

Kingmaker Chapter Nine: Pink Seagrass Blues

SOUND: Typewriter sounds. Contemplative piano music plays underneath the narration.

HISTORIAN: Those of you who have been listening to this historical account since the beginning may be wondering at this point as to the identity of Iyer and Winterlich's fleshcrafter associate. Colette often found herself wondering the same thing during her travels. Early on, she made a point of fastidiously keeping track of the days she spent in the van, using a notebook she liberated from one of the many crates of stolen and contraband merchandise. But as the weeks passed, and the landscape around them blossomed with the arrival of spring, Colette found herself less and less able to keep track of how much time had gone by. The second month of her adventure would have come and gone without her noticing had it not been for Telesphore and Eisen surprising her with a cake.

TELESPHORE and EISEN: Happy Anniversary!

SOUND: Plate being put down on the table.

HISTORIAN: The cake was a spiced coffee cake, a type that was very popular in the region at the time, coated with chocolate that was roughly the same shade as Colette's hair. In the centre of the cake was a large blue crystal sculpted out of a mix of artificially coloured icing and white chocolate.

COLETTE: Ah, it's a cake. Depicting the most traumatic aspect of my life...

EISEN: And your reason for meeting us!

COLETTE: They are in fact closely connected.

TELESPHORE: Shall I cut you a slice of your head?

COLETTE: It'd be a shame to ruin the decoration so soon-

EISEN: Yes.

TELESPHORE: Already cutting it.

SOUND: Cake being plated.

EISEN: (mouth full) It's amazing how light you make this considering how much copper sulphide is in the blue frosting. (muttering) God, it's delicious.

TELESPHORE: It's a secret I learned in my time as a royal chef.

COLETTE: So, what's the occasion?

EISEN: Oh, have you not looked at the calendar lately? It's April 19th.

COLETTE: God, has it been two months already?

TELESPHORE: Hard to believe, isn't it?

COLETTE: You promised you'd take me to your fleshcrafter friend in Ankerstadt, and that was *two months ago*.

TELESPHORE: ...Yes, and we're celebrating, with the cake.

COLETTE: Why on earth has it taken two months?

EISEN: Are we that unbearable to be around?

COLETTE: I mean...not as much anymore. But still, it doesn't take *two months* to get from Champignon to Ankerstadt.

EISEN: Well, I'm sorry we didn't completely re-write our route for you, but we're busy men, we had things to take care of. I mean...we had to go to Vienna for the unicorn statue, we had to go to Hanover for the toxic fabric dye, we had to make a detour to Serabois for the cake ingredients...

TELESPHORE: But now all of those things have been taken care of, and we're headed north for a delivery anyway, so getting you to Ankerstadt has moved up to the top of our list of priorities.

COLETTE: Really?

TELESPHORE: Yes, it's nearly the end of your tenure with us.

EISEN: We'll get Jenny to reverse the fusion spell, Tel and I will pocket the Kingmaker, and then you will be free to do ...whatever the hell you want to do with the rest of your life.

COLETTE: Oh.

HISTORIAN: The group shared a moment of contemplative silence as the van continued to travel north towards Ankerstadt.

HISTORIAN: It surprises many people to find out that the largest maritime city in the VSR is not located on the shores of the Obersee, the large lake to the south that also shares borders with Switzerland and Austria. Ankerstadt is in fact in the north of the country, on a lake known as Fremdersee. The Fremdersee, which is not connected to either the Rhine or the Danube, is often, reductively, described as the nautical version of the Seltsamwald, having been created by a particularly large portal to the Kehrseite that connected on the other side to an ocean. The portal was naturally unstable and only open for a short period between 1580 and 1583, but in that time the low-lying farmland on the Earth side was completely flooded with salt water. And,

much like how the portals in the Seltsamwald brought with them mantelopes, cerphons, snakeberries, and all manner of other diverse flora and fauna, so too was the Fremdersee quickly populated by a number of aquatic species native to the Kehrseite.

