

NARRATOR: Welcome to tonight's production. Content warnings can be found beneath the list of cast and crew in our notes. As always - stay safe, and enjoy the show.

MUSIC: The Curtain Rises by Trace Callahan.

NARRATOR: Starfall. Act one, scene twelve.

SFX: Dreamscape time. We stand alone in the deep, dark forest as the branches creak and the wind rages.

YOUNG LEONA: [no longer crying or sounding scared as in previous dreams; only tired and resigned] What do I do now...? Where do I go now...? Who am I now...?

DREAM VOICE: [voice muffled] Leona...Leona...Leona...

DREAM VOICE & FEL: [voices muffled & melding together] Leona...Leona...

SFX: The dreamscape fades away peacefully, leaving us in the early-early morning of camp.

FEL: [excitedly] Leona...Leona! Wake up!

LEONA: [groggily] Nuh...what? Fel?

SFX: Leona pushes herself up from the ground, where she sleeps.

LEONA: What is it? Something wrong?

FEL: Gooooood morning, Leona!

LEONA: Fel, it - it's not even light out yet.

FEL: But it's the first day of performances in Dowden! Your first chance to see a show in a proper theater! I know it's early, but I'm just really excited.

LEONA: [hesitates, then laughs once] You're right. I'm excited too. What do we need to do today?

FEL: Well, first thing's first - we need to rustle up some breakfast.

LEONA: Sounds good. What then?

SFX: Whoosh over to the pantry wagon, rummaging through jars and paper packages in search of breakfast.

FEL: From what I've heard, we're going to be preeeeetty busy today. There's all the usual stuff - checking props and costumes for effectiveness, getting everything laid out for the show, trying to help with whatever last-minute marketing we need - and

then apparently, there's still some repairs needed on the stage from what you and Hestren found. So I think it'll be an all-hands on deck kind of day. Cheese?

LEONA: Yes, please.

FEL: Gonna grab some cheese and some bread and - ooh, these berries look good! And we're good to go. C'mon, let's -

HOSSE: [clearing throat loudly] Eh-*hem!*

SFX: Leona drops her breakfast in surprise.

LEONA: Hosse, we weren't doing anything - oh.

HOSSE: Calm down, Scarecrow. If anyone has issues with your breakfast, you'll hear it from Centhly, not me.

FEL: Then what are you doing here so early? And who is your - and I'm sure this term is applied lightly - your friend here?

BARROW: [stiffly] Sergeant Barrow of Dowden Constabulary. A pleasure to make your acquaintance.

FEL: [sarcastically grumbling] Constables. One of my favorite kinds of people. Right up there with inspectors.

HOSSE: [agitated] If you don't want this to concern you, it doesn't have to, Porter. Barrow here is recruiting me and the Scarecrow for some civic security duty.

LEONA: [taken aback] You need *me*?

BARROW: We need all the capable warriors we can find, even if that means hiring outside the constabulary on this occasion. I understand you both have experience in fighting creatures of the fae?

LEONA: I do.

HOSSE: 25 years experience keeping these tenderfoots safe from fae beasties.

FEL: [grumbling] Way to oversell it.

BARROW: That's good to hear. We have confirmed sightings of multiple freshwater crustaceans of unusual size at Lake Sover. I'm putting together a team of constables, fellows from the local militia, and members of your fine troupe to hopefully deal with them by day's end. What do you say, Mr. Hosse? Miss...Scarecrow?

FEL: Excuse you, her name is *Leona*.

HOSSE: And I'm no Mister. But you said this is a paying job?

BARROW: Yes, of course. It's 50 lets for each of you upon completion of your duty. 20 lets as compensation for your time should the job be attempted and deemed incompletable by the forces at hand. 200 lets to be paid to your employer or next of kin should you fall in the course of duty.

FEL: [dripping with sarcasm] Oh, how good to know they're worth more dead than alive. Sorry, but I think we'll -

LEONA: I'll do it. I'll help.

FEL: *Leona.*

HOSSE: Rates seem reasonable. I'll be there too.

BARROW: Good to hear. We'll be gathering at the eastern banks of the lake in approximately two hours. I look forward to seeing you there.

SFX: Barrow spins around and clanks off in their armor.

FEL: Leona, what was that about? Why would you wanna work with them?

LEONA: Fel, fae-beasts this close to a human settlement never ends well. I want to make sure there won't be a repeat of Gazbit for the show tonight.

FEL: [sighs] I guess that makes sense. I just wish you could be working with us today instead.

LEONA: I know. I do too. But I do have experience with this - and with my power, I'm sure I can take care of this quickly.

HOSSE: Hey, that's the thing if you're coming along. Don't go pulling your sword out around the local law enforcement.

LEONA: I can't use my *sword* today?

FEL: You can't be serious!

HOSSE: Dowden may be more progressive, but you think their constables won't have questions about your powers? C'mon Scarecrow, use your brain. We just scraped by one surprise inspection. You wanna bring another down on us?

LEONA: If I can't use my powers, then why do you even want me for this fight?

HOSSE: [sighs] Look, you can still use some prop scripts to cover for when you use your strength and then swing around one of Lennic's old swords. But in case you hadn't noticed, the rest of us get by just fine in these fights, even without giant weapons. We just need more bodies that won't turn tail at the first sight of the fae. Wrap your head around that and be at the lake in two hours.

SFX: Hosse turns and walks off.

FEL: [frustrated] Why does everything that guy says make me wanna...urgh! He's the worst!

LEONA: Fel, I'm sorry. I may not be able to help the stagehands too much today.

FEL: Hey, hey, it's fine. You've got your duty to keep this town safe, and I - I've got mine to make tonight's show the best it's ever been. Just take care of those crustaceans and we'll have something spectacular waiting for you when you get back tonight.

LEONA: [encouraged] Okay. I'll do my best to be there on time.

FEL: Oh! And here, take my breakfast.

LEONA: But -

FEL: I'll grab something in town, don't worry, but I know you'll need lunch out there too, and it doesn't have to be raw lake fish.

LEONA: I actually really love fish. But thank you all the same. I'll see you later, Fel.

SFX: Leona turns and walks off.

