAN
Something in my bag poked me. Let’s stop for a bit.

[SFX: Footsteps stop and backpack coming off.]
[SFX: another peal of distant thunder.]

RONNIE
Ugh. Spring storms are the worst. We’re gonna get soaked.

ROWAN
Let me find this and we can get moving.

GARNETT
Hey, you never said what happened after you went to get your shield back from Tusk.

RONNIE
You’re right, I didn’t.

DESPAIR
That’s not what she meant.

RONNIE
I know. I promised that I wouldn’t tell anyone about what happened, but it was nothing bad.

ROWAN
Where are you, you little... Oh gods above and devils below. G, what did Laz say to look for in his stuff?

GARNETT
A green leather-bound book.

ROWAN
I was afraid you were going to say that.

[SFX: Rustling of bag.]

GARNETT, RONNIE, and DESPAIR gasp.

DESPAIR
What? Where did that come from? And why is it glowing?

ROWAN
The gods as my witness, I do not know how it got here. But it’s…

[SFX: Paper shuffling]

Well slap me twice. Look familiar, Despair?

DESPAIR
Oh! That’s more of that amazing art! Like what Severina found in Marley’s cloak! Like what’s in Thalestris’ book?

GARNETT
Finally! A piece that fits in the picture puzzle. Any chance the vault key is in there too?

ROWAN
No joy. And if Artie did take it, we couldn’t catch him with a horse.

GARNETT
ARGH! This is too much! It’s like a question-hydra. We answer one question and five more pop up in its place!

ROWAN
The further this goes, I’m starting to think that hydra problems call for hydra solutions.

DESPAIR
And how, exactly, does one kill a hydra, Lawson?

ROWAN
Burn it to the ground.

[acoustic pause]

[SFX: Close thunder, with heavy rain. Door opens, feet on wood floors, door closes.]

THEOPHANY BREWER
Sir Rowan and company! I was beginning to worry about you! You look like you've seen a hard fight!

ROWAN
Yeah, it's been a rough couple of days. (to the team) Y'all head up to the room, I've got some plans to make. (to Theophany) Goody Brewer, I hate to be the one to tell you this.

THEOPHANY BREWER
(sigh) Sheridan's dead, isn't he?

ROWAN
How could you tell?

THEOPHANY BREWER
Fighting always made him hungry. It didn't matter where he'd gone or what he was covered in, he would always come here first. There were times I would have to send his first course to the bath house, he stank so bad. But I thank you for the news.

ROWAN
There's one more thing you need to be aware of.

THEOPHANY BREWER
What's that, dear?

ROWAN
He requested a Traditional Dwarven funeral.

THEOPHANY BREWER (immediate angry shock)
Oh, seven hells!

ROWAN
I know, I know. The bastard tricked me into promising him anything.

THEOPHANY BREWER
What did you expect? Some light refreshments and a chorus of Kumbaya?

ROWAN
I don’t know? A pilgrimage to his mountain? At least his clan would be prepared for something like this.

THEOPHANY BREWER
Tonight?

ROWAN
Tonight’s best. And before you say anything, he insisted he had enough gold to cover it. And if there isn’t, I’ll pay it myself.

THEOPHANY BREWER
Do you know anything about Traditional Dwarven funerals?

ROWAN
Gods have mercy, I do.

THEOPHANY BREWER
Then you know the gold isn’t the problem. Ugh. I barely have time to start all the food and to tap the kegs.

ROWAN
I’ll get out of your way. But thank you, Goody Brewer. He always held you in high esteem. I appreciate your willingness to do this for him.

THEOPHANY BREWER
Willingness, my little elbow. You are paying me, Rowan Lawson, down to every last copper. (Calls out) Gaia!

GAIA BREWER (approaching from elsewhere)
Yes, mother?

THEOPHANY BREWER
Change of plans for tonight. Traditional Dwarven Funeral.

GAIA BREWER
Oh shit!