HISTORIAN: One of these species was the pinnipent, which was discovered to have blubber that, when rendered, could burn up to three times as long as the oil from any known whale species. Furthermore, its colour-changing fur made for a striking addition to any outfit. Starting in the late 18th century, the pinnipent trade exploded in Valor, as well as nearby Luxembourg. This economic revitalisation of the area prompted the construction of the floating city of Ankerstadt in 1879. The pinnipent serves as not only the city's main export, but as its official mascot, as travellers can always tell that they are getting close to the wharf when they hear the creature's very distinctive calls.

SOUND: A real wonky walrus-esque noise.

EISEN: Sounds like we're almost there.

TELESPHORE: We'll park the van here and you can put all the usual protective spells on it before we get on the 2pm ferry.

COLETTE: I've never been on a boat before.

EISEN: We'll bring some ginger root with us just in case.

SOUND: Magical car lock. The gang walks to the ferry, a boat horn blasts in the distance.

HISTORIAN: Ankerstadt is often called the eighth wonder of the modern world, as no other feat of maritime engineering before or since has ever been quite as ambitious. It is located at the precise middle-point of the Fremdersee, anchored to the bottom and kept afloat by a complex system of ballasts and magic. The view from the ferry as one approaches the city is quite spectacular, unfortunately Colette was unable to appreciate its intricate technical majesty, as she was taken with a profound bout of seasickness.

EISEN: I told you to bring the ginger.

TELESPHORE: (defensive) I'm sorry, but I had to use the last of it for the cake.

COLETTE: (coughs) It's okay, I think I'm alright. Are we almost there?

EISEN: Just about. Hang in there, diamond-head.

SOUND: Boat horn. They disembark from the ferry and step onto the streets of Ankerstadt. Quirky industrial music plays.

TELESPHORE: And remember, while you're here, your name is Gina Hofer.

COLETTE: The cops are still looking for me after two months? I'd have given up and assumed I was dead by now. What name does Jenny know me by?

BEAT

COLETTE: You did call ahead to say you were bringing me, right?

TELESPHORE: Well...

COLETTE: Oh, come on, we were at a telegraph office not that long ago! We've been to places with telephones, too!

EISEN: I guess it just slipped our minds. But it doesn't matter! Jenny and I go way back- she's *always* got time for me.

SOUND: The city ambience fades out. Ethereal, moody string music fades in.

HISTORIAN: The fleshcrafter commonly known as 'Dead-Arm Jenny' was born Genevra Genevieve Ostertag in 1855, in the small hamlet of Weidedorf, just outside of Taurea, to a family of textile mill employees. Though she was an adept mage, she never pursued the craft in a professional capacity. Rather, she was self-taught, and used fleshcraft as an enhancement to her real passion- the performing arts. Jenny had enjoyed quite a career in her twenties and thirties as Valor's most unique and intriguing opera singer, able to seamlessly transform into any character, and manipulate her lungs and vocal cords to achieve consistently perfect pitch. Her career was bolstered by popularity among the Feverites- her ethereal talents, coupled with her sharp mind and working-class background, made her the perfect idealised vision of their bright, socialist future. She was advertised as the voice of the revolution- her face featured in propaganda artwork, and her sold-out international tour helped raise vital funds to support the 1886 rebellion.

HISTORIAN: However, after the Feverites secured more power, Jenny found that her sharp mind and equally sharp tongue frequently landed her in hot water. This came to a head in 1895, when she was invited to the inauguration of President Gerlach Rothbart, and jokingly accused him of rigging the election. This comment was widely published in Valorian papers and sparked a national outrage that prompted Jenny's image to be scrubbed from the history of the Feverite party. With her singing career in shambles, Jenny fell back on her other great skill, fleshcraft. While she may not have had the accolades of someone like Ariadne, she was still incredibly skilled, and even dabbled in the outlawed sub-practice of necromancy, hence her nickname. In 1911, while she still did the odd performance in some smaller cabarets in Luxembourg, her main work was providing magical services out of the Crow's Nest Hotel- Ankerstadt's cheapest and only inn.

SOUND: Eisen dings the bell. Pause.

EISEN: Hello? Where the bloody hell is everybody?