FEL: Later, Leona! Take care!

SFX: Fel claps his hands and rubs them together in anticipation.

FEL: Alright then -

SFX: We whoosh over to the interior of the theater, backstage.

FEL: - what needs doing here today?

SFX: Large thump in the background.

AKSOL: [loudly, out of frame] Frack!

FEL: Well, that sounds promising!

SFX: Fel walks across the stage, approaching a conversation.

AKSOL: Grandma's knobby knees, Koua, what's this thing made of?

KOUA: Hey, none of this "thing" business. Maramuth has ears too, you know.

AKSOL: What, and you've figured out scripts to let a puppet *hear* too?...No, really, have you? Because that would be *fascinating*.

FEL: Hey Aksol, hey Koua, what's happening over here?

KOUA: Oh, Fel, you may be just the person we need. I believe my poor puppet of Maramuth the dragon may have been jostled in that strange windstorm on stage a few days ago. I can't get the jaw to open properly, even with the other movement scripts in place.

AKSOL: And I heard about Koua's troubles and volunteered to take a look at the scripts and mechanics inside the mouth - mostly because they won't let me even *touch* their puppets otherwise - but apparently, they also need to tell me what not to mess with when I'm in there.

KOUA: Look, I'm not saying I don't trust your skills in repairing scripts, but my puppets are delicate creatures and their scripts need to be maintained -

AKSOL: With the utmost delicacy, yeah, yeah, yeah.

FEL: Sooo...what do you need me to do?

KOUA: Fel, could you be a dear and hold the jaws open -

AKSOL: - so I can work and Koua can tell me what not to touch?

FEL: Sure can! Just let me - [grunts as he begins to push the jaws open] - get set up here and - whoa, this thing is heavier than I thought! But you're good to go.

SFX: There's a creak as he pulls the puppet jaws open, and smaller ones as he struggles to keep it open.

AKSOL: Alright, what am I looking at? Shine the handlight around.

SFX: Glow of magical light.

KOUA: Aksol, if you look towards the back, along the bottom of the lower jaw, that's the script to make it move.

AKSOL: Ooh, and that shiny thing in the throat?

KOUA: That's for the illusory fire. You *shouldn't* have to touch that.

AKSOL: Fine, fine. Let's see here...

FEL: [grunts a little from keeping the jaws open]

AKSOL: That's it? That's pretty simple.

KOUA: All it needs to do is open. It doesn't have to be too complex.

AKSOL: Are you sure you don't want me to tinker with it juuuuust a little? Maybe add some cool smoke effects, or improve the tongue functionality, or -

KOUA: The scripts of this puppet already work perfectly in concert with each other *as is*, thank you very much.

AKSOL: ...So, you want me to work on all of them?

KOUA: Aksol, please just do as I've asked you.

AKSOL: Okay, okay. [grumbling] Be boring for all I care. Hey Fel, how about keeping the jaws wide open, huh?

FEL: Sorry, my bad.

SFX: Loud creak.

FEL: [voice straining from effort] Everything look okay in there?

AKSOL: Eh, well, I see what the problem is. The mechanical bits look fine, but it looks like something must have whipped through here and left a scratch on the runes.

KOUA: Can you fix it?

AKSOL: [snorts] Can I *fix it*? Koua, you shoulda seen what I pulled off back in Hillbend. Hand me my toolkit.

SFX: Bits of metal wrapped in leather exchange hands.

AKSOL: Thaaaank you!

SFX: Aksol clinks and scrapes away against the wood of the jaws as they begin to work.

KOUA: [casually] So, Fel, how have you been lately?

FEL: [still straining, but trying to keep it positive] Oh, you know me. Keeping busy.

KOUA: Yes, I've certainly been hearing that. Your life seems to have become quite interesting lately with that new girl around.

FEL: Leona does seem like a bit of a weird things-magnet, doesn't she? But, y'know, it's alright. I still feel better with her around than not. Plus, she's - [grunts, pushing up against the jaw] - she's really handy for dealing with heavy things!

AKSOL: [backing out of the dragon's mouth] Hey Koua, go ahead and try something for me with this puppet.

KOUA: Right!

SFX: Koua steps around to the back of the puppet.

FEL: Uhhhh, are we good? Should I move?

AKSOL: Okay, give it a go!

KOUA: Alright Maramuth, let's see if you're feeling better.

SFX: Magic charge-up sound.

FEL: Uhhh, wait, maybe I should -

SFX: Mechanical creak and crunch as the dragon's jaws snap shut - with Fel still half in.

FEL: [cries out in alarm from being crunched]

AKSOL: Oh...right. Hey, uh, Koua, you mind un-clamping the jaw?

SFX: The magic powers down and the jaw lowers.

AKSOL: Fel? You alright there?

FEL: [cheerfully] Haha, yep! Just a little startled there. Thankfully, those teeth are a little more fluff than fang, aren't they?

KOUA: Yes, I make my puppets largely human-safe, even in the ways you might not think mattered. Especially after the Bite of '23...

Silent beat. We all consider 'the Bite of '23'.

KOUA: Well, I think that should cover it! Thank you for your help, Fel.

FEL: Anytime, Koua!

SFX: Fel begins to walk away, the last of their conversation following him.

AKSOL: What was the *Bite of '23*?

KOUA: Oh, it's really not as exciting as it sounds. See, there was this Torlandic prince attending our showing of 'Trindeo and Iziet,' and...

FEL: [long, relieved sigh] Oh, stars. I hope Leona's having more fun out there than I am.

SFX: Cut over the lapping shores of Lake Sover.

TINNICK: Hi there! Welcome to our little squad. I'm Corporal Tinnick, and I'll be in charge of you for this afternoon. You two are the hires from that acting troupe, right? It's so nice to meet you! Honestly, I didn't know actors could fight, but I guess you

learn something new every day, huh? So, how're you feeling about all this? Are you ready to get out there and slay some fae?

Silent beat.

HOSSE: Yes.

TINNICK: Well, that's just dandy! When you're ready, come over and say hi to the rest of the squad and we'll get you apprised of some of our typical tactics for this kind of mission. Oh, that's neat - are you left-handed too?

LEONA: Me? Um...no.

