

The Eagles of Londeria

Writing Sample

The peahen routinely flew some distance ahead, waiting to see if the group would follow, before flying a little further. It kited them along in this way for quite some time. Whenever the bird lost sight of them, it would let out its signature double honk and Martin Bancroft, and Varick would catch up in no time at all. Again and again this played out as the group followed suit. Martin noticed that they were rising in elevation still and thus were potentially leaving the valley.

“We’re still due east.” Bancroft added and was given a nod in agreement by both men. This meant that whenever they decided to quit this foreign goose chase they wouldn’t have to backtrack so far.

The ascended higher and higher, the sound of the river getting further, but notably choopier the further they went along. The trees grew dense and jungle-like as they ran. Varick questioned the validity of their engagement on more than one occasion but was answered by Martin’s stone serious face. Something was strange and these were just the sort of things they had messed around with before. *But chasing a bird?* Varick thought, before immediately shunted the thought. If his lord went, so did he.

Once again Martin lost sight of the bird in the dense vegetation and stopped, waiting for their traveling companion to call out for them once more. *Ca-honk* it went as predicted, but this time it sounded strange. There was a slight reverberation to it. As Martin paused to detect what the cause might be, Bancroft strode passed with his chest heaving and sweat dappling his face.

“Come uncle, are you growing weary?”

“Stop!” Shouted Martin, but it was already too late. Bancroft was mid stroll when the dirt and rock beneath him gave out. ”Bancroft!” Martin shouted as he dove forward looking at a now clear view of the canyon that lay before them. The distant rumble of water now revealed to be a waterfall coming down from the mountain ahead. Martin looked down and saw roughly ten feet below was his squire hanging from the root of a tree and hanging for his life. An eighty foot drop lies below him. Something on the ground below Bancroft caught Martin’s eye but he couldn’t make out what it was and he didn’t have time.

“Varick, the rope!” Commanded the knight, but there was no need. The page was already next to him and unraveling it.

“Hang tight lad!” Called the gilden as he fashioned a lariat and prepared to lower it down. “We’ll get you up in a Sunturian second!”

Bancroft could not resist the urge to look down. His heart rose into his throat. “...uncle!”

“Just a second boy! Hang tight! We’re lowering it down now!”

“Loop it under your armpit and over your head, lad! Don’t let go of whatever you’re holding on to until we say! And then start clawing up slowly!”Varick directed.

“Did you get that Bancroft?” followed Martin. After a pause, “Bancroft!”

“Yes! Yes, sir!”

“Good. Here it comes.” And a second later the rope went careening over the ledge and down to the massive young man. Martin watched it gently and gracefully go before a sudden and awful wind sprung up and forced the rope onto a rocky stone out of reach from anyone.

“Burdens on you, damned wind!”” Martin cursed.

“What happened?” Asked Varick, unable to see much over the ledge.

“The wind took it and the boy can’t reach it now.” Martin answered.

“Dammit. Okay, I will pull it up, we’ll try again.” The page began to pull but was stopped by Martin.

“Hold, friend. It’s caught and the rock looks to have an edge to it. We mustn’t risk fraying the rope.”

“Then what do you suppose we do?”

Martin took the line and began to loosely wave it up and down. The lariat refused to budge. He studied the rock face carefully, observing every detail in line of sight. “Varick, take what is left of the rope and wind it around a tree small enough to get at least three revolutions, then hold the end taught. I’m going down.”

“You’re mad, sir!” Varick protested. “You can’t mean to go down with naught for kit! And we only have one rope!”

“Do as I say, Varick. Bancroft is strong but his arms will fail him eventually so we’ve little time to debate.”

Varick frowned in frustration and concern but obeyed as was his duty. He found a tree that served the purpose and wrapped the rope around three times before taking the end and pulling it taught. He watched as Martin now grabbed the secured rope and began to slowly climb down the cliff, locking eyes with him a moment before disappearing over the edge. It is the curse of all page’s to have to consider how they will break the news of the death of their charges when things got particularly dangerous. Varick was no exception and as he waited, hearing nothing but the howling of the wind, he began to formulate a briefing for the two men’s family.

As Martin descended, he placed a foot upon a stone that immediately gave way and plummeted, narrowly missing Bancroft's head.

"Too close ,Uncle!" Bancroft shouted up.

"Shut up, Bancroft." Martin whispered to himself rapidly scanning the cliff surface. He found another stone that looked sturdy and tentatively placed his foot upon it. It held. He slowly adjusted his wait before searching once more for a hold.

The wind whipped by and bits of dust and dirt kicked up into both men's eyes, causing them to wince. Martin scoured the surface and locked eyes on the lariat. The rock it hung on hooked downward right where the cliff face stuck out from the wall, meaning that below it was nothing but open air. He steeled his focus and continued.