THEOPHANY BREWER
None of that foul language, young lady! Go! Pull the emergency shopping list. And we’ll see if we can hire some extra help.

GAIA BREWER
Serving boys and girls?

THEOPHANY BREWER
Gods help us, people to mop up the mess. Do it! Or else you'll be pushing a mop yourself.

GAIA BREWER (horrified)
You wouldn't!

THEOPHANY BREWER
I would. Go!

[Commercial break]

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

[SFX: “Every body dance now!”]

THE VOICE OF BARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE
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Sign up today at Bard Community College for Professor Otto’s “Irresistible Dance Class!”

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They said you couldn’t do it!
Now it’s time to prove them wrong.

[SFX: “Every body dance now!”]

[SFX: BCC signature power chord]

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

Part Two

[SFX: loud indoor crowd, loud music]

[NOTE: Every single person in this scene is uncomfortably drunk.]

DESPAIR
I don't feel so good.

GARNETT
Only a little longer, D!

DESPAIR
You told me "only a little longer" like an hour ago.

GARNETT
That was five minutes ago.

DESPAIR
(even more miserable noises)

GARNETT
Hold it in, D. For Sheridan's sake. You gotta hold it in.

ROWAN
Hey. Kitchen's running at full steam. Everyone still standing? Where's Ronnie?

GARNETT
Ronnie is in Ranger time out. I sent her outside to think about her choices and to come back when she wants to make better ones.

ROWAN
I thought ginger beer didn't have any alcohol in it?

GARNETT
It's no that. More like a cocktail of too much sugar and survivor's guilt with a float of an unrequited crush. (beat) Hon, you need to start this. Soon.

ROWAN
Gods dammit, I hate this!

GARNETT
He saved our asses and you promised him.

ROWAN
I know, I know.

DESPAIR
Sir Ronald, when does the room stop spinning?

ROWAN
Is it spinning sunwise or widdershins?

DESPAIR
Sunwise? I think?

ROWAN
When it changes to widdershins, get outside. But take heart, the funeral is starting soon.

DESPAIR
THIS ISN'T THE FUNERAL? WHAT IS THIS? I have dranken more tonight than I have ever drunken before. (fake whisper) And don't tell Goody Brewer, but her whiskey tastes like butt.

UNIDENTIFIED
True story.

ROWAN
Focus. I need you to trust me: This is going to be weird. But this is what he asked for. Alright?

DESPAIR
Alright.

GAIA BREWER
Excuse me, are you Mistress Despair?

DESPAIR
I think so?

GAIA BREWER
I'm sorry to bother you but your girlfriend is being awfully flirtatious with me.

[SFX: The music stops, conversation lulls just as:]

DESPAIR
Wha? ARGH! No girlfriend! She is not my girlfriend! She is never, ever, ever going to be… (beat – RONNIE gasps) She's right behind me, isn't she?

[RONNIE bursts into tears, her footsteps running away, door slams]

GAIA BREWER
Awkward! I think I hear my mother calling me.

ROWAN
Alright! Listen up, you lot! Quiet down! Quiet!

THEOPHANY BREWER
SHUT UP!

[SFX: crowd noise dies down but the music keeps playing]

THEOPHANY BREWER
Faltermeyer! Stop now or the only way you'll be able to play that recorder is when you fart!

[SFX: Music stops immediately with a plaintive squeak.]

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
Yes, ma'am!

ROWAN
Comrades! Before we begin, I will remind you of your oaths. We will hold secret the rites we witness tonight, or else may every god, goddess, and deity of indeterminate gender have mercy on your souls! (laughter) We are here tonight because Sheridan Jameson Smithwick has gone to meet his maker.

[NOTE: From now until her big speech, dialogue is very fast paced. Despair will be absolutely horrified at what people are saying. CJ: Ad lib some "hey!" "that's not right!" etc.]

TARIQA SEVERINA
You sayin' he's dead?

ROWAN
Yes, you drunk fool. He has ceased to be!

GARNETT
He’s expired!

