

The Prickwillow Papers - Season 1 Episode 1

“Welcome to the Rest of Your Life” by Maddy Searle

SCENE 1

Theme Music

Sylda opens the door, steps inside, and closes the door carefully behind her. She sits down at her desk, and rummages through her papers until she finds a quill.

SYLDA: Uh, quill?

The quill scratches on the paper.

Take dictation, please.

Another scratch as the quill readies itself. As Sylda takes dictation, the quill begins scribbling down her words. As Sylda continues speaking, the sound of the quill fades away.

Thanks.

Twenty first of Bud's Bloom, in the year of Our Lady fifteen thirty-seven.

So, hi. Diary. Journal. Book Soon To Be Full of Inane Ramblings.

Whatever. I'm Sylda. Nice to meet you.

I'm twenty-one. I'm a half-elf. I've just graduated. And I'm bored out of my fucking mind.

Since I'm back in this shit-hole again I thought I should do something mildly productive to pass the time. There's not a whole lot to do here.

Hearthford had libraries, bathing houses, temples, taverns, shops, everything you could want. But here... Zero. Zilch. Zippo. And it's got

the stupidest fucking name in the whole province. Prickwillow. I know. You can tell if someone's a visitor here by the permanent smirk on their face. Not that there are many visitors.

It would be better if more of my friends were here. Only a couple of my Prickwillow schoolfriends are still around, and my friends from the Hearthford College of Mages live leagues away.

But I won't be here forever. I'm already sending letters to sorcerers, enchanters, wizards, trying to get an apprenticeship. Fingers crossed. I'm reasonably confident.

Mum keeps asking me if I've had any replies yet. I've only been home a week. Way to turn on the pressure.

And dad keeps trying to persuade me to go into the family business. Don't get me wrong. I love books. I wouldn't have gone to the College if I didn't. But running a bookshop is a different kettle of kraken-spawn. Inventories, accounts, shelving... customer service... Yuck.

Of course, I'm helping out right now because I have nothing else to do and it's right downstairs, so I have no viable excuse, but I won't be doing it for long. Fingers crossed.

Something has to come up eventually. If only I could just set up on my own, right away. But I have to get an apprenticeship and do one more year of training before I can practice magic professionally. And there are loads of advanced spells you can only use if you have a license. Bloody bureaucracy.

A distant clock tower chimes eight. The sound of the quill returns.

Fuck! I need to go and meet Briarley in the tavern, like, five minutes ago. Catch you later, diary. Maybe something will happen while I'm gone. Haha, that's likely.

Quill, finish dictation.

The quill stops, falls down on the desk. Sylva closes the diary.

Pensive music

SCENE 2

Sylva rushes into her bedroom, out of breath. She slams the door behind her.

SYLVA: (Whispering) Shit. Shit shit shit. Hey, hey! Are you awake? You're still breathing. Wake up! Please. OK, I'll just put you on this blanket, and wait until you wake up. If you wake up. Fucking hell.

Sylva arranges a blanket, then sits at her desk and gets her diary and quill ready for another writing session.

Quill, take dictation.

The quill doesn't respond.

Shit. I need to calm down. (Breathes slowly) Quill, take dictation, please.

The quill finally responds.

So, I was just in The Peacock's Feather with Briarley. Everything seemed pretty normal.

Tavern chatter and drinks being poured.

She was talking about her boyfriend non-stop and I could barely get a word in. She's the shortest halfling in town but she's also the loudest person I know. No kidding.

Anyway, she was talking at me and I was pretending to listen when the tavernkeeper's cat started making weird yowling, hissing noises.

Cat (indeed) making yowling, hissing noises.

SYLDA: I looked over and it was staring at a minute woman who was just standing on the floor near the privy door.

She was about... say... five inches tall, and had shimmery wings on her back. Before I could do anything, the cat pounced on her.

More angry cat noises.

No one else seemed to be paying any attention. The cat grabbed the tiny woman in its jaws and ran outside.

Cat paws on wood.

I followed the cat as quickly as I could, leaving Briarley looking incredibly confused.

Tavern door closing. Birdsong, horse and cart plodding past. Cat hissing.

I found the cat toying with its prey in the street, and managed to grab the tiny woman before it did serious damage. But she was unconscious, and one of her wings was shredded by the cat's claws.

Tavern door opening, chatter resumes.

I ran back inside, hiding the woman behind my back as best I could, and told Briarley that I'd just been sick and had to go home. She must've thought I'd gone bonkers.

Anyway, the little woman is on my bed now, wrapped up in a blanket. Luckily my parents are already in bed, so I didn't have to dodge past them on my way up here.

I think she's still breathing. Hopefully.

I know it's probably a terrible idea to bring some unknown magical creature into the house. I've been told enough stories about kids who got dragged off by kelpies or tricked by imps to know that.

That's why I don't want Briarley, or my parents, or anyone to find out about her. They'd tell me to get rid of her, leave her to her fate. But she was helpless against that tabby. I couldn't just let her get slashed to bits. They wouldn't understand that I had to help her.

I think she must be a fairy or a pixie or something like that. But I don't know for sure. The descriptions in the guides at the college

were never clear enough. I think most of the writers had never seen the creatures they were describing. But now I've seen a... whatever she is. That's quite... exciting. But also quite... terrifying.

I want her to be OK, to wake up. But, if she wakes up, I have no idea what she'll do. She might attack me, or trick me, or cast a spell on me, or any number of things. But if I leave her out to die, I'd never forgive myself.

I suppose I just need to wait and see what happens. I'm probably not going to get any sleep tonight.

Good night diary. Hope you sleep well, at least.

Quill, end dictation.

