

NARRATOR

A small sitting room is warmed by the midday sun, the mellow afternoon light filtered through rustling wisterias blooming around the open shutters. Dust motes dance and swirl in the glow, illuminated and chasing each other as they are carried in the ebb and flow of the summer air.

The sounds of city life waft in from outside: the rumble of horse-drawn carts, the clatter of the smith's hammer, the laughs of children, and the distant, noisy din of a vibrant market all speak to the bustling life here in the city of Tabria. People from all walks of life amble along, going about their chores and errands with baskets and bundles and buggies stacked high with goods.

Within the home, however, things are uncomfortably silent. A young woman stands at the door, shouldering an overstuffed backpack and a well-worn leather guitar case. Her garb, that of an entertainer, is comfortable, but a tad impractical; colorful, eye-catching patterns adorn the fabric, and small bells jingle merrily as she moves. She stands with her arms outstretched in a pleading gesture, turned towards her mother and younger sister who have gathered to see her off. Tears glimmer in the younger girl's eyes as her older sister looks at her imploringly.

AMARA

I'm sorry, Lily.

LILY

If you're so sorry then why don't you *stay*?

AMARA

(*apologetic*) I...can't stay, kiddo. Joining the band is my dream.
I've got to follow it.

LILY

But who's gonna play with me when you're gone?

AMARA

Mom will! Lily, I won't be gone forever. I'll be back to visit soon. I promise.

LILY

It's not *fair*! You can't leave! Mom, tell her she can't leave!

MOM

Lily, it's okay. Your sister has...her own life to live. We both need to try and understand.

(*trying to not let Lily hear*) Honey, are you certain this is what you want?

AMARA

(*exasperated*) Mom, we've been over this a hundred times. Yes.

MOM

I just think-

AMARA

(hackles raising) What, that I should stay here? And just...do some job I'll hate? Watch Lily until she's an *adult*? I have been practicing nonstop for YEARS. And I *finally* made it into the band! Aren't you happy for me?

MOM

(placating) Amara, of course I'm happy for you. *We're* happy for you. Right, Lily?

LILY

No! I hate her!

[Sound of little feet running off.]

MOM

(gasp) Lily!

(sighing) I'm sorry, Amara. She loves you. You just... know how she gets.

AMARA

I know. *(beat.)*

...But really, Mom. I'm sure this is what I want.

MOM

Well, I'm glad you're certain.

AMARA

...What's that supposed to mean?

MOM

Nothing! It...it *would* just be nice to have an extra set of hands to help take care of your sister, is all.

AMARA

(growing incredulous) Really? You can't expect me to put everything on hold just to watch her!

MOM

I know! But-Amara, it's dangerous out there! Besides, living in *wagons*? Never knowing when your next pay is coming? I honestly can't see the appeal of it.

AMARA

...Don't you believe in me? Even a little bit?

MOM

Of course I do! I've seen how hard you've worked for this! But, // Amara, I can't help but worry!

AMARA

No, I can't deal with this right now. You're concerned, *I get it*. But you can't even pretend to be happy. Not even a little bit. I'm leaving.

MOM

Amara-

AMARA

No.

[Sound of footsteps followed by a slamming door.]

MOM, calling out

Amara! Come back!

NARRATOR

Amara's cheerfully bright clothing clashes with the angered look darkening her brow as she leaves the front porch, passing the blooming flowers and wooden toys strewn across the grassy slope leading to the cobbled street. The bright yellow-and-blue paint of her childhood home disappears behind her as she stomps off. She ignores her mother's calls, vanishing into the midday crowd of passers-by, each busy with their own errands. She marches away, leaving her mother and sister behind. Her feet carry her through town, past the vendors at their booths, past the small school, past the temples and their holy people. The clergymen in their starched

white vestments nod at her and smile, but she glowers at them and hurries on. The brilliant gold emblem of the sun, inset in the stone of the belltower, winks at her as it catches the light.

She is a simmering storm of emotion, of anger and hurt and embarrassment barely contained beneath a strained facade and a jaw clenched shut through sheer force of will. She pauses as she passes beneath the shade of a willow, her breath hitching in her throat. Her face flushes red and her eyes prickle with tears.

AMARA, suppressing cries, to herself

Dammit...I really thought they'd understand. We've talked about it so many times.

(inhale, sniff, followed by a long, shuddering exhale)

VEGA

Amara? You made it!

AMARA

(surprised, choked noise)

NARRATOR

Amara fumbles with a bunched-up sleeve as she struggles to wipe away the tears streaking her reddened face. She turns away from the familiar voice, hiding her face in embarrassment. The newcomer, Vega, is tall, and sports a closely-shorn head of hair dyed a vivid shade of purple. She has an easy demeanor about her, and laugh lines

crease her face and brow. She cradles a fiddle case in one slender arm. Her features soften and a sympathetic look crosses her face as she sees her new bandmate hunched on the street corner.

AMARA, rubbing her eyes

Yeah. Yeah, I'm here.

VEGA

Oh. Sorry. I take it—things didn't go well?

AMARA

About as well as could be expected.

VEGA

I'm sorry kid. It does take some getting used to, leaving home and all. For everyone.

AMARA

(changing the subject) ...Do you need any help loading up?

VEGA

Nah. We're all good, I just came to find you. Are you ready to roll? You need a minute?

AMARA

...No. Yeah, I'm ready.

NARRATOR

Amara follows Vega around a street corner, finding a bustling crew in the midst of preparing a caravan of colorful wagons. The carts are stacked with crates and boxes of all sizes, while their horses stamp and chomp anxiously at their bridles. Performers and workers mill about, fraternizing and filled with anticipation at the long journey ahead. She passes them by, many exchanging waves, handshakes, and congratulatory welcomes. Her chest unclenches somewhat at these eager faces, and she dares to allow a slight smile to cross her own features.