THEOPHANY BREWER
Kicked the bucket!

CORPORAL GRAY
Shuffled off his mortal coil!

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
He’s joined the invisible choir.

TARIQA SEVERINA
He is an ex-Dwarf!

GAIA BREWER
Gone to meet his maker!

ROWAN
No repeats! You! Drink!

CROWD
Drink! Drink! Drink!

TARIQA SEVERINA
But he can’t be dead!

ROWAN
Why not?

TARIQA SEVERINA
He owed me two gold crowns!

GAIA BREWER
Two? He owed me ten!

CORPORAL GRAY
It was his turn to muck out the stalls in the stable!

THEOPHANY BREWER
He was gonna fix my roof!

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
He was gonna teach me to sing!

GARNETT
Are you kidding? He sings like a tomcat looking to get laid.

ROWAN
WRONG! Past tense! He sang! Drink!

CROWD
Drink! Drink! Drink!

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
How’d he die?

GARNETT
I heard he got caught with a merchant’s daughter.

CORPORAL GRAY
I heard he ran from a fight.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
Well, you know he didn’t drown in a bathtub.

TARIQA SEVERINA
He was a pig!

GAIA BREWER
No! Pigs smell better after they’re dead. He’s not bacon!

THEOPHANY BREWER
He sure ate enough of it.

GARNETT
And how he drank! I don’t know how you kept up with him.

THEOPHANY BREWER
After the second round, I served him horse piss. He couldn’t tell the difference.

DESPAIR (crying and angry-sober)
This is horrible! All of you stop what you’re saying! You’re wrong. Wrong, wrong, wrong! Each and every one of you is wrong. He never ran from a fight in his life! And he wouldn’t chase a skirt, or a pair of pants for that matter. He was honest and he was truthful and he was good! And it breaks me inside to know that he’s not coming back. I don’t know why you would say all these mean and horrible lies about him!

GARNETT
Oh honey.

ROWAN
You couldn’t have timed that better if you’d tried.

DESPAIR
What are you saying?

ROWAN
This is a Traditional Dwarven Funeral. More than the booze and the food, a funeral is supposed to include stuff like this.

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
He loved poetry, so we try to find the most creative ways to say he’s gone.

GARNETT
And those lies weren’t random stories, D. Each one of those things was the exact opposite of true.

GAIA BREWER
It’s true: I owed him two crowns.

CORPORAL GRAY
He used to keep me company while I mucked out the stable.

THEOPHANY BREWER
And he fixed my roof!

FABULOUS FALTERMEYER JUNIOR
And he had a lovely singing voice.

GARNETT
Oh, he did.

DESPAIR
I’m so confused!

ROWAN
When we go, we lose control over what people will say about us. But if we live our lives well, there will always be someone who will hold our memories up even when it feels like all the world is trying to tear it down. Yeah, it's fun to get poetical or to make up tall tales, but there's always someone that will speak up, just like you did. THAT is the point of a Traditional Dwarven Funeral.

DESPAIR
To defend someone who can't defend themselves?

GARNETT
To tell the whole world that you'll be missed.

ROWAN
He was brave, and he was smart, and he was sober, and he was kind. We are all richer for knowing him and we are poorer in his passing. AND we each carry a bit of him with us: a memory, a kindness, a lesson. Those bits are like sparks flying from a fire. We must shelter those sparks and carry them wherever we go; because in doing so, we bring his light into this darkening world.

DESPAIR
But! That's! I'm! Winder-shins! (puke)

ROWAN
The good news is: these things can drag out for days with the boasting and the poetry. But you spoke up, so it ends now.

DESPAIR (weakly)
Oh, thank you.

ROWAN
And you spoke up first. So, absent another claim, you inherit his stuff: his treasure and his obligations.

DESPAIR
(very small voice) And what's the bad news?

GAIA BREWER
You get mop duty!

[acoustic pause]

[SFX: Indoor, day. We hear Garnett's voice through the door.]