SCENE 3

Sound of Syllda breathing heavily in her sleep. Suddenly, there's high-pitched coughing and groaning coming. Syllda wakes up, gets out of bed and rushes over to the source of the sounds.

SYLDA: Hey! Miss... Ma'am...? Are you alright? Can you talk?

SQUIRM: Yes, of course I can fucking talk. I may be in a lot of pain but I haven't lost my basic linguistic functions.

SYLDA: Oh, that's good, I suppose. I'm sorry... Can I do anything to help you? With the pain, I mean?

SQUIRM: Why are you being so... concerned? Big folk are usually more about poking and prodding and trying to extract our bodily fluids for potions and the like.

SYLDA: Big folk? You mean, humans, elves, that kind of thing?

SQUIRM: Don't care what you call them, they're all big folk to me.

SYLDA: Well, I'm a half-elf. My name's Sylda. Nice to meet you.

SQUIRM: Sylda, eh? At least you have some manners, Sylda.

SYLDA: May I ask you your name? And, if you don't mind, where you come from?

SQUIRM: I'm Squirm. I'm one of the fay folk from the Gloamlight Realm.

SYLDA: Pardon?

SQUIRM: You really know nothing, don't you? OK. I suppose you'll have heard of fairies. Am I right?

SYLDA: Yes.

SQUIRM: Well, they're a myth put about by cowardly wizards who are shit-scared of the real deal. Us.

SYLDA: OK...

SQUIRM: They put it about that we're these sweet little fairies who have names like Cherry Blossom and Sunflower Seed, who skip amongst the daisies and give you good luck. But that's because they can't handle how powerful we are. The fay can destroy crops, drive people mad, steal children, bring down castles.

SYLDA: Um... Sorry if I'm being rude, but you didn't seem very powerful when you were being torn to shreds by that tabby.

SQUIRM: Ah, right, you saw that, did you? Well... I suppose I can't keep it from you. I have lost most of my... abilities, as of late. I don't really want to discuss it at the moment. Or ever. So don't ask me about it again.

SYLDA: Alright, I promise I won't ask you about it.

SQUIRM: Good. So now you know. I'm a helpless being, far from home and completely at your mercy.

SYLDA: It's OK, though, I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to help. Can I help you... I don't know... get back to Gloomy Night Realm or whatever?

SQUIRM: I... can't go back. It's very complicated and I don't want to get into that now. You wouldn't understand the complexities of fay politics anyway.

SYLDA: OK, sorry I asked. But I'm serious, you know. I do want to help you.

SQUIRM: Oh yeah, of course. Your idea of help will be handing me over to one of your wizard buddies who'll stick his wand up my bum and quiz me on the days of the fucking week as part of a sick experiment! Am I right?

SYLDA: No, you're not, actually. I know that if anyone finds out that you're here, it could mean trouble, so I'm willing to let you stay

with me, and keep it a secret. Seems like that's your best chance of surviving in this place.

SQUIRM: Seriously? You'd do that?

SYLDA: Well, I've got nothing better to do. Might as well help someone out.

SQUIRM: Well, um, that's very... decent of you, Syllda.

SYLDA: I'll take that as a heartfelt "thank you".

SQUIRM: Alright.

SYLDA: Alright, then. So, do you need anything? Food, drink?

SQUIRM: I feast on moonlight and drink the salt spray of the sea.

SYLDA: Um... OK, I'm not sure how I'm going to get those...

SQUIRM: Just kidding. I eat meat and drink water. Like you, I assume.

SYLDA: Actually, I'm vegan.

SQUIRM: Fucking hell.

SYLDA: But that should be easy enough to arrange. Need anything at the moment?

SQUIRM: No, I'm alright just now. I need to rest. But I would like to know a bit more about you, since we're going to be roomies. What do you... do?

SYLDA: Well, not very much, to be honest. I've just graduated from the College of Mages in Hearthford, and I'm looking for apprenticeships.

SQUIRM: Ah I see, so you're one of those unemployed young people, leeching off their hard-working parents, am I right?

SYLDA: No, not really, I help mum and dad at the bookshop.

SQUIRM: (Sarcastic) Sounds fascinating.

SYLDA: Not really. But it passes the time. I'll get something... eventually.

SQUIRM: So, there are plenty of wizards and enchanters who can offer apprenticeships then?

SYLDA: No, not really. Only about ten percent of graduates actually get a place with a professional magic practitioner.

SQUIRM: Shit. So what you're saying is, all the training at that college of yours... it could have been for nothing.

SYLDA: Don't say that! I... I will get something.

SQUIRM: You don't sound so sure.

SYLDA: Alright. Alright. I'm fucking terrified. Magic is everything I've ever wanted to do. And now I'm realising that I might never get to do it. I don't want to be stuck in this place for the rest of my life. But I might already be stuck here. What if I don't get an apprenticeship? What if I never move out of my parents' house? What if I never do anything? I thought that when I left college my

life would just suddenly start for real. That I'd know exactly what to do and how to do it. But I don't know anything. I'm just sending letters to people who'll probably never even read them. I'm scared. All. The. Time.

SQUIRM: Shit. Looks like I touched a nerve.

SYLDA: Yeah. You kind of did. So, you happy? Now you know I have no fucking clue what I'm doing?

SQUIRM: No. Not really.

SYLDA: Well, what should I do? Seriously. What should I do?

SQUIRM: (Pause. Squirm is genuinely stumped.) I... I don't know.

SYLDA: (Bitterly) Ugh. Great.

SQUIRM: (Changing the subject brusquely) Now get me some water. All this angst is making me thirsty.

Outro music

CREDITS: You've been listening to The Prickwillow Papers, Episode 1, Welcome To The Rest of Your Life. It was written, produced and performed by Maddy Searle, and was a Snazzy Tapir Production. We hope you join us again soon.