Vega pauses at the last cart in the row, gesturing theatrically to the words "THE TRAVELING TROUBADOURS" emblazoned large and bold upon its painted side. Amara stifles a laugh as the elder musician opens the door and clammers inside. Amara glances over her shoulder, drinking in the sights of the hometown she has known for all her life. She closes her eyes, taking in a deep breath to inhale the familiar smells once last time.

She exhales, opens her eyes, and climbs in as Vega closes the door behind her.

[The theme song plays.]

WELCOME TO THE BRASS EAGLE

EPISODE 1: THE PERFORMER

NARRATOR

Miles pass as the caravan travels day and night away from the city of Tabria. One night, ahead of the wagons, the road stretches ever on, and as the wheel of her cart catches on a rut, Amara is shaken awake. She mutters a curse and tries to regain her position on the thin mattress, but falls silent when she glances over at Vega's bunk. The other performer is still asleep, invisible beneath a messy pile of quilts and blankets that rise and fall with each breath. With no one to talk to, she turns to her thoughts.

The first week on the road has been hard on her. Her fingers ache from long hours of rehearsal, her muscles sore from the rigorous training of unfamiliar dance routines. Compounding on that, the cramped interior, uncomfortable bedding, and the ever-present rocking of the wagon have slowly chipped away at her resolve and left her feeling ragged and hollow. Her mind races and her heart pounds as she thinks of the night's upcoming performance, her thoughts tinged with dread.

She is roused from her wallowing by the sound of a whistle and the whinnying of horses as the caravan begins to slow. The wagon train rumbles to a stop, and she hears movement as Vega stirs to life.

[Background hoofbeats come to a stop as the coachman whistles, jingles the reins, and orders the horses to halt and pull over.]

[Foley as Vega sits up, pulling off the blanket and sliding the curtains to the side.]

VEGA, yawning and looking outside

We're finally stopping? Good. You rested up, kid? Big night ahead.

AMARA

Yeah...I...I'm good.

VEGA

Doesn't sound like it. What's on your mind?

AMARA

I've been thinking a lot. About things. My family...I don't know if I'm actually...supposed to be here.

VEGA

What makes you say that?

AMARA

I just...I don't feel good enough. I've been practicing nonstop, but I haven't gotten any better.

VEGA

I know the feeling, kid. Felt the same when I first joined up with the troupe—we all go through it. But it's only been a week. Cut yourself some slack! You made it through the auditions. I've heard ya play. You're more than good enough.

NARRATOR

Amara smiles weakly as Vega swings open the door, letting in fresh air and golden sunlight. They both shield their eyes as they survey the bright surroundings. The wagons have stopped on the edge of a small town square, nestled between a cluster of outbuildings and the only tavern house for miles around. To anyone else, this would be a humble venue—a stopover on the way to bigger and better things. To Amara's anxious mind, however, the bandstand may as well be the executioner's platform.

VEGA

Oh yeah. We're here. We've got a while before we start yet, so come find me once you've got your bearings. Gotta go get warmed up!

NARRATOR

With a wave, Vega leaves Amara behind and joins the gathering throng of musicians unloading their equipment and heading inside to set up. It is a quiet, beautiful day, but the air thrums with anticipation. Amara shoulders her guitar and assists the band in preparing for the night's show, eager to put her idle hands to use.

Dusk settles quickly, and as the stage is set and rehearsals run through time and time again, Amara finds her mind drifting to her family. She thinks of that last conversation with them; of the tears in Lily's eyes and the betrayal on her face. Of her mother's concern for her, and of the finality of the slamming door. Amara feels her chest clench as she thinks about the miles that now separate them.

She reaches up and absentmindedly fumbles with the pendant around her neck, a family gift from long ago.

She is startled by a gentle hand on her shoulder and as she looks up she sees Vega with another musician in tow—a bearded man with whom Amara isn't familiar.

VEGA

Still worried?

AMARA

Just...feeling homesick.

VEGA

Ah, the woes of leaving family behind. (*playfully*) You think you've got it tough? Wait till you hear Drew's sob story. Drew!

NARRATOR

Vega thumps the man playfully in the chest, getting his attention.

DREW, feigning gruffness

Ow! Whaddya want?

VEGA

Tell Amara why you're on the run.

DREW

Aw, I wish you wouldn't bring that up so often-

VEGA

Come on, she's missing home!

DREW

Oh, alright. I'm on the run from a pair of demons that have been chasing me for years.

VEGA

He means his kids.

DREW

...I mean my kids.

AMARA, quietly shocked

...You're running from your own kids?

DREW

No, not really. They're both grown now. But I had you going there, didn't I? Hahaha!

VEGA

(more earnest) See? Look, all I'm trying to say is that leaving home isn't the end of the world. We'll be back your way soon enough. And in the meantime, you can always write.

DREW

And you should be relieved you don't have your own little demons to run from!

AMARA, a bit more optimistic

Haha, I'll take your word for it. Thanks. Both of you.

NARRATOR

Vega and Drew beam back at her, and the three turn their attention to the final preparations before the show.

As night falls and the stage curtain is lowered, Amara waits backstage with the ensemble. The growing murmur of a crowd and the clinking of silverware alerts them to the sizable audience already seated in the hall. Amara clenches the neck of her guitar with a sweaty hand, and looks to her bandmates for reassurance. Vega meets her gaze with a resolute nod and a smile, and the bearded countenance of Drew breaks out into a toothy grin as he offers two over-eager thumbs up. Amara feels her fluttering heart fall back into a staccato rhythm, and she takes a deep breath as she hears the crowd's murmuring give way to hushed silence as the voice of the emcee wafts through the curtain.

EMCEE

Good people of the valley! The performance you are about to witness needs no introduction. We have traveled far to be here with you tonight, and it is our wish that you are awed, amazed, and positively delighted by the show that awaits. It is my pleasure to welcome, without further ado, the Traveling Troubadours!