TINNICK: Oh. Your sword might be on the wrong side then. Might wanna fix that.

SFX: Tinnick skips away in a clatter of armor.

HOSSE: Blast it, Scarecrow, are you *trying* to embarrass us in front of the locals? Sword goes *opposite* your draw hand.

LEONA: [slightly flustered] I'm - *sorry*, I'm not used to it mattering where the sword comes from.

HOSSE: Then learn to act like it does. You wanna keep working with security, this won't be the last time we work with outsiders.

LEONA: Fine. I'll do my best to act like a normal fighter. Can you just tell me what kind of script is on my sword so I'm ready to use it?

HOSSE: [laughs harshly] You think I'm giving you a scripted weapon so you can burn your own squad out the gate? You get the standard soldier's kit.

LEONA: I've been fighting my entire life. I can handle more than the basics.

HOSSE: I'll believe that when I see it.

SFX: Hosse turns to leave. Leona stops him by grabbing his arm.

Silent beat.

HOSSE: You wanna take your hand off me, Scarecrow? Or you wanna lose it?

LEONA: I want you to tell me why you don't trust me.

HOSSE: Sorry. Hand-holding ain't in the job description.

LEONA: I mean it. After all I've done, you *barely* bring me in on security duties. What does it take for me to prove my worth to you?

HOSSE: After all you've - ...Look. I'm not rightly the sharing type. But I do like a good bet. So tell you what. You cut more legs off these crabs than me by the end of this day, and I'll tell you why you don't belong on my team.

LEONA: And if you cut off more? What do you get?

HOSSE: You don't talk to Porter for a week.

LEONA: *What?*

HOSSE: No explanation, no pre-amble. You just give him the cold shoulder for the next seven days, on your honor.

LEONA: But - why? Why would you want *that* of all things?

HOSSE: It's not like you got much else to offer me. So, I just think it would be funny to see that kid squirm.

LEONA: ...Fine. I'll do it.

HOSSE: Ha! Really? Pretty fast and loose with your friendship, eh, Scarecrow?

LEONA: It's fine. I'm not worried.

HOSSE: We'll see about that when you see these crabs.

LEONA: The lake's not that big. How bad could they -

SFX: Alarm bells start ringing, followed by rumbling in the water.

BARROW: To arms, squadrons! Crustaceans encroaching!

SFX: There's a massive rumbling and disruption in the water - followed by crabs screeching and claws snapping, implying their massive size.

LEONA: That's...pretty bad.

CRAB MONSTER: [lets out an intimidating screech, announcing its arrival]

SFX: Fade back to the stage where Fel hammers away at some of the boards.

FEL: Well, Dots? Think that looks straight?

DOTS: Lemme see...Yeah, those look alright.

COLDEN: What's that? Has little Fel finally learned to hammer a board in straight? Whoda thought we'd see the day!

DOTS: [chuckles] Remember when he was still a newbie and he couldn't hit a nail in straight to save his life? I don't even know how you get to his age with so few life skills!

COLDEN: Right? You'd think one torn hem on a costume would've taught him better -

DOTS: - but this guy just kept going back for punishment from Macalus!

FEL: Haha, yeah. I was definitely kind of a mess when I started with the troupe. Did I ever thank you guys for being patient with me before I got my head on straight?

DOTS: Knowing you, probably. But it never hurts to hear it again.

FEL: Well, then - thank you both for being so patient with me. And as thanks, why don't I go grab us some water?

COLDEN: Ha, forget the water. You should come get drinks with me and Dots after the show. We used to do that all the time back when you started, remember?

DOTS: Yeah, it's been ages now! Come drinking with us!

FEL: [laughs, just a little nervously] Yeah, maybe. We'll see after the show, okay? In the meantime - water? Water? I'm gonna grab some water.

SFX: Fel walks off quickly, then ducks out of sight as soon as he can.

FEL: [takes in and lets out a long, soothing breath] It's okay. Yooooou're okay. Okay? Okay. Let's get that water.

SFX: Fel begins to walk off normally - then stops again as he hears someone.

KIO: [quietly crying into her hands]

FEL: Hm?

SFX: Fel turns and approaches Kio.

FEL: Kio? What's the matter?

KIO: [startled, sniffing] Oh! Fel!

SFX: Kio quickly attempts to shove a mass of gauzy clothing out of sight.

KIO: Um, what are - what are you doing over here?

FEL: Well, I heard - *someone* crying and wanted to check in on that. Are you okay back here?

Silent beat.

KIO: [tearfully] *No!* Just - just look at what I've done to the nursemaid's dress!

SFX: Kio reveals the ruined dress.

FEL: [breathes in sharply] Yikes. That's a pretty big burn. How did this happen?

KIO: I was supposed to fix the stitch script that makes it look like it catches fire in the fourth act - but I just made a fire script instead! It went up in seconds!

FEL: Is there any way you can fix this? Have you already talked to Macalus about -

KIO: No! I can't tell Macalus I did this. This is one of the first times he's let me fix scripts on my own. If he sees this, he'll be *furios*.

FEL: Yeah, that guy can definitely fly off the handle.

KIO: I don't know what to do, Fel. I could lose my apprenticeship over this. All I've ever wanted to do was make beautiful clothes - clothes that make you feel like you could have all the world's eyes on you. And when I saw the gowns the troupe used in 'The Midnight Bride' that looked like they were alive with starlight, I thought I could learn to make them too...but I've just ruined all my chances, haven't I?

Silent beat.

FEL: Well...maybe not. Kio, can I see that dress?

KIO: [excitedly] You have an idea of how to fix it?

FEL: Nope! Even better!

SFX: Loud rip of fabric. Whoosh over to -

MACALUS: [raging to high heavens] You star-blasted blight! You shame on your ancestors! You plague on the Lord's land! Get out of my sight! And don't let me catch you within 100 feet of my costumes until next Solstice!

FEL: Rightyo! Later, Mac!

MACALUS: [screams with rage]

SFX: Fel casually strolls away.

DOTS: *Wow.* Solunism, Nayitism, Anshenism, he was cursing you out with the triple threat of religions. What did you do to make Macalus *that mad?*

FEL: Told him I left a candle under the nursemaid's dress and then ripped it on a stray nail when I tried to rescue it.