SOUND: He dings it several times. Imogen, the clerk, enters from the back room.

IMOGEN: Thank you for making sure the bell still works, but I did hear you the first time.

HISTORIAN: The owner and operator of the Crow's Nest Hotel was a woman by the name of Imogen Haberkorn, who was widely known around Ankerstadt for her blunt and unpleasant demeanour. As the Crow's Nest Hotel was the only inn in a town that saw little tourism and was surrounded by water on all sides, she felt she could afford to have less-than-stellar customer service.

EISEN: Good afternoon, my associates and I would like to rent a room.

IMOGEN: Just one? Are you sure?

TELESPHORE: How much is a room?

IMOGEN: 20 marks.

TELESPHORE: That's reasonable, I think we could shell out for a second room.

EISEN: Alright, two rooms it is.

IMOGEN: I just checked the book and we only have one.

EISEN: But you said-

IMOGEN: I can give you a room with one queen-sized bed, or a room with two double beds.

EISEN: So there are two rooms?

IMOGEN: No, just two beds.

EISEN: I don't understand how that works.

IMOGEN: That's none of your concern, sir.

EISEN: Also, how are you completely booked? There is nobody here.

IMOGEN: Do you want a room or not?

EISEN: Yes. We'll take the one with two beds.

IMOGEN: That'll be 40 marks for the first night.

EISEN: I thought you said it was 20!

IMOGEN: 20 per bed, not per room.

EISEN: Alright, we'll worry about rooms later. Does Jenny Ostertag still live in suite 217?

IMOGEN: She doesn't want to see you.

EISEN: How do you know that? I didn't give you my name.

IMOGEN: There's a photograph of you behind the desk here with 'Do not let this man into suite 217' written on the back.

TELESPHORE: She *always has time for you*, hmm?

EISEN: Oh, shut up. (to Imogen) Listen- what's your name?

IMOGEN: I'm not telling you.

EISEN: *Oh, for f...* Doesn't matter. It's an emergency, more or less, and I think I'll be going up to the suite anyway. Are those the room keys on the wall behind you?

IMOGEN: Yes, but don't get any ideas.

SOUND: Knife being drawn and stuck into the table.

HISTORIAN: Imogen Haberkorn was also well known for her habit of hiding a bowie knife in her combinations. The men of Ankerstadt did not like to be around her for very long.

BEAT.

EISEN: (scoffs) You really *don't* know me, do you?

SOUND: Magic metal noise as Eisen pulls the knife out of the desk.

EISEN: There's your knife, and....

SOUND: Magic metal noise

EISEN: A room key, for my associates and I. I'll be back in a bit with those 20 marks. C'mon, gents.

SOUND: Footsteps out of the room.

HISTORIAN: As the trio left reception and headed for the stairs, Imogen and Colette briefly shared a moment of eye contact. Imogen reached out from behind the desk and grabbed Colette by the arm, staring at her with a frightening intensity.

IMOGEN: I recognise you.

COLETTE: Do you? Perhaps we were in the same class at St. Rita's. You have the *aura* of someone who had behavioural problems as a child...

IMOGEN: I was homeschooled. I don't know exactly where I know you from, but I'll remember. Mark my words.

BEAT

COLETTE: Okay?

IMOGEN: Now get lost.

SOUND: Footsteps that get faster as they go away.

SOUND: Knocking. "The Song that Reached my Heart" by Arabella Fields plays through the door.

EISEN: (sing-song) Jenny?

SOUND: He knocks again.

EISEN: (singing) *I'm lookin' for a Jenny-y-y....*

SOUND: Doorknob rattles.

HISTORIAN: Eisen tried the door and found it unlocked. As soon as it was open, Jenny greeted him with the tip of a bone sword pointed right at his windpipe.

SOUND: Jenny's arm turns into a blade.

EISEN: Woah, woah, easy, easy-

JENNY: How *dare* you walk in on a lady while she's in a state of undress?

EISEN: You're the one with your door unlocked.

JENNY: What the hell are you doing here, Eisen?