[modest clapping]

NARRATOR

The curtains peel away to reveal the bright lamplight of the spacious tavern hall. Faces of all ages look up at the musicians in their cheerfully colored costumes. Amara gulps as the band begins to play, and she joins them. Her fingers pluck at the strings, uncertain at first but gaining momentum and confidence. She steadies herself as she allows muscle memory to take over, the long hours of rehearsal flooding back to her and washing away thoughts of anything but the performance and the present.

She sways to and fro, bobbing and weaving amidst the other pirouetting musicians, the flickering light glinting off of the brilliant beads and bells affixed to their costumes. Feet tap the floor as they keep time with the song, the audience beginning to sway in response to the rhythm. Smiles flash up from the dark crowd, and Amara feels her own sense of self dissolve as she pours herself fully into her art. She closes her eyes and strums, playing with a passion

and an intensity that dwarfs her other performances: busking on street corners, playing for disinterested crowds; she knows that none of those times can hold a candle to the brilliant flame of a show she is putting on now. She opens her eyes to see Vega's broad grin as she winks before twirling away, her fiddle joining the crescendo of song.

The band plays on throughout the night, their instruments filling the room with their presence, and filling the hearts of those in the audience with song. As the final strum of her guitar rings out through the inn, the tavern crowd—most of whom now pleasantly inebriated—erupt into raucous applause. Amara joins her band in a sweeping bow before the curtain finally falls.

AMARA

I think...I think that went well.

VEGA

Oh you "Think that went well?" Amara, you were incredible!

AMARA

Oh, well, it wasn't—

VEGA

Don't be humble! You *killed it!* Come on. Let's go get some drinks and you can meet your adoring fans!

NARRATOR

Amara lets herself be led out and into the bustling tavern, where patrons talk and laugh about the show. She mingles with them eagerly, and one drink blends into another until she feels her cheeks flush and she becomes dimly aware that her laugh is a bit louder than usual. Merriment fills the air, but as she chats, a stray conversation catches her ear.

DRUNK TAVERNGOER

I'm tellin' ya! I know what I saw!

BARTENDER

Sure thing, Barry. I think you've had enough. Why don't ya go tell someone else that story-away from the bar, y'know?

AMARA

Hold on, I wanna hear what he has to say!

BARTENDER

Ugh.

DRUNK TAVERNGOER

Thank you! Alrighty. You wanna hear my story?

So. I was walkin' home the other night. Quiet road, I know the area. Lovely place. And as I'm walkin', what do I see? I look off to the left and there's a building. A BUILDING!

AMARA

...A building?

DRUNK TAVERNGOER

Yes, a BUILDING! But there ain't never *been* one here. I swear, plain as the nose on my face, that was an empty field not one day before. But explain to me how I'm looking at a big ole thing, all wood and thatch, with huge, dark windows. And swinging above the door? A sign. Read "the Bronze Hawk Inn" or somethin' like that.

AMARA, humoring him

Well? Did you go inside?

DRUNK TAVERNGOER

Like hell I did! I turned around and got out of there as fast as I could. We had a storm that night, some kind of supernatural omen, I tell ya. Back home, as I'm layin' in bed, I swear, I heard a thunderclap like nothing else, along with some kinda horrible harpy or bird screaming bloody murder. By the time I worked up enough nerve and got back the next morning with some more folks, the field was empty. *(he audibly shudders)*

AMARA

So...what do you think it was? A ghost?

DRUNK TAVERNGOER

I don't rightly know. But I know what I felt in my gut, and my gut felt that it weren't right.

(conspiratorial) If you really want to know what I think...I think it were witches.

NARRATOR

As the man's words hang in the air, the bustling tavern seems to grow a bit quieter. A palpable sense of unease settles upon the room, dampening the night's celebration.

VEGA

Oh, please! A magical tavern? How cliché can ya get?

AMARA

Aw, come on, Vega. *(to him)* Did anyone else see the tavern, or was it just you?

DRUNK TAVERNGOER

I...sure, I was the only one! But the folks I was with—ask any one of them! Something strange was goin' on, and they'll say the same.

NARRATOR

Amara leaves the man to his own devices as he slumps backwards in his chair, and the bartender rolls her eyes ruefully. Amara drifts away

from him and finds herself back at her own circle, Vega bobbing along beside her.

VEGA

I'd love to have some of whatever that guy was having.

AMARA, thoughtful

Yeah, I wonder what his deal was.

VEGA

Who knows. I've never heard of a ghost building before. That could make a fun idea for a song.

AMARA

I suppose it would.

NARRATOR

Something about the man's account sticks with her. Maybe it was the conviction in his voice, or perhaps it was the sheer oddity of the tale. She finds her mind wandering back to the story time and time again, even as she sips her drink in the company of others. The night passes in a blur, and she awakens the next morning with a pounding headache.

To her addled mind, the previous night feels like a haze of revelry and a pastiche of smeared lights and colors. Her head throbs just thinking about it.

Amara fumbles around for a piece of paper, managing to locate a quill as well. As she blinks back the spots that swim in front of her eyes, she begins to write a letter home.

AMARA

Dear Mom and Lily-

I hope you're both well. I owe you an apology for the way I left things. Mom, I understand your concern for me, but please believe I'm pursuing my dreams with passion, and responsibility. I miss you both and the conversations we'd have. I'm hoping to visit soon. Looking forward to seeing you again.

Love, Amara

NARRATOR

She sends out the letter, and time creeps past, the days turning to weeks before she finally receives a reply. She takes it from the courier and returns to her wagon, both eager and anxious to find what awaits. She feels a pang of emotion as she recognizes her sister's large, innocent writing.

LILY

Dear Big Sis,

Mom helped me write this letter, but it's from me. We both miss you a lot. I still feel sad you're not here, but Mom says we can see you soon, and that makes me feel better. I'm happy you're having fun with your band. I drew some pictures for you-there's one with you

playing guitar, and there's one of you fighting a giant.