COLDEN: You actually told him that? I would've just tied a rock to the dress, dropped it down a well, and hightailed it for the faewoods. That would've been safer.

FEL: Honestly, I think he's too busy at this point to get properly mad. They've gotta do a fitting on Mint for the backup dress before tonight, so now I have to cover her shift running sound checks with Stonder.

DOTS: Well, good on you for coming clean. Although, I don't envy any patching up your clothes are going to need in the next few months.

FEL: Yeah, well, sometimes, you just gotta take one for the team.

SFX: Abruptly cut away with the heavy smack of a giant crab claw against a human body - as Leona lands heavily in the water.

MUSIC: The Getaway from Purple Planet Music.

CRAB MONSTER: [screeches fearsome, a crabby screech]

LEONA: [growls in frustration]

TINNICK: By the Lord! Are you alright?

LEONA: [rising to her feet from the water] I'm fine. Just a scratch.

TINNICK: That was some hit, straight from the crab. But if you say you're okay, we need you back in formation for -

BARROW: Sun Squad, look out!

SFX: A giant crab's pincer swipes across the grass and soldiers back off with a clatter of armored bodies.

TINNICK: Star Squad, aim for the eyes and between the shell!

SFX: Archers take aim and loose arrows, some breaking against the shell, some finding soft targets.

TINNICK: Moon Squad, get ropes around the legs and unbalance it. We'll - Leona, no!

SFX: Leona dashes out through the shallow water and unsheathes her temporary sword. She slashes fiercely at one of its legs repeatedly, but the sword slides off ineffectively.

LEONA: [grunts repeatedly with slashing effort before speaking] Useless piece of steel. If I just had the Lion's Fang -

HOSSE: Outta the way, Scarecrow!

SFX: More footsteps trample through the water, throwing ropes around the crab's legs as more arrows fly overhead.

TINNICK: Now!

SFX: The ropes pull taut and the crab crashes to the ground.

CRAB MONSTER: [screams in surprise as it is pulled to the ground]

HOSSE: Hyah!

SFX: Hosse and the others begin to hack away at the crab's legs with a great deal of splashing and chopping.

LEONA: [breathes heavily on the edge of the chaos]

HOSSE: [calling over smugly] Looks like it's already my two legs to your zero, Scarecrow! Better start catching up or it's curtains for you and Porter.

LEONA: [growls] But that's not - [stops, calming herself] ..what I agreed to. I need to fix this.

SFX: Leona tramps out of the water and onto the shore.

TINNICK: [pleasantly surprised] Oh, Deputy Leona! Good to see you're still alive. Most people don't make it out of running up to fae crabs alone and unarmored. Twice.

LEONA: Most people aren't...as foolhardy as me. Corporal Tinnick, I apologize for not following the formations.

TINNICK: Oh, well, as long as you're not dead, you can always stand in the next one. There's still plenty of crab left to fight.

LEONA: Yes, I can -

CRAB MONSTER: [crab screech in the distance]

LEONA: - I can see that. And I will do better in the next wave. But I wanted to see if there's something I can suggest - something I might be able to do to help.

TINNICK: Hm. Breaking the rules, nearly getting killed, and now proposing your own strategy, all on your first day. A bold move.

LEONA: Sorry, I know it's -

TINNICK: I like it! Shows some real gusto!

LEONA: Really? Alright. Here's what I was thinking...

SFX: Whoosh back over to the stage and the sound of heavy furniture being dragged in one direction.

GLENN: Hmm...a little to the left.

SFX: It's just a scoot to the left.

GLENN: Maybe a little less-left?

SFX: And then a scoot to the right.

GLENN: Hmmm, it might've been better the first time. A little more left?

SFX: And then a scoot back to the left.

GLENN: [conflicted] See, now I'm second-guessing everything. Fel, do you mind moving it back to the center so I can see -

RHEA: Oh, leave it alone, Glenn. Dalyn's stabbed you and shoved you out that window a hundred times. A few inches left or right won't make a difference.

GLENN: Right. Of course you're right. Sorry Fel! Just leave it there, it's *perfect!*

FEL: [calling out] You sure? Cause I can keep trying if you're not sure.

GLENN: Rhea, he did say -

RHEA: It's fine, Fel! Take ten and we'll get Maramuth's cave figured out when you're back.

FEL: Yes, ma'am!

SFX: Fel hustles backstage, singing to himself as he goes.

FEL: Water, water, where is the water? Water, water, get some - hm?

DALYN: [from a distance, rehearsing as General Howell] Look to me now, my countrymen. I see in your eyes a hope I cannot allow myself. You wait - both for the monster we are intended to meet in battle, and for the hero fated to save our wretched souls. But it is without guards I must - [drops character] Blast it. That's not - [back into character] But it is with a gart hardened by - [out of character] *Saints*. No! Why can't I get this right?

SFX: Dalyn slams a fist against a wooden counter in frustration. Fel waits outside his rehearsal space a moment, considering.

DALYN: [breathes in and out deeply, centering himself and getting back into character] Look to me now, my countrymen. I see in your eyes -

FEL: [walking over] Hey there Dalyn, how's it going?

DALYN: [sighs] How long were you listening, Fel?

FEL: Oh, you know. Hours and hours. Say, anything I can help you with?

DALYN: [sullenly] *No.*

FEL: Really? Becaaaaause I've heard you do the General's speech dozens of times and you've never had that much trouble with it before.

DALYN: [aggressively] I said, go dunk your head in Hosse's bathwater, Porter!

Silent beat.

SFX: Fel crosses the room and leans against a counter with a wooden creak.

FEL: [evenly] I'm ready to listen when you're ready to talk.

Silent beat.

DALYN: There is...Rizabeth Alstanding is going to be in the audience tonight.

FEL: Alstanding? Outstanding! Who is that?

DALYN: She is - she *was* one of the only theater critics whose works were ever published in the state of Falsten. She was so powerful and influential that she convinced people to read her writings critiquing another artform en masse. *In Falsten.*

FEL: And she's going to be here tonight?

