

7. Cockatrice and Dead Man's Flats, AB

[MUSIC: "Tentative" plays]

TENNYSON: An Excerpt from Sky and Otter's Handbook to the Fae, Chapter Four, Page Thirty.

When conducting an investigation into magical phenomena, the preliminary survey is the most important. If information is being gathered second-hand, pay close attention to descriptions. Which details does your mundane observer focus on? What do they emphasize? There is a crucial difference between a baby cockatrice and an oversized rooster.

Consider your equipment. It is always better to air on the side of caution. In the aforementioned cockatrice scenario, make sure you bring mirrored surfaces and are prepared to attack at range. Think about the particular weaknesses of the creature you're expecting, as well as things you may not expect.

Plan as much as possible. Take every opportunity to encounter a creature on your terms rather than theirs. Go out in daylight if a creature is nocturnal, and vice versa. Think about potential bystanders and their safety. Mitigate risk to the public where you can.

It is said the fae are humanity's natural predators. Keep that in mind whenever you engage them directly. A sideways approach is always preferable.

["Tentative" ends]

[Car engine sounds]

ALDER: This is a bad idea.

TENNYSON: She said it was only a small cockatrice. Besides, they're paying us a lot.

ALDER: Since when do you care about the money?

TENNYSON: Since I was offered a lot of it.

ALDER: Even a small cockatrice is very dangerous.

TENNYSON: We can take it. And do you really want to leave it running loose?

ALDER: I guess not.

TENNYSON: You guess?

ALDER: No, I don't want to leave it running loose.

TENNYSON: That's what I thought.

ALDER: Still, I don't think we're properly prepared for this. I mean —

TENNYSON: Off ramp!

ALDER: Crap!

[Car honking as it moves past]

ALDER: That was close.

TENNYSON: The guy behind is right on your tail.

ALDER: Well, if he's making any obscene gestures, I can't see them.

TENNYSON: Alder, we'll be fine. We've got this.

ALDER: If you say so.

TENNYSON: By the way, this town is like ten roads big.

ALDER: And it's called Dead Man's Flats, which doesn't seem at all like a bad omen to you?

TENNYSON: I don't believe in omens.

ALDER: Really? That's where your line is? Fate?

TENNYSON: Pigeon Mountain is a bad name for a mountain.

ALDER: Fine, change the subject. I still think this is a bad idea.

TENNYSON: I'm honestly not sure if this is a town or just a rest stop.

ALDER: I really wish you'd told me before two minutes ago.

TENNYSON: I think it's been ten minutes. How many motels does one crappy rest stop town need?

ALDER: Tennyson, I'm serious.

TENNYSON: I didn't want you to back out of the job. Turn right.

[Sound of car slowing and idling]

TENNYSON: What are you doing? I said turn right.

ALDER: This is a partnership, Tennyson. That means we both get a say.

TENNYSON: Alder. Drive.

ALDER: You are not ready to go up against a cockatrice.

TENNYSON: You don't get to decide what I'm ready for.

ALDER: Tennyson, I am serious.

TENNYSON: Look, I'm sorry I didn't tell you, but I knew what you were going to say, and I didn't want to give you the chance to back out. There are lives at stake, Alder.

ALDER: Yeah! Our lives!

TENNYSON: If that's the way you want to do this, fine.

[Door opens]

ALDER: Tennyson?

[Door slams, ambient sound of highway traffic passing by]

TENNYSON: Screw her. Screw her and this town and this stupid little witch hat house and these roads that don't have any shoulders and the goddamned campground with its goddamned cockatrice. . .

[Car driving up]

ALDER: Tennyson! Get in already!

TENNYSON: I'm good!

ALDER: You win, okay? Let's go get the goddamned cockatrice.

[Door opens, then closes]

TENNYSON: I knew you'd come around.

ALDER: You're a jerk, you know that.

TENNYSON: Just drive.

[MUSIC: "Lying Here Helpless" by Daniel Birch plays as transition, ends]

[Ambient sound of forest, footsteps]

ALDER: I would like to reiterate that this is very dangerous.

TENNYSON: Just keep looking in the mirror.

ALDER: In case we haven't mentioned this yet, cockatrices turn people to stone by making direct eye contact.

TENNYSON: Maybe should have said that earlier.

ALDER: Maybe. Tennyson —

TENNYSON: I'm fine, Alder. Should we split up? Cover more ground?

ALDER: First rule of creepy woods at night is don't split up.

TENNYSON: That's a movie trope, not a universal constant.

ALDER: Still. Are you sure you can shoot that?

TENNYSON: Are you sure you can use a sword?

ALDER: I tried to pull your bow and I failed miserably.

TENNYSON: It's just practice.

ALDER: How does a kid from nowhere Vancouver Island get archery practice?

TENNYSON: The backyard, Alder.

ALDER: Can you shoot a moving target?

TENNYSON: Are you implying you've actually used that thing in a fight?

ALDER: Would that be weird?

TENNYSON: Yes. Very. How — Oh no.

ALDER: Tennyson? Where's the light?

TENNYSON: In my hand. It went out.

ALDER: That's not good.

TENNYSON: Alder, don't move.

ALDER: Why?

TENNYSON: Don't turn around. Don't even twitch.

[Arrow nocks]

ALDER: Tennyson —

TENNYSON: Shush.

[Arrow pulls back, fires, hits. Cockatrice screeches. Sound of flapping wings, screeching, and swish of a sword. Finally a quiet screech and a dull thud. A silence.]

TENNYSON: Did you get it?

ALDER: Think so. Hang on.

TENNYSON: Forget about cell phone flashlights.

ALDER: Looks pretty dead to me.

TENNYSON: The hell do we do with it?

ALDER: I'll deal with it.

TENNYSON: You sure? I can —

ALDER: I've got it. Go find the owners, tell them it's dead.

TENNYSON: It was my job, it's not fair to you —

ALDER: I'm serious, Tennyson.

TENNYSON: What aren't you telling me?

ALDER: Tennyson!

TENNYSON: Okay. You're very intimidating with a bloody sword. I'll meet you back at the RV?

ALDER: Yeah. I might be a while.

TENNYSON: Lucky for us, this is a campground.

[MUSIC: "Lying Here Helpless" transitions]

[Nighttime ambience, crickets, distant barking of dogs. Sound of a kettle boiling]

TENNYSON: So Alder isn't back yet. It's been about two hours, which makes it around one in the morning. I'm making tea. Shouldn't she be back by now? I feel like she should be back by now.

[Door opens, closes as Tennyson speaks]

TENNYSON: There you are! I was — is that smoke? Did you burn it?

ALDER: Controlled burn. Don't worry about it.

[Door closes]

TENNYSON: Oh. Well, goodnight then.

[MUSIC: "Lying Here Helpless" plays under credits]

Credits: Beyond the Veil is a Meadowlark Presents production. It was written and produced by Katrina Basnett. The voice of Alder was Darhyl Balemans. The voice of Tennyson was Katrina Basnett. On the radio this week was "Lying Here Helpless" by Daniel Birch. Graphic design by Oscar Yu. Theme music by Katrina Basnett. Follow us on Twitter at @Veil_podcast and find this and all our other shows at meadowlarkpresents.ca.

[MUSIC: "Lying Here Helpless" plays out]