(conspiratorial) ...I made that one up. Don't tell Mom. You have to come back to see them! Remember-I love you lots!

Lily.

MOM

(P.S. Amara-I want you to know that despite my worries, I'm proud of you. Take care of yourself, my love, and know that your family supports and misses you. We'll see each other again before long.

-Mom.)

VEGA

Ooh, a letter! Whatcha got there, Amara? Adoring fan mail?

AMARA, beaming

Oh, no, it's from my family.

VEGA

..Everything good, judging from your smile?

AMARA

Yeah. It's good.

NARRATOR

Amara's life on the road continues, her days filled with song and laughter. She meets all sorts of people, from all walks of life, and

finds herself in awe of just how many different ways of *being* there are.

On one street corner, as she and her bandmates carry their instruments from venue to venue, she pauses to listen to the cries of a man in a dark hooded robe, arms outstretched as he addresses a half-interested crowd. He gestures wildly, arms flailing as he speaks, spittle flecking his lips and beard as he calls out in a voice quivering with conviction.

HOODED CLERGY

Fellow citizens! Open your eyes! There is danger that lurks in our world--over, beneath, and *through* all things! It is the risk of temptation! It offers promises of grandeur, control-but the result is chaos! Destruction! What is this danger, you ask? It is the siren song of the arcane! Of magic!

DREW

(muttering) The hell's this guy on about?

VEGA

Ugh, I've heard about these nuts before.

AMARA

Oh, who...who are they?

VEGA

They're clowns. Scaring people by talking about the 'evils of magic', ooooooh! They're all over nowadays.

HOODED CLERGY

Steel your hearts! Do not let yourselves be swayed!

I have seen the havoc it wreaks—lives shattered, villages, CITIES reduced to crumbling ash by fire expelled from the burning fingertips of a crazed mage. It is the very reason the gods have shunned us! Turned their backs on this wicked world and the evil we have brought upon ourselves! Each of you—guard yourselves, and go! Walk with the Light!

NARRATOR

The man's hooded head swivels in their direction, and Amara notices a perturbed look cross Vega's face as she gently urges the other two onward. They continue through the streets, a shadow cast over their day, and head towards the night's performance.

The following days roll by, and letters become something of a rarity for Amara. In the few fortunate moments when the mail *does* make its way to her, she finds it increasingly difficult to carve out the time needed to respond. When the band's travels finally allow her to make her first visit home, she spends those precious few days swapping stories with her mother and making up for lost time with Lily.

As the months then burn away to years, her visits home are infrequent and brief, but they are always filled with joy. She develops a deep

ache in her chest whenever she comes home to find her little sister that much older, and her mother that much more gray.

[Several years have passed since we've last seen Lily. She is about 11-13 now.]

AMARA, telling a story

...And then they almost tore the door down! It's been fun meeting all the fans, but I swear, sometimes it's like common sense goes right out the window.

LILY

Are people really that crazy out there?

AMARA

Sometimes. It's not all bad. What *is* amazing is the adrenaline.

Connecting with the crowd...nothing like it.

But-enough about me. How are you? How's school been, Lily?

LILY

Fine, I guess? I've got some friends, but it feels like I'm always way behind.

AMARA, chuckling

I remember when I was there. I do *not* envy you.

LILY

Yeah. It's...just a lot, you know? I'm always tired.

AMARA

Are you getting enough sleep?

LILY

(wanting to say more) I'm trying. I just...I don't know.

AMARA

You've gotta remember to give yourself breaks, kid, okay?

LILY

Okay.

AMARA

And don't think for a moment I've forgotten you out there!

LILY

Heh. I know. Make sure you bring back more stories for us next time.

AMARA

That, I can do.

NARRATOR

While on the road, Amara becomes a master of her art, enthralling crowds across the continent with her guitar and her band. From the western port of Yarrin to the mountain city of Ballater in the Eastern March, the Traveling Troubadours follow the merchants and the traders to the concert halls and venues where pockets are deep and tankards are deeper.

On one particular day, Amara is handed a letter from her sister. She takes it from the courier, intent on opening it right away, but her bandmates call out to her. She pauses, sighs, and places the letter on a pile of other papers in her wagon.

Time marches on, and the band's reputation continues to grow. As the crowds swell ever larger and more eager, Amara finds herself consumed by the thrill of it all. She entertains with a flair unmatched even among her peers, and she spends her nights engaging in revelry with her friends and colleagues. One night, in a bustling inn far from her hometown, she laughs as she recalls a story she overheard some time ago.

AMARA, mid-story

And, get this, this guy swears to me-the building just vanished!

Poof! Gone!

PATRON #1

And you believe him?

AMARA

No, not really. I kinda had to humor him.

PATRON #2, perturbed

That's—oh. That...reminds me of something my cousin told me once.

AMARA, sipping her drink, curious

And what's that?

PATRON #1, groaning

This again.

PATRON #2

Quiet, you. So, my cousin—he's a rancher out in the badlands to the south. Harsh, dry area. Nothing around except the farms. But one night, right around midnight, he swears he hears what he thinks is some kind of bird screeching, and a gong, or thunder, or something. Spooked him and his cattle pretty bad.

AMARA

Did he see anything?

PATRON #2

Yeah. Kind of? He said he saw some kind of big dark shape on a canyon ledge a ways out. Thought it might have been some kind of...hut or something. But it was in a place no building could reasonably be—narrow rock shelf, hundreds of feet up a sheer canyon wall. He

got a really bad feeling in his gut and went back home as fast as he could.

AMARA

Odd.

PATRON #2

He was shaken up for a while. And what's more? He came back the following night with his horse and his flintlock. Said he got about a mile out from the place, and sure enough it was still there. Suddenly, he hears the same god-awful noise and is nearly thrown off his horse. When he calmed her down, he looked, and...the whole damn place was gone.