DALYN: Apparently, she has *retired* to Dowden and attends the theater regularly.

FEL: Okay, so, she's retired. I don't think she'll actually be writing anything about us then.

DALYN: It doesn't matter if it goes on the page or not! A few years ago, this woman's word was law on if a show was worthwhile or not. Do you know how many actors I saw having breakdowns because she called their performances "uninspired?"

FEL: What are you worried about though? All she'll be tonight is just another face in the crowd. You won't even be able to see her for all the stagelights.

DALYN: But *I'll know* she's there, and she'll be judging me, and it'll be just like I'm back in Falsten again, back in the Empire Theater, *burning* under their eyes and choking until I forget my lines and - and -

Silent beat.

SFX: Fel pushes off the counters, closes the space between himself and Dalyn, and hugs him, speaking close into his ear.

FEL: Hey. I know you're good. I've seen you on that stage time and time again. You never forget a line. You never miss a mark. And you made yourself that way. One more unheard opinion in the audience doesn't take that away from you.

Silent beat.

DALYN: I know that. I know I'm good.

FEL: Yeah. You know it. So own it, Mr. Archivayik.

SFX: Fel pulls away from the hug.

FEL: And you know what you need to do now, right?

DALYN: Yes. Of course. I need to get my head on right. I can't let Alstanding intimidate me. I need to keep practicing until I have my lines word-perfect again, and then -

FEL: No, you goof! You need to talk to Rhea and Glenn about this!

DALYN: Ugghhhhhh. Fel, whyyyyy?

FEL: Because they're your partners on stage. They need to know where your head is at or they can't support you up there.

DALYN: But you know what they're like. Rhea will be all, "You should spend more time with the basics, kid," and Glenn will want to give me *notes*. *Glenn. Me. Notes.*

FEL: Yeah, I know, but...you'd do the same for them too, wouldn't you?

Silent beat.

DALYN: Why do you have to be so insufferably tender-hearted and *right*? Fine, I'll speak to them before the show tonight.

FEL: You can follow me back and take care of it now, if you like. I should probably be getting -

SFX: Sudden, rushing footsteps interrupt them.

VAIR: Hey! Fel! If you're not too busy, could you help me out with a little thing?

FEL: Vair, you know I would gladly help normally, but I also just told the actors I would finish helping *them* with something, and -

VAIR: Oh, that's okay, I totally understand. I guess it's nothing too bad.

FEL: Are you sure? Cause if you're not, I can -

VAIR: No, no, no, it's fine. Probably nothing I can't deal with. Just this soldier construct is acting out, and it won't stop stabbing its pike, and it's a little on fire, and -

FEL: Oh, stars!

SFX: Fel rushes off across the stage, until his footsteps turn into Leona's, rushing through the shallows until she leaps up to a great height.

MUSIC: Licence to Thrill from Purple Planet Music.

LEONA: [efforts for leaping and then stabbing her sword]

SFX: Leona's sword stabs into the meat of the crab.

CRAB MONSTER: [screeches in pain and surprise as its eye is attacked]

SFX: The crab thrashes about in the water.

LEONA: [calling out] Corporal Tinnick!

TINNICK: Moon Squad, ropes!

SFX: Armored footsteps tromp through the water, throwing ropes around the thrashing legs.

TINNICK: Pull!

SFX: The ropes are pulled taut and people begin hacking at the carapace of the legs. The crab swings one pincer at the water.

CRAB MONSTER: [screeches, violently attempting to bat away the group of attackers]

LEONA: No you don't. Keep your eyes on - keep your eye me and my crappy sword, *buried* where your eye should be. [grunts as she twists the sword in deeper]

CRAB MONSTER: [screeches in pain from further eye attacks]

SFX: The crab swings a pincer directly at Leona, snapping the sword and slamming her to the ground.

LEONA: [pained effort as she impacts the shallows]

SFX: The crab slams down another pincer, which Leona catches with a heavy impact before it can crush her.

LEONA: [growling] No...you...*don't!*

SFX: A tinge of magic humming surrounds her.

TINNICK: Moon Squad, get those ropes *taut!*

SFX: The ropes pull taut in one direction as Leona bears down and pulls in another.

LEONA: [yells powerfully as she rips the giant crab claw loose]

CRAB MONSTER: [lets out a perishing screech as it is torn apart]

SFX: Following the ripping and crash of the claw being torn loose, the Crab flails a final time before fully falling aside in the water, silent and vanquished]

LEONA: [breathes heavily, dripping with water and crab viscera]

SFX: Hosse approaches across the shallows.

HOSSE: You can put the claw down, Scarecrow. It's over.

SFX: Fade out from the moment, then in on coins being counted out and wagon wheels shuffling away in the distance.

BARROW: ...48, 49, and 50! That's 50 lets for you, and another 50 for Mr. Hosse over there. Please give him our thanks for his assistance today.

LEONA: I will do that.

TINNICK: Yeah, it's been pretty interesting having you two around. Your friend was pretty handy with his script. And you! I thought you were wanting to run into death's pincers when you suggested playing decoy, but look at you, still alive and everything! How did you manage it?

LEONA: Um...we have some very talented runeworkers in the troupe. Their scripts helped me.

BARROW: Well, the city of Dowden thanks you and your runeworkers for their service.

TINNICK: And invites you to the crab boil we'll be having in the town square later!

LEONA: Of course. Thank you.

SFX: Leona waves them off, then turns and walks back to the lakeshore, where Hosse sits. She offers his payment with a jangle of coins.

HOSSE: Huh? Oh, right.

SFX: He accepts the coins and tucks them away.

LEONA: How many legs did you get?

HOSSE: We don't need to get into numbers. Not when every leg on that last one counts as yours.

LEONA: So I win the bet?

HOSSE: Sure. You win.

LEONA: Good. I'll be speaking to Fel as soon as we get back to the theater.

HOSSE: [grumbling] Like I could have ever stopped that.

Silent beat.

SFX: Leona sits down on the lakeshore beside Hosse.

LEONA: Why do you not want me on your team, Hosse? Why don't you trust me?

HOSSE: [sighs] It's nothing personal, y'know. I don't have some burning resentment against you for showing me up against those lizard beasts or something. I ain't got time for that bullmuck. I trust you as much as I need to.