GARNETT
Here's Sheridan's room. Give me the key.

[SFX: Key turning in a lock, wooden door squeaks open. All voices normal. Door closes with a thud.]

DESPAIR
(whimpering) Why is everything so loud?

GARNETT
Awww… Is this your first hangover?

DESPAIR
(yells) THIS (reconsiders) this is what a hangover feels like?

ROWAN
'Fraid so, kiddo.

DESPAIR
(whine) But why is the sun yelling at me?

[ROWAN bursts out laughing]

DESPAIR
Don't laugh at me!

ROWAN
I'm not laughing at you, I'm laughing near you. Here. Drink some more tea. It'll help.

DESPAIR
Are you sure?

ROWAN
I have had professional training in these matters. But if you're going to hoot with the owls, you still gotta be able to scream with the eagles the next morning.

DESPAIR
Does that even make sense to a sober person?

GARNETT
It's a lousy metaphor, hon.

ROWAN
I guess you had to be there. Anyway. We're here. Not exactly the bastion I was hoping for, and definitely not how I wanted to acquire one. But it's up to you now, Despair.

DESPAIR
What am I supposed to do?

ROWAN
This room and everything in it is now yours. You can keep it, you can sell it, you can drag it outside the station walls, light it on fire, and dance a merry jig.

GARNETT
But you have to know what it is, first. And we'll help with that.

DESPAIR
Oh good.

GARNETT
And not to belabor the point, but if you'd had that conversation with Ronnie sooner, she would have joined us today to help, too.

DESPAIR
I know, I know. You were right.

GARNETT
It's not about being right, it's about being kind.

ROWAN
I'm impressed: Dusted and organized? Hell, his bed is made. This place could pass barracks inspection.

DESPAIR
Why is that a surprise?

GARNETT
Bachelor quarters are often a Constitution save versus throwing up.

DESPAIR
(gulp) Please, don't say throwing up again, please?

ROWAN
I promise: no more jokes. Sorting through someone’s stuff is hard enough with a clear head. Have a seat; we’ll get started, as quietly as we can.

GARNETT
Ro, you want to start with that bookshelf by the fire grate? He said that other key worked on the footlocker, yeah?

ROWAN
Yeah. Woof. Guy clearly liked to read.

[SFX: pages turning]

And write! These are journals! Maps? Oh wow.

DESPAIR
Be extra careful with his trunk.

GARNETT
What is it? He wouldn’t trap his own gear in his own room?

DESPAIR
Don’t think it’s a trap, but there’s definitely an aetherial glow. More like an aetherial shout.

GARNETT
Good to know. Thank you. (beat) Checks out so far. Here goes nothing.

[SFX: Key turns in the lock and the chest squeaks open]

GARNETT
That’s a relief. Looks like… clothes. An old wool sweater; pretty knitting though.

DESPAIR
Oh, this is so nice! Do you think he’d mind if I wore it?

GARNETT
It is literally yours, D.

DESPAIR
I know, but do you think he’d mind?

GARNETT
If it keeps you warm, I’m sure he’d be thrilled. But isn’t that a little much? It’s starting to warm up.

DESPAIR
I’ve been getting colder and colder lately.

GARNETT (like an unboxing video, as you find the stuff)
Well, there’s plenty of clothes, an old hand axe, and a really nice pair of boots. Ooo! Vimes Boot Company. Quality stuff. Think your feet might fit?

DESPAIR
Tiefling, remember? Hooves.

GARNETT
Right. Sorry. Forgot. Hey, Ro? He said there was something special in the trunk?

ROWAN
He said there was enough to cover the funeral plus some?

GARNETT
That’s weird because… Hold on. Oh hello, you sneaky little false floor! It’s… Sweet mercy grace, we have our answer to your aetherial glow.

DESPAIR
What is it?

GARNETT
See how deep I’m reaching? The false floor opens to a… trunk of holding?

DESPAIR
Maybe it’s for someone who stays in one place for a long time? What else is in there?