PATRON #1, to Amara

This guy. Don't listen to him. He'll believe anything.
Hey, barkeep! Could I get another?

PATRON #2

Naysay all you want; but I believe him. You would too if you'da heard *him* tell it.

[The din of the rowdy bar fades out as the narration comes in.]

NARRATOR

Amara ponders this interaction over the following days, and as the wagons wind their way through the countryside, she begins to take an active interest in the stories of this mysterious, magically apparating building. Could it be, she wonders, that these stories are referring to the same phenomenon? And what's more, could the tales contain some kernel of truth? Her bandmates take note of this new obsession, teasing her for it, but listening in all the same. At each inn, each bar, each restaurant, Amara asks anyone who will listen about this mysterious building. Although she is most often met with confused stares and arched eyebrows, a few people have a bit more to say.

[The following is a montage, with different peoples' responses spread out over a long time.]

OLD STORYTELLER

Reminds me of a story passed down in my family. I think it was...My grandfather's grandfather-he was a sailor. Middle of nowhere, miles from land, he found a tiny rocky outcrop with a building on top of it. He sailed past, and by the time he got back-it was empty. Like you said.

YOUNG STORYTELLER

My aunt talked about a "brass eagle" once. When I was reeeaaaally little, she said there was a troll who lived in a hut with a big metal bird, and if we stayed out too late the bird would swoop down and eat us!

WOMAN #1

I've heard the place is filled with gold. Just *bursting* with riches. But the second you enter, poof, it vanishes-taking you with it.

MAN #1

You know, they say if you go inside you'll never be seen again!

MALE STORYTELLER

When my brother and I were kids, we went looking for it once. Bought a treasure map and everything. And of course...no luck. In hindsight, I'm certain the guy who sold us the map was a conman looking to scam a coupla kids.

NARRATOR

The stories lead this way and that, pointing in every direction but a straight line. One night, after a long day on the road, she and her bandmates are sharing a bottle by the fireside when the topic of the tavern comes up once again.

AMARA

But what if it *is* real? It's a bit of a coincidence that so many people claim to have heard *something* about it.

VEGA

I'm not convinced. Still just sounds like made up stories to me.

DREW

I don't know. I think there could be *something* to them.

VEGA, groaning

Not you, too?

DREW

I'm not saying it's real! I just think it'd be...interesting to put on a show there. If it's an inn, they've probably got the space. Wouldn't you agree?

VEGA

I'll give you that.

AMARA, half-serious

Well, if either of you end up finding it without me, do me a favor and speak up. Ok?

VEGA

You got it.

DREW

Sure thing.

NARRATOR

The night wraps up, and Amara returns to the bunk in her wagon. As she passes the mess of papers nestled amidst her bags, she pauses as she spots Lily's crumpled letter, neglected among the eclectic accouterments she has accumulated over her travels. She picks it up and finally opens the parcel.

LILY

(older, weaker) Hi, sis. It's been a bit since we've heard from you. I hear your name every once and a while, you know. It sounds like you've finally made it! Mom and I are both really proud of you. But...that's not really why I'm writing. I'm sick, Amara. We don't know from what. It's been weeks, now, and it's not getting better. Mom hasn't said much about it, but the doctors...I've seen it in their eyes. They aren't optimistic. Can you come home soon? I'd like to catch up, and to hear your guitar again.

See you soon.

Love, Lily.

NARRATOR

The world seems to shrink around her as the breath catches in her throat. Amara's hands, so proficient and dextrous at creating song, tremble as they clutch the letter. She reads it again and again, until she places it down and tries to steady her racing heart, bracing herself against the side of her wagon. She stumbles back out

into the cool of the morning air, where Vega awaits her by the now-cold firepit.

VEGA

..Amara? Are you alright?

AMARA

(shock and disbelief)...No.

VEGA

What's the matter?

AMARA

Can we...can we go back? To Tabria? Home?

VEGA, sympathetic

Ah, sudden pang of homesickness?

AMARA

(earnest, frantic) Please. My sister. She's sick.

VEGA

(realizing) Oh. Oh, honey, I'm so sorry. We're not scheduled to head that way for another few months. I'll...I'll talk to the band and see what I can do.

NARRATOR

With an impassioned plea from Vega, the troupe reluctantly makes the decision to divert their tour and return to Amara's hometown. The days pass achingly slowly for her, and her heart seems to clench tighter and tighter each time they stop for even a moment. Her bandmates, used to seeing the vibrant and headstrong woman they've come to know, watch with worry as she grows pale and ragged from lack of sleep. She spends hours each day staring at the road, saying nothing, clutching the crumpled letter from her sister in a white-knuckled hand. The rest of her time is spent writing letters in her journal. Whenever they stop for the night in a town, or anywhere with any semblance of civilization, she tears the pages loose and sends them out by the handful, hoping against hope that they will find their way home before she does. *Please, she thinks. Please, Lily. Be okay.*

It is a sunny day some time later when Vega first spots the gleaming temple roof in the early morning haze.

VEGA

Oh-Amara. I think we're nearly there.

AMARA

Yeah. This is it.

VEGA

Just...know that whatever happens, we'll be here for you. Alright?

AMARA

...Ok.

VEGA

Good. We'll be at the Leaping Lamb Inn. You know the place? It's on the north side of town. We'll see you later.

NARRATOR

As the cart trundles into town, the bustling streets feel to Amara like an elaborate set made for the stage. Everyone, mere actors, just pantomiming their silly little jobs and trivial tasks while her world teeters on a knife's edge.

She parts ways with the band and turns towards home. She struggles against herself as she walks, feeling as if each leg is shackled to an iron weight. Her colorful performer's ensemble belies the numbness she feels inside, and she feels a wave of self-loathing as she walks and the bells jingle. How stupid-how inappropriate-for such a somber homecoming.

And yet, she is giving a performance all the same—one of togetherness and composure, desperate as she is to not let the passers-by see beyond her porcelain mask and into the swirling knot of dread that has displaced her heart.