EISEN: Well, I have a job for you, Jenny my dear. It's a bit of a weird one, but you're the only person I could've turned to.

JENNY: And you didn't think to call ahead? We get telegrams and letters sent in from the shore, it's not like there's no way to reach me out here.

EISEN: I thought about it, I really did. The last two months have just been totally all over the place. You know how it is- the life of a travelling merchant is never without excitement, as Telesphore always likes to say.

JENNY: And where is he?

TELESPHORE: In the hall, hoping you don't slice my partner's throat and get blood all over this nice carpet.

JENNY: (cordial) Telesphore!

TELESPHORE: Hello, Genevra.

SOUND: They do a gay little double cheek kiss.

JENNY: It's been ages, how *are* you? Come in, come in.

EISEN: (grumbling) You're always so nice to *him*.

JENNY: You know why that is. Now, Telesphore, darling, what is this weird job you boys have come to me about?

TELESPHORE: Well, it's about our friend, Miss Geise.

COLETTE: Hi.

JENNY: Miss Geise? *Colette* Geise? The name I've seen on about a hundred wanted posters in the past month?

EISEN: More or less.

COLETTE: Don't believe anything you've heard, it was an accident.

SOUND: The song comes to an end and Jenny takes the record off the gramophone while she talks.

JENNY: Oh, relax, darling, I work mostly with criminals, all the best actresses do. Let me guess- you want me to alter your face so you can flee the country unnoticed.

COLETTE: Not...exactly. Though that would probably come in handy later. Alright- promise you won't be too freaked out.

SOUND: Colette takes her hat off.

JENNY: Dear mother of God, is that the Kingmaker?

COLETTE: Yeah. It's been stuck there for two months. The boys promised me they'd take me to you to get it taken out, as long as I let them keep it afterwards.

JENNY: I had better get a cut of whatever you make afterwards.

EISEN: Of course, I'd never dream of leaving you empty-handed.

JENNY: So, Colette, you want me to take a look at your head?

COLETTE: Yes.

JENNY: And then, if I fix you up, what do you plan on doing?

COLETTE: I'm not sure? I'm a little scared about this whole thing. I'll be free to go after the diamond's out of my head, but I don't know what I'll do with myself at that point.

JENNY: You're worried you won't be able to go back to normal, hm? I know all about that, darling. Here, sit down, let's talk. Have a smoke.

COLETTE: Oh, uh...thanks.

SOUND: She lights a cigarette for herself and Colette. Ethereal, moody string music fades in.

JENNY: Do you know who I am? (laughs wryly) Of course not- you're too young. Oh, to have the ignorance of youth.

SOUND: She takes a drag.

JENNY: I used to be the best opera singer in the country. The Feverites loved me. The people loved me. They called me the Black Aphrodite. I was spoken of in the same breath as Jenny Lind and Marguerite Baux- I was headed places. But it all came crashing down because of some stupid little joke. Do you know what I said to the president before he saw fit to blacklist me? I said "I would've voted for you twice, not that you needed anyone else to do that." I didn't even mean it seriously, but someone put it in the paper and suddenly I'm getting dropped by every venue, directors refuse to work with me- all because I lightly implied that the election was rigged. Which it absolutely was, for the record, they all are.

COLETTE: I'm sorry that happened to you.

JENNY: Pity me not- I detest being pitied. I mean, sure, singing was my passion and it *hurt* to not be able to perform anymore, it really, truly did- but over time I've come to see it as a sort of wiping clean of the slate. I'm glad for getting my schedule freed up, because if I'd never seriously gotten into fleshcraft, I'd never have discovered that I had a knack for necromancy.

COLETTE: But....that's illegal?

EISEN: So is everything Telesphore and I do- don't act so scandalised.

COLETTE: There's a difference between stealing and *raising the dead*.

JENNY: Oh, I can't raise the dead, not fully- I can only raise parts. That's why they call me Dead Arm Jenny. Observe-

SOUND: Glove being removed.

HISTORIAN: In preparing to examine Colette's head, Jenny removed the long satin glove over her left arm and revealed, to Colette's shock, that it was completely stripped of flesh up to the elbow, leaving only bone and some small pieces of connective tissue.

