

The Prickwillow Papers – Season 1 Episode 5

“Customer Satisfaction” by Maddy Searle

SCENE 1

Theme Music

Quill scribbling.

SYLDA: (V.O.) Seventh of Men’s Tears, in the year of Our Lady fifteen thirty-seven. So, today’s the day, I suppose. Squirm and I will be in Vottun in a matter of hours, running the Trove’s little errand. I’m almost relieved, because the past few days have been... not pleasant. It’s like some part of me won’t let me forget what I’m about to do.

Sleep has been almost impossible. Whenever I feel myself drifting off, I get a horrific jolt of terror and nausea that wakes me right up again.

Then I just lie there, running over all the possible scenarios in my head, but I still don’t feel any more prepared.

Eating has been difficult too. I’ve been feeling too queasy to eat much, and I’ve even been sick a couple of times. I’ve told my parents I have a stomach bug, but that’s a downright lie. I’m just shit-scared.

Squirm is completely cool about everything, though. She’s treating it all like an elaborate strategy game. She made me dig out some old maps of Vottun and plot routes through the city. She had me practicing disguise spells, spells to create distractions, spells to unlock doors. She even made me learn to use a lockpick in case my spells didn’t work. I’ve hidden the lockpick in a hollowed-out book. (Sorry, book!)

But I don't want mum or dad wandering in and seeing thieves' tools lying around.

Squirm is also very keen on codenames and all that kind of thing. She wants me to call her Viper. I mean, seriously. Who does she think she is? And guess what she wants to call me. Hatchling. How patronising is that? I wanted to be called Lynx but no, SHE's the one with a stake in this quest, SHE's in charge, SHE gets to choose the codenames. Fuck's sake. And the mission codename is Operation Slither. I mean, really? This whole snake theme thing has gone TOO FAR.

Anyway, VIPER is going to be waking up from her power nap soon. I'd better get the last bits and pieces together before we head off. See you on the other side, diary. I hope...

Pensive Music

SCENE 2

Gust of magical energy and a rustle of leaves as Squirm and Syllda appear on the outskirts of Vottun in a bush. Countryside ambience, a cart or two rolling past, horses' hooves.

SYLDA: (Whisper) Ow. Shit. OK. We're here.

SQUIRM: (Whisper) What the fuck are you doing? We're far too close to the edge of the city. There's people around. They could've spotted us.

SYLDA: Doesn't look like anyone's seen us. There's plenty of bushes for cover, and no-one is facing this way. They're all heading into town.

SQUIRM: Alright, you were lucky this time. Just... be more careful.

SYLDA: Fine, fine. Should I use a disguise spell now? Or should we just get going?

SQUIRM: Probably best to use a disguise spell. Remember the one we practiced? The middle aged half-orc woman?

SYLDA: Do I have to use that one? I wanted to be a dog-folk girl.

SQUIRM: The half-orc is the one disguise you've managed to create that draws minimal attention. Dog-folk are far less common in this region, and the disguise you came up with was far too... noticeable.

SYLDA: In what way was it noticeable?

SQUIRM: You kept... drooling.

SYLDA: Ah. OK. I'll give you that one. Fine, half-orc it is then.

Gust of magical energy as Sylva dons her disguise.

Is this alright?

SQUIRM: It'll do. But your posture is just too... good. Stoop a bit more. Think unobtrusive.

SYLDA: OK, Squirm, how about this?

SQUIRM: Better, but don't fucking call me that, OK? You never know who could be listening. It's VIPER.

SYLDA: Viper. Yeah. Of course.

SQUIRM: I'll have none of your attitude today, Hatchling, alright? We get in, get the Eye of Eignarhald, and get out. No fuck-ups, no funny business. Just a straightforward operation.

SYLDA: I don't see what's straightforward about any of this.

SQUIRM: Now, get your arse in gear and get us into the city.

SYLDA: OK, and you'd better get in my headscarf. Don't want anyone spotting you.