GARNETT
Let’s see. That’s…

[SFX: large jingling bag of coins)

GARNETT
Judging by recent experience, that's at least a thousand coins. Oh! Dwarven – you can tell by the hole in the middle.

ROWAN
Hey, that reminds me: we have to go back to Sunnyvale to get the Guild's money.

GARNETT
All in due time. The next bag is… mystery of mysteries, that is the biggest diamond I have ever seen in my life. (Heh) with a calling card for a church in Hightower.

DESPAIR
He kept a resurrection-grade gem in his footlocker? But that means…

GARNETT
Don't get your hopes up. There are a thousand goblins between him and us. What's next? A… Oh.

DESPAIR
Oh? What do you… (reading the title) Beardless Dwarves Illust… (click) Hunh. I didn't think he'd be into that.

GARNETT
I'm going to go wash my hands. I'm almost afraid to think what he would keep underneath that.

DESPAIR
I'll take a look. (beat) That's weird.

GARNETT (from a distance)
What'd you find?

DESPAIR
It's… I don't know. I mean, it's a cloak, obviously. Really heavy weight. But that brooch! It looks like…

[SFX: Necklace pulled overhead]

GARNETT
Yes! It's the same silver circle but that looks like an emerald in the middle.

DESPAIR
It’s so pretty.

GARNETT
It’s curious. Hey Ro? Can you come in here, please?

ROWAN
G, you are not going to believe the books this guy had on his shelves! He had histories going back to [stops cold] What is that?

DESPAIR
That’s what I was about to ask you.

ROWAN (distracted or snaps, uncertain)
Where did you find that?

GARNETT
It was pinned to an old cloak, (does it mean something special?)

ROWAN (interrupting)
Let me see that!

DESPAIR
The silver circle looks like the amulets we got from the barracks, only it has a gem inside. It’s (really pretty.)

ROWAN (interrupting)
A rank insignia. (beat) You absolute bastard!

DESPAIR
What is it? Is this another part of the funeral? You can have it.

ROWAN (ignoring her)
But that means… Oh, I underestimated you, Major Smithwick.

GARNETT
Rowan, hey! Talk to us. What are you seeing that we’re not seeing?

ROWAN (back to here and now)
Close everything up. Lock up the trunk. We’re leaving. Now.

DESPAIR
Leaving? Like back to the Middle Finger?

GARNETT
Not back to the Boar Forest again.

ROWAN
No. Temple Pass.

[commercial break]

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

Part Three

[SFX: Outdoors, day. Nickering of horses.]
[SFX: two "ploink" sounds, followed by two gong sounds. Horses approaching and stopping.]

GARNETT
Rowan! ROWAN LAWSON! Light of my life and pain in my ass. STOP!

ROWAN
What?

GARNETT
We can only go so much further on your hunch. You have to tell us what's going on.

ROWAN
Can you walk with me? You know where I'm headed.

DESPAIR
That's the problem, Lawson. We were forbidden from leaving the Gauntlet Valley. We are getting REALLY close to doing exactly that.

ROWAN
I know where I'm going. We're safe. From that.

GARNETT
Again with the doom and "I know what I'm doing" crap.

DESPAIR
Back home, I'd say you were a couple of steps away from litch-ing out and calling us foolish mortals.

ROWAN
Alright, fine. But walk with me, please? Allow me to recap: Shart appears to have been a high ranking member of the Order of the Silver Circle.

DESPAIR
But you made it sound like it was forever ago?

GARNETT
Depending on who you ask, two hundred and fifty years can be multiple generations or undergrad work. He said himself he was pushing three hundred. If he came here immediately after he got his journeyman's blessing, it fits.

ROWAN
So, the stories of the order's exploits really stopped about fifty years ago. And he said he wasted decades of his life adventuring in the Boar Forest and drinking all the profits he made.

GARNETT
When did he say that?

ROWAN
One of the many times he tried to get me to stop drinking. He said, "I had the time to kill, so I drank it to death. You don't have forty years, Rowan." And he said he'd been sober ten years. So, maybe?