"Aaagh" He heard Bancroft groan. He looked up to see the roots he had secured around his arm were starting to dig into his flesh and blood was beginning to trickle out.

"Strength, Bancroft!" Martin called over the wind and continued down. After several careful steps, he finally reached the base of the overhang. He could not help himself but look at the vast expanse of nothing between him and the ground far below. He inched himself over to the rock that had caught the lariat and reached out. He was just out of reach. He strafed ever so slightly closer until he felt the twine of the rope on his fingertips. He grabbed for it and as he did, another powerful gust came through and lifted Martin completely off the rockface and sent him spinning.

Bancroft could be heard shouting in pain again as he forced himself to hang on. Martin could not see him however, as he was spinning in circles and crashed back into the cliff with a thud. Lightning shot through his spine as a stone made contact with a vertebrae. He let out a curse of pain.

“Martin!” Varick called out.

The knight was facing out into the open sky, unforgiving and endless. He forced himself to roll over, using his momentum to reach out for the lariat once again. This time, he had it. He fought for several seconds but eventually realized that he had made the mistake of keeping it too taut. There was a small chunk of rock just large enough and sharp enough that it risked damaging the rope if he forced it. Martin thought fast. He let go of the rope with his one free hand and pulled forth one of his knives. The wind blew again as he did and he watched the rope get further away. Once the wind passed, he began to swing back and in doing so, used the swing and the pommel of his blade to bash the rock that kept the lariat in place. Again and again he hit it but to no avail.

He saw a drop of red appear before him. He looked up and realized that it was Bancroft’s blood dripping down the cliff. He forced himself to think. The pommel of his knife was not doing the job. He needed something bigger but what?

A moment and another gust went by.

“Varick!” shouted Martin. “Pan!”

“What?!” Varick asked justly.

“Skillet!” he elaborated.

Varick had no idea what he was on about but had traveled with the knight long enough to trust whatever he said he needed. He unhooked the pan from his pack and held it six inches off the edge of the cliff.

“Half a foot off! Five seconds!” Varick called out.

Martin couldn't make out exactly what he had said, but quickly stowed his knife all the same. A few moments later a frying pan came diving over the side of the cliff. Martin had one chance to catch it.

Not yet. He thought.

Not yet.

Now. And he threw out his hand and grabbed the cast iron skillet by the handle in a reverse grip. In one fluid motion he spun it around, wielding it like a sword. Just then, another gust sent him swinging, but this time he was completely prepared. As he swung back towards the lariat he bash the opposing rock with all the force he could muster. With a crack the stone gave way and the lariat, still intact thankfully, came free.

"It's free, Varick!" Martin cried without hesitation. "Swing it to him!"

Varick did as he was told and the boy received his long awaited gift. As quick as he could, he secured it around himself as Martin scurried his way back up to the surface.

"His arm is mangled. He's gonna need our help." He said moving over to Varick.

"Aye, sir." The page replied and both men grabbed the rope. "You ready, kid?!" He called down.

"Ready!"

Inch by inch, the two men pulled the massive squire up the cliff. They kept pulling hand-over-hand and did not stop until they saw the bright red hair and piercing green eyes crest the edge of the cliff. They each grabbed an armpit and yanked him to solid ground.

Panting, the men sat collecting themselves as the wind continued to howl. As the adrenaline wore off, Martin's back began to scream. The damage to Bancroft's arm also became clear. Varick rose to his feet and hurriedly began to rifle out his bandages.

“There’s something down there. I tried to get a look but everything was going to hell.”

Martin broke the chorus of heavy breaths first.

Bancroft’s far-away stare fixed on his uncle. “I had plenty of time to get a good look at it.” He said as Varick began to wrap his arm. “It’s a pile of corpses.” All went silent for the breeze once again.

“You can’t- are you sure?” Varick asked in disbelief.

“You want me to hold you over the edge so you can see for yourself, Varick?” Retorted the squire.

“Well if you hadn’t got your eye fixed on some pretty bird maybe we wouldn’t even have to worry about it!” Varick snapped back and a storm began to brew between the two of them before a firm hand emerged.

“Enough, you two! You have been bickering like the Fenton brothers all day and I am running out of patience! Varick, the boy nearly died. Give him a moment.” Varick looked down in penance. “Bancroft, Varick just helped me save your life. Don’t take your anger out on him.” Bancroft looked away aimlessly into the woods. “I don’t know what has gotten into you, but we are all we have out here. Learn to travel together, or go home. Those are the options. Do you understand me?” He was on his feet at this point.

“Yes, sir.” They both answered.

“Damn right you do. Now get up. And get some fabric for a mask.” He took a breath.

“We’re going to go mucking around some corpses.”