SOUND: Bones rattling.

COLETTE: What happened to it?

EISEN: You don't want to know. Moving on-

JENNY: Yes she does. Well, *someone* in this room, who shall remain nameless, even though you probably know who I mean, wanted to take me on a romantic boat ride to Tanner's Cove. Even though everyone knows that Tanner's Cove is where the tritons go to spawn.

EISEN: The view from Tanner's Cove is amazing, though. Especially at sunset.

JENNY: But it was also August, which is precisely the time when the triton eggs start to hatch.

EISEN: As long as they don't smell blood, triton tadpoles are harmless!

JENNY: And yet this **idiot** got me roses! (bones rattling as she points at Eisen) Big red ones, with big *sharp* thorns! Luckily, I'd already been studying necromancy for a while by that point, so I knew just enough to salvage the bones, and the most crucial nerves and tendons, otherwise I completely would have lost my arm.

EISEN: But you didn't, and that's what matters. (weakly hopeful) Right?

JENNY: (bitterly) Of course. Enough reminiscing. Let's look at this diamond.

SOUND: Jenny's finger bones tap on the Kingmaker.

JENNY: Who did you say did this to you?

COLETTE: Ariadne Culver.

JENNY: That follows...This is a *very* advanced fusion-transmutation spell.

COLETTE: We've heard that said a lot but I'm not exactly clear on what that means.

JENNY: It means that, essentially, she turned the kingmaker into an organ without function, and inserted it into your body. In order to un-do the fusion, you first have to re-do the transmutation, and I'm going to be honest with all of you- my transmutation skills are rusty.

COLETTE: I don't like the sound of that.

JENNY: Relax, darling, relax, that's what grimoires are for.

SOUND: A large book being placed on a table. Jenny thumbs through the pages.

JENNY: A-ha! Spell to make the inorganic organic, and vice versa. I'm going to need...let's see...the marrow of a hoofed beast, a sample of the subject's blood, thirty blades of pink Kehrseite seagrass, and a milligram of blue vitriol.

EISEN: Well, the blood sample we can get any time-

TELESPHORE: -Blue vitriol is another name for copper sulphide, which I used for that cake frosting.

COLETTE: And any good butcher ought to have some marrow bones they can sell us.

EISEN: Which leaves the seagrass. Where does that normally grow?

JENNY: On the western bank, around Bismarck Point. It won't be hard to harvest, but you will need to rent a boat.

EISEN: So we'll save the seagrass for last. Jenny, there's no chance you'd lend us the money we'll need, is there?

JENNY: Not a snowman's in hades, darling. Now, get the hell out!

HISTORIAN: The trio did as they were told, and left the hotel posthaste. Telesphore briefly returned to shore to retrieve the leftover frosting from the cake, while Colette haggled with the butcher in the marketplace-

SOUND: marketplace ambience fades in.

COLETTE: There's no way that these bones are worth that much. I'll give you six for it.

HISTORIAN: -And Eisen searched the marina for a boat that looked unguarded and available.

SOUND: Footsteps on the marina, water lapping at the shore.

EISEN: You're too small....you're too small too.... Alright, that'll do.

SOUND: He uses magic to start the boat and jumps in.

HISTORIAN: Once they had reconvened, it was off to Bismarck point to harvest the pink seagrass.

HISTORIAN: Meanwhile, at the hotel, Imogen was absent from her post, as usual. However, unlike most days, she was not at the Shipfitter's Tavern, one of the only places in Ankerstadt that could provide any sort of entertainment. Instead, she was at the Ankerstadt Police station, speaking to Chief Inspector Narcisse Travers, clutching a wanted poster she found on a lamp-post.

IMOGEN: I knew I saw her somewhere.

TRAVERS: And you said she had two men with her?

IMOGEN: Yes, one was a large, red-headed Good Neighbour, and the other was dark, about my height, with a white streak in his hair.

TRAVERS: And did you hear where they were headed?

IMOGEN: They said something about needing a boat. I think they're on the lake, trying to hop the border to Luxembourg.