When she finally arrives, she looks up at the dark windows. The house is much as she remembered—a bit more faded, perhaps, with a few

more flakes in the colorful yellow-and-blue paint. But much the same.

She knocks on the door. Some part of her mind, far removed from the immediacy of the moment, reflects on how odd it is that she feels like a stranger here. Her mother opens. She, too, is much the same as before. But her hair is thinner, streaked with gray, and she seems smaller, somehow. More tired. And far, far sadder. She looks up at her daughter, gasps, and pulls her in for a hug. After a spell, she holds Amara at arm's length. An unspoken question passes between them. Her mother's eyes well with fresh tears and she gives the faintest of shakes to her head in reply.

She's not here.

Amara doesn't respond as her mother takes her by the hand and the two walk the early afternoon streets of the town. She feels numb, a dull ringing in her ears as she is led this way and that. The streets give way to fields as they reach the town's edge, and Amara is dimly aware that they are in a churchyard. The temple's gleaming golden sun sparkles at her, inset within the dark gray stones of its tower. Her mother pauses in the shade of a tall willow. With one arm wrapped around her eldest daughter, she gently motions to a small white stone bearing her youngest's name. Amara collapses to her knees.

AMARA

(whispering, choked) She's...gone?

MOM

(*tenderly*) Yes, love. She's gone.

AMARA

I...should have been here.

MOM

Amara, listen to me. She loved you. Deeply.

AMARA

(*angry, regretful*) I know, but...I got her letter. I just...ignored it.
...How long has she been gone?

MOM

(*hesitant*) ...about a year, sweetie.

AMARA

A YEAR?!...I let her down, Mom! I let her die alone! How could I do that? She was my SISTER!

MOM

Amara, you couldn't have known it would happen. None of us could. You can't carry the weight of this on your shoulders.

AMARA

But I should have been here. I should...I should have held her hand, comforted her, told her it was alright! Now she's gone! ...Every breath I take feels like a betrayal. How am I supposed to go on? Mom, she was...dying...while I was out...*partying!*

MOM

Amara, don't...don't say that. Please. It's not your fault.

AMARA

I miss her so much, Mom. It hurts...it hurts too much. I don't know if I can keep going.

MOM

I said the same. And here I am. She...would have wanted us to persist. To walk with the Light, one day at a time. Ok?

NARRATOR

Amara just nods feebly, her breath catching in her throat as her mother holds her. The day creeps on as she is finally coaxed away from the grave and led back to town. At the foot of the stairs to her home, Amara looks up at the dark windows. Echoes flood her mind, echoes of laughter, of her and Lily sitting on the porch swing, of her chasing her younger sister through the sun-lit halls. She pauses at the door as grief overwhelms her.

AMARA

Mom, I...I can't be here right now.

MOM

Oh, Amara—

AMARA

I can't. I-I'm sorry.

MOM

(calling after, voice cracking) Amara!

[Sounds of footsteps and emotional music swells as she runs off and into town.]

NARRATOR

Her feet carry her swiftly away, her mind clouded with despair. She finds herself at the threshold of the Leaping Lamb Inn, and as she slowly pushes the door open, Vega turns to see her enter.

VEGA

(mild surprise) Amara. How did it go?

[Amara doesn't respond. Vega realizes why.]

VEGA

..Oh, honey. I'm so sorry.

AMARA

(dry, deadpan) I don't know what to do with myself.

VEGA

I...I can't pretend to know what you're going through. My heart is *breaking* for you, kid. *(beat)* Is there anything we can do?

AMARA

...I don't know.

DREW

Amara, maybe going out for a little while could help. Just to take your mind off things, even if it's just for a bit.

AMARA

I don't know if I can...

VEGA

Honey, we're here for you. Let us help you, even if it's only by distracting you. Just for tonight.

AMARA

...Maybe...maybe you're right. Maybe a distraction would be good.

DREW

That's the spirit! We'll take care of you.

NARRATOR

The trio take it slow, meandering through the streets as night descends upon the town and stars wink to life overhead. As they walk along the avenue, Amara finds herself distracted by the conspiratorial chatter of two passers-by.

TOWNIE #1

What's this you're saying?

TOWNIE #2

I'm tellin' ya—they say it just popped up overnight.

TOWNIE #1

A whole building? Serving booze and everything? (*snapping their fingers*) Just like that?

TOWNIE #2

(*nodding*) Just like that.

TOWNIE #1

I call bull.

TOWNIE #2

You'll see!

NARRATOR

Amara follows them with her gaze, the numbness giving way to a sliver of curiosity.

AMARA

I know where we can go.

DREW

That's the spirit. Where to?

AMARA

Those two that just walked by? They mentioned a place. Can we follow them?

VEGA

A bit odd, Amara, but sure. You're in charge tonight.

NARRATOR

The three musicians follow the townies, who stop at the edge of an out-of-the-way square in a little-frequented part of town. Sure enough, an anomaly greets them.

A large, wood-framed building with tall stained glass windows squats on the edge of the plaza, at an angle to and overlapping the street, as if dropped there haphazardly. The foundation is lopsided where it rests on the uneven flagstones.

A crowd of townsfolk of all persuasions stand outside, peering curiously at this bizarre new interloper. Its roof is thatched, and the wood appears worn and weathered. Despite this, and despite spending her entire life in this town and being intimately familiar with each back alley and side street...Amara swears that this sight is new to her. She stares, mouth agape, as she wonders if this is what she thinks it could be.