SQUIRM: I was just about to do that. You don't need to tell ME what to do. I'm in charge here.

SYLDA: Yes, and you'll never let me forget it, will you?

SCENE 3

Busy sounds of a market square: voices, carts and horses.

SYLDA: (Whisper) So, if the map is correct then this is the Bureau of Magical Affairs.

SQUIRM: (Whisper) And we need to get underneath it somehow.

SYLDA: Now that we're here, do you have any kind of plan, then, VIPER? This is your quest, after all.

SQUIRM: Well, I can't see any back entrances or side doors, so the only way in is right through the front.

SYLDA: You've got to be joking.

SQUIRM: While I am a genius of comic timing, in this instance, no, I am not joking. You need to go in and pretend that you have some kind of business with the bureau, then make an excuse to go to the bathroom

or something so you can have a look around and find a way into the vaults.

SYLDA: What? I am a terrible liar, how on earth do you think I can convince the Bureau of anything? When I got a tattoo and tried to hide it from mum, I actually said to her, "Briarley liked my tattoo," completely by accident, and she nearly had a heart attack.

SQUIRM: Well you're just going to have to cope with it. This is our one shot. Do not blow it for me.

SYLDA: Now I'm just feeling a massive amount of pressure which is not helping in the slightest.

SQUIRM: (Angry) Chill out, Hatchling! Get a grip! (Calms herself) OK, tell you what. While we're in there, I'll tell you exactly what to do and what to say. I'll be here in your headscarf the whole time, giving you lines and stuff. Does that make you feel any better?

SYLDA: A little bit, I suppose.

SQUIRM: Right then. Let's just fucking get in there and fucking do it, alright?

SYLDA: Alright. Only way to get it out the way is to do it.

SQUIRM: Exactly.

Syllda walks up to the door of the Bureau and knocks. A woman opens the door.

HORATIA: (Horribly cheerful) Hello, there, ma'am! Do come in! Welcome to the Bureau of Magical Affairs, where we make magic safe and fun for

everyone! My name is Horatia Holmwood, and I'll be your clerk. How can I help you today?

Horatia and Syllda walk into the building.

SQUIRM: (Whisper) Say you want to renew your alchemist's license!

SYLDA: I- I- I want to renew my alchemist's license. Please.

HORATIA: Of course, ma'am. Please take a seat over here and fill out this form with all the necessary details. And if you'd like, please fill out this customer satisfaction form, to let us know how we can improve our service. Just give the form back to me when you're finished, and then you'll be added to our waiting list to see one of our representatives.

SQUIRM: (Whisper) Ask how long you'll have to wait!

SYLDA: Uh, if it's OK to ask, how long will we have to wait to see someone?

HORATIA: Let me just take a look.

Rustle of paper.

HORATIA (CONT.): Ah yes, the average waiting time for today is just nine hours.

Much shorter than normal! You chose a good day to come in, ma'am.

Now please take a seat and take your time to fill in the forms. Thank you very much for your visit today.

SYLDA: Um, thanks.

Horatia walks back to her desk and sits down.

(Whispers) That's fucking ridiculous! Nine hours? There's no-one else in this waiting room, what on EARTH could—

SQUIRM: (Whispers) Cool your jets, Syllda, this can be used to our advantage!
This will give us plenty of time to sneak out and find a way into the vaults.

SYLDA: Oh, right, yeah, of course. Still, it's utterly disgraceful—

SQUIRM: Shush! Don't get distracted. Now, when that awful woman is distracted go and have a look around. See if you can find any way into a basement or a cellar. And if anyone asks you what you're doing, just say you're looking for the toilet.

SYLDA: Sure, OK. I can do that. Wait, Horatia is looking at some files over there. Should I go for it?

SQUIRM: Yes, for fuck's sake, go, go, go!

Syllda gets up and starts to walk over to the corridor.

HORATIA: Excuse me, ma'am, is there anything I can do to help?

SYLDA: Toilet. I mean. I need to go to... it. Sorry.