TRAVERS: Interesting.

IMOGEN: Well, we'd best get going if we want to catch them.

TRAVERS: We?

IMOGEN: Yes, I want to be able to claim the bounty. I hate the hotel business. I thought I'd make money, but it turns out nobody wants to stay in Ankerstadt.

TRAVERS: Well, if I come with you, for your own safety, naturally... I ought to get half of that bounty, don't you think?

IMOGEN: You'll get thirty percent of it.

TRAVERS: Forty.

BEAT

IMOGEN: Deal.

SOUND: Motorboat engine ambience fades in.

TELESPHORE: Eisen, a word, please?

EISEN: You have a secret you wanna tell me?

TELESPHORE: Is this a good idea?

EISEN: Being on the lake?

TELESPHORE: Letting Jenny do the spell.

EISEN: It was *your* idea, need I remind you.

TELESPHORE: Yes, well, I'm not so sure about it anymore. (a little sheepish) That was before we got to know Colette and I...well, I don't think I want to see her go. I'm very fond of her now and I think I'd rather she stays.

EISEN: Oh, come on. You're really going to act possessive over a human, even after what happened in Sorbus? That's a dark path you're headed down, mate-

TELESPHORE: *And* I suppose I don't want the spell to backfire and kill her, either. I mean...I like her. Don't you?

EISEN: Well, sure. But Telsie, we have a saying here on Earth- if you love something, let it go.

COLETTE: What are you guys talking about?

EISEN and TELESPHORE: Nothing.

SOUND: The distant hollering of pinnipents.

TELESPHORE: I think I see the pink seagrass.

EISEN: Take us to shore, then.

TELESPHORE: Aye aye, capitain.

SOUND: Splashing, the boat rattles.

COLETTE: Woah, what was that?

TELESPHORE: Probably a pod of pinnipents kicking up water. Either that or it was a triton.

COLETTE: (panicked) One of the things that ate Jenny's arm?

TELESPHORE: Calm down, calm down- the adults never attack humans. Well, almost never.

COLETTE: *Almost?*

TELESPHORE: Recorded attacks on humans are infrequent and only ever happen near the creatures' spawning grounds during mating season. They can get very protective of their young.

COLETTE: Knowing our luck, I'm guessing that mating season is in mid-April.

BEAT

COLETTE: I'm right, aren't I?

HISTORIAN: The trio docked the boat on a nearby jetty and disembarked, filling their bags with strands of the shimmering pink weeds. Kehrseite Seagrass has of course been used for centuries as an essential binding agent in many magical spells, especially in the field of fleshcraft, due to containing unique amino acids that have no other known source.

SOUND: Weeds being pulled.

EISEN: How many strands did she say we needed?

TELESPHORE: Let's be overcautious and get 50.

COLETTE: Alright, I think that's enough.

EISEN: Nicely done.

SOUND: Footsteps in the water. They get in the boat.

COLETTE: I can't believe we got it. To think, I'm just that little bit closer to getting this stupid rock taken out of my skull forever.

EISEN: And we couldn't be happier for you! (to Telesphore) Right, Telsie?

TELESPHORE: (dejected) We're thrilled on your behalf.

SOUND: The boat starts. Then, suddenly, a gunshot. Quirky industrial music starts playing.

COLETTE: What the hell was that?

TELESPHORE: Looks like another boat, which appears to belong to the Ankerstadt police.

EISEN: I knew it wasn't gonna be that easy. Never is.

HISTORIAN: Such was the nature of life as a career criminal in the Valorian Socialist Republic. Quickly closing the gap between them was a police speedboat, captained by Inspector Travers, who had his police-issue revolver, and Imogen Haberkorn, who already had her bowie knife drawn.

TRAVERS: (yelling through a megaphone) Gentlemen, my name is Inspector Narcisse Travers of the Ankerstadt city police. You're harbouring a dangerous fugitive and if you don't hand her over I will be forced to use deadly force to apprehend her, and yourselves.

COLETTE: (yelling) Why have you got the innkeeper with you?

TRAVERS: (into the megaphone) She's helping with the investigation.