DESPAIR
But how do you connect him to the order?

ROWAN
That emerald brooch is a rank insignia. The old epics are full of gemstone references. "With sapphire eyes and diamond blade" or "upon his breast, an emerald." (beat) Alright, we're here. Let me grab a rock. Everyone stand back. Things are going to get a little batty. (exertion noise)

[SFX: Rock crashes against other rocks. Sound of bats screeching.]
[SFX: Rustling around in a backpack]

One hooded lantern.

[SFX: tick, tick, tick FOOMPH. Followed by a sword drawn from sheath.]

Everyone follow your favorite meat shield.

[SFX: transition to cave sounds]

GARNETT
That's a pretty thin string to connect all those dots, love.

ROWAN
That wasn't the only thing. He said something else right before he pulled aggro on the Ghost-Talker. He said, "One of these days, you're going to have to stop fighting for your lives, and start fighting for light." (beat) and here we are.

[SFX: He sheathes his sword, you hear some necklaces jingle]

One for me, and I got one for you, too, G. Despair, please pull your amulet out.

DESPAIR
Step ahead of you, Lawson.

ROWAN
And now for the big test.

[SFX: Sword drawn]

GARNETT
Don't forget about that pressure plate.

ROWAN
Thank you, love.

GARNETT
Thank you for remembering who you're talking to. Keep connecting those dots.

ROWAN
First, pause to notice that mural we walked past last time.

DESPAIR
I knew it! It IS the same as the one in the goblin temple!

ROWAN
Notice that dwarf in the front rank?

GARNETT
You're not suggesting that's Sheridan, are you?

ROWAN
Same relative height. Same colored hair. And look: you can make out the emerald on his armor.

DESPAIR
Lawson, I want to believe you and that's a couple of brush strokes of very old paint. We need more.

ROWAN
So, at the funeral last night, one of the last things I said was that we have to remember him because that way we bring his light into a darkening world. And see here? The motto in foot-high silver letters.

DESPAIR
"Kindle the (light)"

ROWAN (interrupting)
Wait, wait, wait. Let me get in position first.

GARNETT
Position?

ROWAN
Those footprints Lotus found? Last piece to the puzzle: That inscription on Siegfried's sarcophagus says "If you would keep this you must first give it to me." If I would keep my word, I have to give him my word.

DESPAIR
Got it.

ROWAN
Left knee up, right knee bent to the ground, sword drawn. (deep breath) I vow to kindle the light, shelter the light, and to be the light in this darkening world.

[SFX: Gong and choir]

GARNETT
And that gets you what, exactly?

[SFX: A very obvious and audible CLICK]

DESPAIR
That noise came from the statue! From his hands!

ROWAN
Excuse me while I climb on your grave, Siegfried.

[SFX: Sheaths his sword]

GARNETT
Remember the last time we tried that? We were asked to leave by about a thousand ghosts.

ROWAN
Yes, I do. But last time, I didn’t have thi

[SFX: KRAKOOM! Followed by a slurp? I’ll find something.]

GARNETT
ROWAN!

[SFX: Body hits the floor]

Ro, Ro, Ro? Baby? Wake up. Wake up, Rowan! Wake up, godsdammit. This isn’t how this is supposed to end, Ro! Oh! Pakhet please! I beg you, take one of mine for his, please! Ro. Speak to me! Please?

[SFX: As she continues, her voice begins to get muffled and fade, like the listener is getting farther and farther away. Following that final “please” is a snickt, like a pair of scissors cutting a thread.]

[acoustic pause]

[SFX: Outdoors, day, lots of birdsong. Give people a clutch/shift.]

GAVIN GREENE
Hey! You there! Get up!

[ROWAN gasps awake with a start]

GAVIN GREENE
On your feet, soldier! Sleep is for the weak.

ROWAN
Yeah, yeah. Next week, I know.