HORATIA: Oh, you need to use our facilities? Of course, ma'am, just follow me, right this way.

SYLDA: It's OK, I'm sure I can—

HORATIA: It's no problem at all, ma'am, just step this way.

Horatia leads Syllda down the corridor and opens a door.

HORATIA (CONT.): Here's the bathroom, ma'am, take all the time you need.

SYLDA: Um, thanks.

HORATIA: No problem at all, ma'am.

Syl da goes in and closes the door.

SQUIRM: (Whisper) Right, now we're in here, we just need to wait until she's gone and then—

HORATIA: (Muffled) Can I get you anything, ma'am? Comfort toilet roll? Scented hand lotion? Sanitary products?

SYLDA: No, thanks, I'm OK. You don't need to wait for me, by the way, if you're busy or anything.

HORATIA: It's no problem at all, ma'am. I'll be here to guide you back to your seat when you exit the facilities.

SYLDA: (Whisper) What the fuck?

SQUIRM: Hmm. This isn't going quite how I'd planned.

SYLDA: No shit. What do we do, Viper? What's your next great scheme?

SQUIRM: Um...

SYLDA: Is the great strategist suddenly stumped?

SQUIRM: No. I'm just... weighing up my options.

SYLDA: Why don't I just use one of my distraction spells?

SQUIRM: Of course, that was the very first option I was considering.

SYLDA: Of course.

SQUIRM: Make a loud noise in the waiting room or something.

SYLDA: Your wish is my command.

Rush of magical energy, and a distant clatter from the waiting room.

HORATIA: (Muffled) What the flipping heck was that? Excuse me just one minute, ma'am, while I go and investigate the disturbance. I hope this won't affect your customer satisfaction rating!

Horatia leaves the bathroom door to go and investigate.

SQUIRM: Right. She's out the way. Get a move on!

SYLDA: OK, OK.

Syl da opens the bathroom door and walks briskly down the corridor.

SYLDA (CONT.): Right, a basement entrance. Let's see if we can find a door that looks promising. OK, this one says, "Enforcement and Implementation". Next there's "Licenses and Permits"... "Education and Safety Training"... "Archives"... "Senior Management"... I'm almost falling asleep just reading these signs.

SQUIRM: It's obviously none of these doors. Look, at the end of the corridor, that one doesn't have any signs or anything. That must be it.

Syl da walks to the end of the corridor and tries to open the door. It's locked.

SYLDA: And it's locked. I think you're right.

SQUIRM: Of course I'm right. Unlock the damn thing.

SYLDA: OK, keep your wings on, let's try this. *Opna lás.* (OP-na LAOS).

Energy fizzles out.

SQUIRM: Nope. It's warded. You'll have to do it the old-fashioned way.

SYLDA: Right. Let's give this a go.

Sound of thieves tools clinking, and then rattling in the lock.

HORATIA: (Distant) Are you alright, ma'am? Do you need any help?

SYLDA: No, I'm fine. I'm still in the bathroom! Don't come in!

HORATIA: You don't sound fine, I'm coming to find you, ma'am!

SYLDA: No, really, I'm OK!

HORATIA: It's no bother at all! I'll come and give you some help!

SYLDA: Please don't!

HORATIA: Are you sure? I'm on my way!

SYLDA: YES, I'M REALLY, REALLY SURE!

Door unlocks.

(Whispers) Oh, thank fuck for that.

HORATIA: Well, just let me know—

Door opens, Syllda steps through, and shuts it behind her, cutting off Horatia's voice.

SYLDA: Oh my gods. I'm so glad that's over. What now Squirm?

SQUIRM: Well, that was the easy part. Now, it's going to be a lot more difficult.

SYLDA: Fantastic.

Outro Music

OUTRO: You have been listening to The Prickwillow Papers, episode 5,
Customer Satisfaction.

It was written, produced and performed by Maddy Searle, and is a Snazzy Tapir Production.

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We hope you join us again soon.