LEONA: So then why am I still not part of your team?

HOSSE: Frankly? I don't think you belong on one.

LEONA: But - but, I -

HOSSE: Not for security. Not when it comes to fighting. You can mess around with the stagehands and the prop-makers all you like. That's none of my business. But when it comes to security, you haven't shown me you can work on a team. You're not cut for it.

LEONA: I still don't understand. You've seen me in action before. I've taken down monsters 20 times my own size. Protected people from a rain of swords. What do I need to do to prove I'm strong enough?

HOSSE: I know you're strong. Stronger, faster, more durable than anyone I could hire. But that's the problem. Tell me Scarecrow, you ever had to rely on anyone in battle? Or you always been like you were today, just running out and attacking when you feel like it?

LEONA: I learned to work with the squad, didn't I?

HOSSE: With *your* strategy - the one that put you at the center. Because you don't see allies in a fight. You see enemies, liabilities, and the ways to put yourself between them. That's different from working with a team.

Silent beat.

LEONA: I don't know how to work any other way.

HOSSE: Yeah. Ain't that the truth.

Silent beat.

LEONA: [quietly] Sorry.

Silent beat.

HOSSE: Look. You're not the only one who's spent their whole life fighting. I've been hired muscle. I've been a mercenary. I've even done time in militias and a city watch or two. That means I've had my fair number of run-ins with people like you.

LEONA: Like me? Like me...how?

HOSSE: People who were *special*. Noble scions who could afford better equipment and conditioning, or faebloods who were born with it. People blessed by whatever lord or stars or ancestors they believed in. They were the kinds of people who could kill a ten-foot fae-beast with one hand tied behind their back. They were the stuff legends were made out of.

But the thing is - I never met a single one of them I'd rather have on a squad over one good soldier who knew how to clean their boots, sharpen their sword, and follow a battle plan we both agreed would keep us alive. Think you could ever be that person, Scarecrow? Follow orders made with the middle in mind, even though you know you're better? Even though you know you'll always be stronger than us common folk?

LEONA: I don't know. I've always fought alone. I was never *allowed* to rely on anyone before. And you're right, it's not in my instincts to stay in line when I can charge ahead.

HOSSE: 'S what I've been saying.

LEONA: But...maybe I can learn. I have to try, don't I? For the safety of the troupe. I have to fight for them.

Silent beat.

LEONA: I don't know what I'm doing if it's not this.

SFX: Hosse pushes himself to his feet with a hefty grunt.

HOSSE: I can't tell you what else to do. And given all the weirdness around this troupe lately, I can't say we won't need your sword more in the coming months. It just won't be as part of my team

LEONA: I understand.

HOSSE: And don't try giving me any sad looks over that.

LEONA: What? I wasn't -

HOSSE: You can't try to sell me that you're really broken up about this. Do you *really* wanna be here right now? Out here in murky waters, covered in crab guts? Or would you rather be back at the theater, cozied up to the stagehands and learning to...make old shoes sing or something?

LEONA: I...I'm not -

SFX: More shaking and water displacement as a new crab rises up from the lake.

CRAB MONSTER: [screeches, announcing its arrival]

HOSSE: Huh. Would you look at that? Looks like the constables missed one.

SFX: Leona rises to her feet.

LEONA: Do you want to handle this one together?

HOSSE: [snorts] Are you kidding? I'm not getting paid to fight that. Go wild, Scarecrow.

SFX: Leona summons her sword.

LEONA: Thanks. I need to figure something out.

SFX: Leona races across the water and slashes the Lion's Fang - which cuts us away to the next scene, an evening outside the Dowden Theater.

FEL: [calling out to the street, energy lagging a little] Tonight! Tonight! Come see the Carouvel Traveling Acting Troupe! Performing tonight! -

SFX: Fel's stomach growls loudly.

FEL: Performing tonight - Mariette the Fourth, one of the greatest Erissian works ever penned, performed by one of the greatest performing troupes ever to...perform?

SFX: Stomach growls again distractingly.

FEL: [to himself] Stars, I definitely didn't eat today, did I? I hope Leona remembered *her* lunch.

Silent beat.

FEL: It's getting late...I hope she gets back on time for the show.

SFX: Stomach growls.

FEL: [calling out] Come forth, ye people of Dowden! Attend the tale of Princess Mariette, heiress to the throne of Eriss! There's swordplay! Wordplay! Love and loathing, dragons and damsels! This show has it all! Come see Mariette the Fourth, presented by the Carouvel Traveling -

SFX: Footsteps approach Fel from the side.

RIVER: Excuse me, are you with the acting troupe?

FEL: What? Oh, me?

RIVER: You *are* the one standing here, yelling about the theater into the dark, so, yes.

FEL: Uh, hehe, sorry, of course. You just caught me off-guard. Yes, I'm Fel. I'm a stagehand with the troupe. Are you here for the show?

RIVER: Maybe. Maybe not.

FEL: O...kay? Well, if I can do anything to convince you to buy a ticket, then -

RIVER: I'm rather more interested in your troupe as a feature in itself. You see, I write a news sheet over in Ghilmick, and I've been hearing some very curious things attached to your troupe's name lately. Would you mind setting the record straight on a few matters, perhaps putting some rumors to bed and perhaps confirming others?

FEL: Uh, sure. I don't see why not. Any publicity's gotta be good for the troupe.

RIVER: Wonderful. Let's start with the basics. Can you describe the purpose or mission of your little organization?

FEL: Yeah. We are the Carouvel Traveling Acting Troupe. We travel around from town to town, putting on theatrical performances with the help of magical scripts that create completely immersive and inspiring shows.

RIVER: Script-enhanced theatre? A novel concept. I assume most of the scripts you use are illusory in nature.

FEL: Yeah, mostly. There's a few extra tricks here and there, but no real fire on our stage. Well, there's not supposed to -

RIVER: These scripts you use for your performances, where do they come from? Are they purchased somewhere?

FEL: Oh, no, we operate by making and maintaining our own scripts. I mean, sometimes we need to contract a specialist for certain things, like -

RIVER: And your runeworkers, do they ever make other scripts for you? Basic tools, mobility scripts, weapons, etc.?