IMOGEN: (into the megaphone) I don't abide by criminals staying in my hotel!

EISEN: (yelling) Understandable! (regular volume) Telsie, floor it.

TELESPHORE: You don't have to tell me twice.

SOUND: Boat revs and speeds off.

TRAVERS: Son of a bitch. I can't aim when I'm piloting this thing.... Imogen, can you drive a speedboat?

IMOGEN: No.

TRAVERS: It's very simple, that one is go, that one is stop, and you turn the wheel to change direction. Now, if you want to keep your 60 percent, follow them.

IMOGEN: Alright.

SOUND: Their boat gives chase. Travers starts shooting and Eisen stops the bullets with magic.

EISEN: He's shooting more bullets than I can deflect. Colette, do the thing.

COLETTE: Are you sure?

EISEN: Worth a shot, isn't it?

SOUND: Colette strains. The kingmaker starts to charge. The boat starts to rock.

TELESPHORE: No, don't do that! You're going to flip the boat. I have a better idea, but you have to trust me.

COLETTE: I guess.

EISEN: Always.

TELESPHORE: Everyone hold on, I'm about to take a hard right.

HISTORIAN: Telesphore turned the boat sharply, so much so in fact that his companions feared they might be tossed into the depths. With the same skill with which he handled the Iyer and Winterlich van, he steered them towards the eastern bank of the lake. As they sped forward, Travers and Haberkorn in hot pursuit, the sun began to set in the west behind them. The light glittered over the steel and brass rooftops of Ankerstadt, and cast the North Vosges mountains in stunning silhouette.

COLETTE: Wow, this sunset is gorgeous. You weren't kidding, Eisen.

EISEN: Oh, aye....(realising, horrified) Wait. That means- Winterlich, are you insane?

TELESPHORE: Perhaps a smidge. And I'm going to run our boat aground in a moment, so please don't be too shocked.

HISTORIAN: Telesphore swerved sharply to avoid sailing through a cluster of triton eggs, then he drove the boat up into a sand bank. The police boat followed not long after, though Travers was not observant enough to avoid running through a few eggs in his pursuit.

SOUND: Gunshots continue. The boat runs aground and the police boat comes to a stop.

IMOGEN: We ran them aground! There's nowhere else they can go now. We've got them.

TRAVERS: (yelling) Evading arrest will only worsen your sentences. Give up Colette Geise now or I will be forced to shoot you.

SOUND: Their boat gets closer. It rocks. Splashing. Jaws-like music fades in.

IMOGEN: What the hell was that?

TRAVERS: Probably just a pinnipent.

IMOGEN: No, it was way too big to be any pinnipents. Wait... Travers... where are we right now?

TELESPHORE: Tanner's point.

SOUND: Ominous rumbling.

HISTORIAN: And with an ominous rumbling from the depths came the mother triton, a great amphibian, easily twice the size of the police speedboat with multiple rows of teeth and none too happy about its spawn being run over.

SOUND: Low, threatening croak. Splash. Boat splintering.

HISTORIAN: With astonishing quickness, it leapt up from the water, smashing through the boat with its wide, flat head, and swallowing both of its occupants in one bite.

SOUND: Tanner and Imogen scream but their screams are abruptly cut off by a SNAP and a loud GULP. The creature descends. The music stops and there is a moment of agonising silence.

EISEN: (disbelief) Fuck me.

COLETTE: We...we all saw that, right?

TELESPHORE: Yes, and nobody else did. So if anyone asks, what we just witnessed was a terrible and unforeseen tragedy, and we had absolutely nothing to do with it. Agreed?

BEAT

TELESPHORE: Now that we're on-shore again, shall I bring the van around and take us to the ferry, or shall we take the boat back?

EISEN and COLETTE: Van!

HISTORIAN: And so, a short drive and a second ferry trip later, the trio returned to Jenny's suite.

SOUND: Mortar and pestle.

JENNY: Now, my dear, I'm going to need some of your blood.

Beat

JENNY: Oh, don't look at me like that. I'm a fleshcrafter, remember? I can do it so quickly it won't even hurt-

SOUND: Slice

COLETTE: Ow!