A loud thudding from the other side of the door sends gasps rippling through the spectators, who jostle each other as they back away from the entrance. A second bang rings out, and then a third, before the door bursts open with a jingle as a tired-looking man with a neat beige tunic and messy brown hair tied back in a ponytail trundles out, carrying a stepladder in one arm and a wooden sign in the other. Amara squints at him, trying to discern his age—his eyes are tired, his face etched from what looks to be a permanent frown—but his hair isn't graying, and he seems to otherwise be spry. How old *is* he, she wonders? Thirty? Forty? The man glances up at the uneven door frame and shakes his head tiredly, muttering to himself as he unfolds the ladder, climbs up, and attaches the sign above the door. Amara's eyes widen as she reads the tall, gilded letters: "The Brass Eagle Tavern."

AMARA, breathless

It's real.

VEGA

No way.

NARRATOR

The man on the ladder descends, folds it up, and addresses the crowd with a flourish.

KEEPER, affable, oozing bravado

Hello, my friends! I am the Keeper of this fine establishment. I apologize for my intrusion into your fine city of...?

AMARA, calling out

(beat) Uhh...Tabria?

KEEPER

Of that, yes, thank you. For one night, and one night only, I welcome you to the illustrious Brass Eagle Tavern! Do you fancy exotic liquors, the rarest of wines, and ales from distant lands? Then look no further! And to you—fine men and women of the guard—I welcome you as guests as well!

NARRATOR

As the man gestures to the audience, Amara notices the presence of some of the town's guards intermingled with the crowd, appearing just as awestruck and ill at ease as the rest of them. At the mention of food and drink, however, she notices their postures slacken and glances being exchanged as the man continues.

KEEPER

There's room for all, so long as your coin is good. But! Kindly note the sign! (*extremely curt*) ...For those of you who are illiterate, we close at ten to midnight. No exceptions. (*affable again*) Welcome!

NARRATOR

As he flings the door open, the people closest to the entrance inch closer to peer inside, curiosity driving them forward. They are greeted by lofty ceilings, flickering lamplight, a crackling hearth and a *spectacular* bar, with bottles of all colors, shapes, and sizes lining the wall behind it.

The first person—one of the guardsmen—glances over his shoulder, gives a slight shrug to the others, and crosses the threshold. Then, it is as if a tap has been turned on--the rest of the passers-by flood into the tavern, all the while marveling at the intricately carved decorations covering the walls, the delicious smells wafting from the kitchen, and the strange, humanoid statues of fearsome creatures carved into the very structure of the bar itself. The wood throughout the tavern is polychromatic, of all different grain sizes and colors; worn smooth in some places from the passage of many feet and polished to a high gleam in others. The ambience is at once both eclectic and refined.

Amara filters in, Drew and Vega trailing behind and ogling the building's interior. They find a small table near the fireplace in

an out-of-the-way corner. The peculiar man, the Keeper, busies himself with seating the strangers and taking their orders. Amara notes that he seems to be the only one working here—but he moves with a practiced ease that borders on the uncanny. As she watches him, she realizes that each languid movement feels rehearsed, calculated, as if he's done this hundreds—no, *thousands* of times before. Amara thinks of her time with the band, of the long hours spent practicing and repeating the same songs and dances. She thinks of how long it has taken her to hone her skill, become what she is today. But this...she feels that this is on another level entirely. She can't imagine how long it must have taken him to get *this* good at his job. The man is fulfilling the roles of a dozen people at once; taking orders and manning the bar and singlehandedly staffing the kitchen without even breaking a sweat.

Vega calls for a round of drinks, and within moments they are delivered. As she sips, Amara takes in her surroundings.

Behind her, above the fireplace, a massive clock adorns the wall. An eerily realistic brass eagle, stoic and unmoving, sits atop it.

The bird's talons grip the sculpted lip of the clock face, its wings folded and head turned in a noble pose. While intricately crafted, the statue is tarnished--the surface is discolored and dull, splotched with patches of brown-green patina. She wonders how the Eagle, which must be the namesake of the tavern—could be allowed to become so unsightly.

As she gazes up, she feels almost as if it gazes back at her, its vacant stare sending a shiver down her spine. With a shudder, she

has the thought that-if it were watching, which surely it isn't-its perch would be the perfect vantage point to stand vigil over the tavern.

Suddenly grateful for having picked a table off to the side, she turns away, keeping her back to the bird.

One drink blends into another as the night wears on, the ticking of the clock fading into the din of the increasingly boisterous crowd. Amara feels her cheeks flush as she teeters in her seat, the generous amount of alcohol working its way through her system. While her friends prattle on about one thing or another, she watches the strange man as he tends tirelessly to the crowd, deftly exchanging money for liquor and bantering effortlessly with the various customers. Hours pass.

As the sun disappears and the night creeps in, the man stands atop a chair and calls for the attention of the tavern-goers.

[Sounds of a spoon clinking of a glass as the Keeper calls for the crowd's attention. The crowd murmuring dies down.]

KEEPER

Hello, hello! This is your reminder that the tavern will be closing shortly. I ask that you kindly finish your drinks and begin making your way out of the building at your earliest convenience.

TOWNIE #1

(calling out) Aw, come on! It's not even midnight!

KEEPER

Precisely! But it's the establishment's rules. Sorry.

CROWD

(discontented murmurs and mumbling)

KEEPER

I'm aware this is not how anyone wants to end their night. But!
Your last round will be on the house. Enjoy! And-once again-PLEASE
begin making your way out. It's nearly ten to midnight.

NARRATOR

With a cluster of empty glasses next to her, Amara feels the
all-too-familiar introspection that comes with inebriation. As she
sits back in her chair, her vision swims and she exhales a shaky
breath. The stories were true. This place, this bizarre place with
its strange Keeper, is real. A thought strikes her. She glances at
her bandmates, glances at the Keeper deftly clearing glasses from
tables and ushering disgruntled patrons out, and staggers to her
feet, pushing back her chair.

AMARA

I'll...be right back.

DREW

Sounds like they're closing soon. Meet you outside?

AMARA

'Kay.

NARRATOR

Wavering slightly, she makes for the restroom at the back of the establishment, stealing furtive glances at the Keeper. He seems not to notice her as she draws a meandering path across the tavern.