FEL: [speaking just a bit more carefully] No, not really. Our people aren't licensed to make scripted weapons. Well, Aksol is, but -

RIVER: Hm. Interesting.

FEL: What?

RIVER: Oh, no, nothing. I'm sure it's nothing.

FEL: No, what? It's not weird that a theatre troupe wouldn't make its own weapons, is it?

RIVER: No, of course not. I've just been hearing so many stories about your troupe lately involving strange weapons. Honestly, I just thought it could make for a fun new folktale for the town if I could find more details. But I suppose you may not be the lead I thought I was chasing after all.

FEL: [laughs] No, I think that's definitely us.

RIVER: But you said you didn't deal with weapons.

FEL: We don't *make* weapons, but we do have a security team equipped to keep us safe. And their latest member, she's - well, she's the one you've probably been hearing about.

RIVER: Oh? Do tell. Did she really fight off fae-beasts single-handedly in Gazbit? And cause a rain of swords in Hillbend?

FEL: [snorts] I think people have been telling you tales already if you think that's what really happened. It's never anything that spectacular, even with the troupe. Just bored locals who like to exaggerate every big lizard and weird weather event.

Silent beat.

FEL: Leona though...I guess she kinda does spark the imagination. She...she's kinda fearless, but she still cares so much about protecting us, almost in that classical hero kind of way. Maybe that's why she fits with us so well. She's like the people we tell stories about.

RIVER: [interest notably rising] So this...*Leona* I've been hearing so much about. She's attached to your group?

FEL: Yeah. Hopefully for a long time to come.

RIVER: Hm. Not to put a spin on this, but you seem quite attached to *her*. Are you two close?

FEL: I mean, I'd say so. I was kind of the one who invited her into the troupe, and, y'know, tried my best to help her learn her way around. And then she saved my neck a bunch of times. Yeah, we're kind of best friends.

RIVER: Hm. How about that? The girl has a *friend*. Well, I thank you for your time. That's all I need to know.

SFX: River turns to walk away.

FEL: [calling out] Wait! Don't you wanna see the play? Or hear about it? Or -

RIVER: Sorry, deadlines to meet! Ta-ta, friend of Leona!

Silent beat.

FEL: Okay. [shrugs] Weirdo. [starts calling out again] Come see our troupe tonight in our premiere Dowden performance of Mariette the Fourth! It's got - it's got -

SFX: Fel's stomach growls loudly. He stumbles a step.

FEL: [woozily] Whoa...little light-headed there. Little...little...

SFX: He stumbles more, hunger making his head spin, until he stumbles into someone else.

LEONA: Fel? Are you alright?

FEL: What - ? [pepping up] Oh! Leona! You made it just in time for the show! That's sure lucky.

LEONA: Sorry the job ran so long. I really wanted to get back early enough to help with the show.

FEL: Hey, it's fine. The crew handled everything on their own for today. But - there'll be plenty of crab-less days ahead of us where you can pitch in again.

LEONA: That sounds good. And, speaking of crab, I stopped to get you some fritters from the crab boil on the way back!

FEL: Oh, Leona, thank you, that's - wait, is fae crab safe to - actually, know what, I don't care.

SFX: A crinkle of paper exchanging hands as Fel begins chowing down on fritters.

LEONA: I thought you might be hungry. You always try to work through lunch on show days.

FEL: [as someone who has not eaten all day] Ha. Yeah. Lunch. So, how was your day? Hosse not too much of a pain?

LEONA: Nothing too difficult. Hosse was...fair, I guess. How was your day?

FEL: Oh, you know. Same ol', same ol' stagehand stuff. Sorry, just let me finish these and then we can go in.

LEONA: No, it's fine. Take your time. I like seeing the theater at night. It really is like Dalyn said. Full of that...warm, quiet glow.

FEL: [chuckles] Yeah...sure is something, isn't it?

SFX: Long pause as Fel eats.

LEONA: Hey, Fel? Can I ask you a question?

FEL: [mouth full] Sure. Shoot!

LEONA: Why do you work for the troupe? Why have you dedicated so much of your life to them?

FEL: Why? Huh. I guess - [swallows] - I guess I could say a lot of things. I could say it's because I love sitting around a fire and listening to stories from some of the best performers in the Empire after a long day of working with my hands. I could say it's because no two days are ever exactly the same, and that each day, I get to see a little more of the world. [laughs ruefully] I could say it's because I burned a *lot* of bridges behind me and so I'm not really able to go back the way I came anyway. But honestly? I think it's mostly just there's nothing I'd rather be doing than *this*.

LEONA: [thoughtfully] I see...

FEL: Sorry, that may not be the most helpful answer.

LEONA: No, no, it's fine. I was just curious.

FEL: Oh. Okay. [om-noms another fritter]

LEONA: [voice wavering, a little uncertain] Hey, um...Fel?

FEL: [swallows again] Yeah?

LEONA: This may be a strange question, but...have you ever met a man named...Sage?

FEL: Hmm...no, I don't think so. Why? Ooh, is this a riddle? Something about meeting three sages on the road and trying to figure out which one's a devil in disguise?

LEONA: No, it's just...Sage is someone I knew. Someone I know. And I've been...kind of hoping I'd run into him on the road again.

FEL: Yeah? Where do you know him from?

LEONA: Sage was...he was almost like a father to me, growing up. I didn't really live with my family after I came to Falsten. Sage looked after me there. He taught me to fight. Taught me to survive. And in times when fighting and surviving were the only things asked of me, he taught me to be kind as well. Then, a few years ago, he disappeared. And he didn't tell me where he was going, or why he was leaving. He just left.

FEL: I...I'm sorry. I didn't know that.

LEONA: I know. I never told you. I don't like talking about it too much.

FEL: So, is that - is that why you were travelling when we first met? You were looking for Sage? Do you -

Silent beat. Fel considers a possibility he does not want to.

FEL: [quietly] Would you rather still be looking for him?

LEONA: ...No. If Sage has been hidden this long, then I don't think he wants to be found yet. I just think it might be nice, if I could meet him again someday, to make sure that he's okay. And to let him know that...I think I'm okay now too.