JENNY: -Much. Now, boys, tie that seagrass into braids for me.

SOUND: grass shuffling

EISEN: Got mine.

TELESPHORE: Me too.

JENNY: Wonderful work, Telesphore. Eisen, yours is...fine.

SOUND: Match lighting followed by a magical whoosh of fire.

JENNY: Voila, the preparations are finished. Well, Colette, are you ready?

COLETTE: As I'll ever be, I suppose.

JENNY: Then let's begin.

SOUND: Jenny cracks her knuckles. Off-kilter toy piano music starts playing.

JENNY: Colette, get in the middle, the men and I will form a circle around you. Eisen, Telesphore, let's hold hands.

SOUND: A rising tone, creepy whispering. All that same shit from the prologue. The music builds.

COLETTE: Is it working?

JENNY: I can't say.

SOUND: The whispering builds. Cracking noises.

JENNY: Wait...that's not meant to happen. Something's wrong.

EISEN: What?

JENNY: Everyone get down!

SOUND: They all hit the ground just as a blast comes out of the kingmaker.

COLETTE: Is everyone okay?

SOUND: Ethereal, moody string music fades in.

JENNY: We're fine, darling. (to herself) Culver, you magnificent bitch...

EISEN: What went wrong with the spell?

JENNY: Ariadne must've known there was a chance you might go to another flesh witch to undo her work, so she added a failsafe. Quite ingenious, really. I didn't even notice it.

COLETTE: And all this means...?

JENNY: It means the only person who can undo the spell-

TELESPHORE: (dread)...Is Ariadne herself.

EISEN: *Dee-lightful.* You wouldn't happen to know where she's hiding out these days?

JENNY: Last I heard it was somewhere in Crystal City.

EISEN: Well, then. We know where we're going next.

HISTORIAN: Indeed, the next morning, after spending a night in two barely adequate beds in the Crow's Nest Hotel, they took the first ferry back to the Valorian side of the lake and got back in the van. Once inside, Colette saw there was still a slice of cake left. It was stale by then, and had ants crawling on it, but it still made her feel a certain fondness.

COLETTE: Hey, guys?

EISEN: What's up?

Pause

COLETTE: I was thinking about what Jenny said to me earlier, about wiping the slate clean. I think I ought to do that. You know, when the kingmaker's finally out of me. Because, I mean, the cops are on my tail, my boss is dead, my dad wants nothing to do with me, I don't have a normal to go back to.

EISEN: No, I guess you don't.

COLETTE: And, like...despite everything, I've grown to...appreciate you guys quite a lot, so...maybe my employment with you two could be...permanent? Regardless of what happens to the diamond?

TELESPHORE: I think that's a fantastic idea.

EISEN: Yeah...I guess we've gotten used to having you around at this point, anyway.

COLETTE: Likewise. I'm gonna get in the back and lie down.

TELESPHORE: Be our guest.

SOUND: The back door of the van closing. Eisen scoffs.

TELESPHORE: Why are you looking at me like that?

EISEN: Must be great to always get your way all the time.

TELESPHORE: (indignant) Now, you listen to me-

SOUND: Enigmatic, quirky string music fades in and continues until the end. Telesphore continues ranting indistinctly.

HISTORIAN: The two men continued bickering in the front seat while Colette lay on the sofa in the back, and the van continued southwards towards the shining metropolis of Crystal City. In a somewhat notable aside, a dead triton was found washed ashore a few days following their departure. It was sliced open from end to end, with the body of Inspector Travers still inside. Imogen Haberkorn's remains, however, were never located.

MEG: This episode of The Kingmaker Histories was written and audio engineered by Meg Molloy Tuten, with executive production by Henry Galley. Our music comes courtesy of Vivek Abishek. This episode featured, in order of appearance, David Ault as the Historian, Josh Rubino as Telesphore, Taqi Nazeer as Eisen, Blythe Renay as Colette, Nichole Goodnight as Imogen, Amina Koroma as Jenny, and Roscoe Braman as Travers.

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