GAVIN GREENE
(chuckles) You’ve heard that before, eh? You must’ve sacked out pretty hard after you arrived. I’m glad you’re here. But if you managed to get past the picket, the Drake is going to have some explaining to do.

ROWAN
The Drake?

GAVIN GREENE
Caradoc Drake is the night watch. Big wall of a guy. Dumber than a bag of hammers but he’s got all the senses of a dog and a cat stitched together.

ROWAN
Oh, I would remember meeting someone with that name.

GAVIN GREENE
How do you mean?

ROWAN
He’s named after… Never mind.

GAVIN GREENE
Come on, then. If you’re here for the great work, let’s get you to the old man. Follow me.

[SFX: Footsteps]

ROWAN
You didn’t happen to see a Tabaxi or a Tiefling this morning, did you?

GAVIN GREENE
(laughs) Friend, I know this seems like the middle of nowhere, because it is. But no, I haven’t seen any Tieflings or Tabaxis or Tarrasques, for that matter.

ROWAN
This looks… strange. It. This looks like Temple Pass.

GAVIN GREENE
Temple Pass? Where’s that at?

ROWAN
I… Where are we?

GAVIN GREENE
In case you missed it in the recruiting paperwork, soldier: this is Krusk Pass. Damn dirty orc name, but we're thinking about changing that.

ROWAN
Wait, what?

GAVIN GREENE
(calling out) Excuse me, Commander!

[SFX: Footsteps stop. Greene salutes.]

GAVIN GREENE
Morning, sir. New volunteer arrived in the night. Apparently, he managed to sneak past The Drake. I'll talk to him, sir.

COMMANDER
Yes, please do. Thank you, Greene.

GAVIN GREENE
Yes, sir. (leaves and turns back) Hey, new guy: find me after you get settled in. I'll show you around. Name's Gavin.

ROWAN
Thanks. Wait, Gavin Greene?

GAVIN GREENE
Yeah? Do I own you money?

COMMANDER
You should be more worried if he has a sister recently bitten by a stork. Move along, Greene. (beat) And who are you, son?

ROWAN
I… My name is Rowan, sir.

COMMANDER
Rowan! Any relation to Rowan the Tall from Deepwater?

ROWAN
No sir. I'm the son of Lawrence, from Sand Point on the eastern shore. Most folks call me Lawson.

COMMANDER
Too bad. Rowan the Tall's a good man (beat) and the old fart still owes me two hundred crown from a card game. But no matter. It's good to have you with us. I'm heading toward the quartermaster's tent. I'll walk you over so you can get your billet and your uniform.

ROWAN
Thank you, sir.

[SFX: Footsteps again]

COMMANDER
Your armor looks to be in good shape. Your sword still pointy?

ROWAN
Pointy where it counts, sir. Never been dropped.

COMMANDER
That's one less set we have to buy, tender mercies. Prior military then? You're not deserting, are you?

ROWAN
Not deserting, sir. And yes, prior service. Twenty years with the…

COMMANDER
Twenty years! You got Elvish blood in you?

ROWAN
Not that I know of, sir.

COMMANDER
I had to ask. Those pointy-eared bastards are everywhere this season. No matter. You look young is all I meant.

ROWAN
But, elves? I don't understand…

COMMANDER (rambling on, not noticing)
Unless you've got some paperwork to back up that military claim, you'll start out in the next cadre class. Until then, you'll act as gopher. It's standard squire scut work, only you'll have two dozen men running you ragged, and they'll each want their job done first.

ROWAN
Yes, sir. I'm familiar. But sir, I…

COMMANDER (distracted)
Oh, I’m sorry. My brain is scattered this morning: I’m Siegfried. I’m in charge here. Welcome to the Order of the Silver Circle.

ROWAN
Sigfried? But your left hand?

COMMANDER (confused)
What ABOUT my left hand, son?

ROWAN
It’s flesh and… (click) Oh, shit.

COMMANDER SIEGFRIED
Mind the language, son.

[end credits]