FEL: I think that's a lovely idea, Leona.

LEONA: And besides - [laughs gently and smiles] - even if I could find him, there's nowhere else I'd rather be than right here.

FEL: [laughs in agreement]

SFX: A door to the theater opens behind them.

MUSIC: The Curtain Falls by Trace Callahan.

RAYBAR: Fel, Leona, there you are! Can you finish up out here? Part of the castle backdrop fell down and we need it repaired and lifted back up before the show starts.

FEL: We'll be right there, Raybar! Come on, Leona. Let's get this taken care of before all the good seats are gone.

LEONA: Of course. I can't wait to see what we've made.

SFX: Leona and Fel walk off, in through the open doors to the theater before Raybar pulls them shut. The music fades out, before taking us back to the quiet night outdoors. We wait outside a moment, till another pair of footsteps comes to bid us farewell.

NARRATOR: Thank you for joining us for this, the first part of Act I of - Starfall, a fantasy audio drama. We beg your patience while more of this story is crafted for

your enjoyment - and that you wait just a moment more after the credits for one final scene.

Starfall is written and produced by Claudia Elvidge. This episode featured the voice talents of:

[Roll clips of all actors introducing themselves]

Ishani Kanetkar as Leona

Sam B. Nguyen as Fel

Cole Burkhardt as Dalyn

Malcolm Jay as Aksol

Emma Laslett as Raybar

Brandon Nguyen as Hosse

Thom Guttridge as River

Sawyer Greene as Vair

Lindsay Zana as Rhea

Tal Minear as Kio

Sean Siegler as Macalus

D.J. Sylvis as Glenn

Liz Morey as Dots

Toby Harvey as Colden

Shade Oyemakinwa as Koua

Alexander Doddy as Barrow

Deanna Pistono as Tinnick

Stewart Moyer as Cross

Stephen Indrisano as Dream Voice

Derrick Davis as Crab Monsters

NARRATOR: And myself, Margaret Ashley, as the Narrator.

For more information, visit starfallpodcast.com or follow us on Twitter @starfallpod.

Tonight's Falsten Fact is on the subject of - Falsten. Falsten is the continent where we live. Falsten is the 12 states which were once 12 disparate kingdoms. Falsten is the administrative region at the center of this land which serves as the home of the Emperor. Falsten is the standard of what is good and productive and righteous in this chosen land of the Lord. Falsten *is* the Empire.

SFX: We fade out from the end of the credits and into a cricket-dense summer night in a meadow on the edge of Dowden. One pair of footsteps crosses through the tall grass and then comes to a stop. The newcomer and the one they have come to meet wait in silence a moment.

CROSS: Well? What do you have to report?

RIVER: [takes in a deep, dramatic breath, and then -] River.

CROSS: What?

RIVER: River. The name's River, not Well. Pretty sure Well was...what? Three or four Emblems ago?

Silent beat.

RIVER: Still as humorless as ever, Mr. Cross?

CROSS: I don't find the situation too humorous.

RIVER: Really? I think it's hilarious! You were right. Little Leona's gone and found herself a new pride - with *actors*, of all things. She's spending her days serving people whose greatest contribution to society is regurgitating dead men's words into dark rooms. That's pretty funny when you think about it.

CROSS: I don't find it so funny that we've lost a second Emblem within three years of the last. And not even lost them to death, which would at least be *useful* to us in some manner, but to disobedience and following their own whims out into the wild.

RIVER: Still. *Actors* -

CROSS: The stability of the Empire is no laughing matter. That is final. Three years later and even the Judge is still wasting her time hunting our errant Archer. We can't afford to lose track of the Lion like that as well.

RIVER: That won't be a problem with Leona. There's a *reason* I was able to track her down so easily. She has the subtlety of a dragon in a dancehall.

CROSS: That is a problem in its own right. So? Will you be able to bring her back in?

RIVER: Mr. Cross, Leona is a *beast* in battle. Even by our standards. I saw her tear apart those crabs I riled up today with her bare hands. She didn't even have to draw her weapon. You send me after her now, on my own, and it will be a bloody mess.

CROSS: That foul Lion...We really did leave her in the wilds far too long.

RIVER: Yeah, maybe make a note of that for the next one. All I'm saying is, if you want all the same Emblems to be alive at the end of all this, you better send me after her with some support.

CROSS: Based on recent assignments, the Ram should be in this region. Very nearby, in fact. I will send word for her to seek you out, and from there, I will leave the matter up to your discretion in how it is handled, with only one caveat: *do not* embarrass the Emperor with your actions.

RIVER: Sounds *splendid*. Thank you for your thoughtful instruction, as always.

SFX: Cross walks away in the field. River is left standing in the silence of the night.

RIVER: Oh, my dear little Leona...

MUSIC: The Curtain Falls by Trace Callahan.

SFX: We hear the sound of a magic summoning - something metallic comes into existence and, shortly afterward, a stream of water emerges, playfully twirled about the air through magical means.

RIVER: ...you are in so much trouble.

End of Act I, Part 1

Begin playing trailer for "InCo."

NOVA: Ship designation asshole, I've got your buddy. What do you want me to do with him? In case you haven't noticed, I'm a sitting duck. Ship repairs were underway, awaiting instruction.

JEANNE: I would like to take this moment to remind you of our rules Nova, I don't mind a bit of private smuggling but you are not take on an entire load.

SAWA: Hello I'm SAWA your life support system and aid, how may I help you?

HATOV: You're an InCo.

NOVA: Ding, ding, ding

HATOV: Don't try to manipulate me.

SAWA: He claims to be from Eolara

NOVA: A what now? Like, the place from children's stories?

HATOV: I'm just trying to get home.

NOVA: Your "home" is a legend.

BRAYLING: Wilm, I don't think you understand, Eolara is a very new acquisition.

HATOV: Acquisition? (scene change) Did you just lock me to the wall?

NOVA: I can't deal with whatever fucking problem you've just turned into.

HATOV: Why would I ever help you?

NOVA: Because I'm an InCo. What better way to get your hands on forbidden information than from someone who actually deals in it?