Through the closed door she hears the din of the grumbling rabble fading away as they filter out, ushered into the night by the sole employee of the Brass Eagle.

Now by herself, the memory of just what awaits her outside the tavern comes bubbling back up.

No more sister. No more laughing with her, no more embarrassing her in front of her friends—just...nothing. No more Lily. Just that small, smooth white stone bearing her name, and the knowledge that Amara had failed her when she needed her most.

Her head swirls and she is drowned with grief once again, choking back sobs. What's the point? There *isn't* one.

She slumps against the wall, wrapping her arms around her legs as she pulls herself into a ball. Maybe she should just sit for a moment or two.

Or maybe...maybe there's something to all those stories about this place. Maybe they aren't just half-baked myths spun from the

ramblings of drunken revelers, like Vega seems to think. Maybe...if she stays, she can get away. Follow the tavern, find somewhere far, far from here and get away from the hurt and the grief and the memories bearing down on her.

And if not, then she would rejoin Vega and Drew in a few minutes, mumble an apology for making them wait, and have to face life without her sister.

So, she sits. The noise finally dies down, and she assumes she must be the last one left.

She peers through a crack in the door, seeing the form of the man rushing back and forth from table to table. She stares in puzzlement as she sees him scoop glasses off of tables, flip chairs upside down, and drop bottles of liquor into storage cabinets. He slots each one into what looks like molded, padded compartments before closing and locking each door. He is like a machine, an automaton, dedicated solely to the completion of his strange post-merriment rituals. As the clock ticks ever closer to midnight, he sighs, his work evidently done. He rubs his hands on his apron and awkwardly stoops to the ground, before he lays himself flat on his stomach, his hands folded over his ears. He waits there for a long moment as she stares in confusion.

The clock chimes as it finally strikes midnight. The sound reverberates, almost unnaturally, filling the tavern with its resonations. She inches closer to the door, cursing as she feels needles prick her sleeping leg. She gasps and she locks eyes with the

Keeper, his head turned and his stare wide and wild as he gazes straight at her, incredulous.

KEEPER, hissing

WHAT? YOU CAN'T BE HERE-

NARRATOR

With a whirring of gears, the bird atop the clock animates, spreading its metallic wings and calling its shrill call as Amara gasps.

The tavern shakes, a supernatural wind howls, and the distant peal of thunder causes the earth below them to tremble. As the very air around her crackles with energy, Amara is sent tumbling forwards, her body slamming into the door and flinging it open. With tears in her eyes, she looks pleadingly to the Keeper, fury evident in his clenched jaw and furrowed brow.

AMARA

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

[The tavern disappears. Amara's scream grows echoed and distorted, and then there's a moment of silence.]

NARRATOR

And then, the tavern is simply gone, taking her, the Keeper, and all the empty glasses with it.

NARRATOR

Meanwhile, Vega and Drew chat quietly amidst the drunken, happy throng slowly leaving the plaza. They are startled by a sudden peal of thunder, and with a flash, the tavern has disappeared. They both stare at the vacant, flattened earth, jaws agape.

MOM

Amara? Amara! Where are you?

NARRATOR

Amara's mother calls out as she enters the plaza, a woolen cloak thrown over her narrow shoulders to keep the chill at bay. She catches sight of the two brightly-dressed minstrels staring dumbly at the empty space before them. Her eyes light up with recognition at the sight of Amara's bandmates.

MOM

(gasp) You two! Have you seen Amara? I'm looking for her. Please, I'm very worried.

NARRATOR

Vega turns, her jaw still hanging open, and stares at Amara's mother. Behind her, Drew weakly clears his throat, struggling to find the words.

DREW

(ahem) ...About that...I...I don't think she's here anymore.

["Living the Dream" by the Dread Halla Tavern begins to play.]

CONNOR

Welcome to the Brass Eagle

Episode 1: The Performer

Written and directed by Connor Bushoven and produced by Michael DeMauro.

With sound Design by Candace Mortier, Marcus Siniscalchi, Amanda P.H. Bennett, and Yemi Kanmi.

This episode features the voice talents of Mike LeBeau as the Narrator, E.R. Hollands as Amara, Abigail Turner as Lily, Madeleine Norton as Amara's Mother, Meredith Nudo as Vega, Paul Warren as Drew, and Connor Bushoven as the Keeper.

Also featuring Diana Helen Kennedy as the emcee and the female storyteller, Brian Jeffords as the drunk taverngoer, Candace Mortier as the bartender, Brandon Ambs as the hooded clergyman, Mei Xin Bierzynski and Tim Winters as the bar patrons, Chrysanthe Grech, Maia Harlap, and Michael Mishkin as the storytellers, and Swann Grey and Ty Wilkins as the townies.

The theme song for our show, "A New Form" was written and performed by Polina Faustova.

The ending song for this episode is "Living the Dream", written and performed by Alyssa Gaiser as the Dread Halla Tavern. You can find her on instagram and TikTok @dreadhallatavern. You can find the full

version of this song on our show's YouTube page and the Dread Halla Tavern's spotify feed, as well as a digital download on our crowdfunding page.

Thank you for joining us for our first episode. We hope you've enjoyed the start of this adventure. To make the full series a reality, support our crowdfunding campaign at the link below. There, you can find information about digital and physical rewards like wallpaper packs, posters, t-shirts, pins, and my personal favorite—a Brass Tavern pint glass.

You can also learn more about our bonus content and stretch goals, which includes cast interviews, outtakes, and additional narrative content.

Rating and reviewing us on the podcast platform of your choice and sharing us on social media go a long way towards helping us reach new listeners and meet our goals. You can find us on all socials @brasseaglepod.

Seriously—thank you all, again. This episode represents months of hard work from our cast and crew, and we're all so appreciative of you being here. It is your support that makes this show possible, and I can't wait to share what else we have in store.

Until then, stay tuned, and welcome to the Brass Eagle.