

SFX: We begin outside, in the quiet of a still, tame summer night. Then, a door opens up onto the night, breaking the silence. We hear inside, beyond the door - jaunty orchestral music and lively laughter and conversation. The door closes softly, muffling the party inside.

The person who opened the door quickly strolls across expansive grounds, passing water features and shrubbery tousled by the wind, before finally approaching the edge of a creaking, bristling forest at night.

LEONA: [breathes out a steadying sigh of relief]

SFX: This person stands there on the edge a moment, before taking one step forward. Then -

RIVER: And where do you think *you're* going?

SFX: Leona turns to face this person who was not there a moment ago.

LEONA: I was just going out for a run.

RIVER: Out in the woods? In the middle of the night? And here I was thinking you were meant to be at the party on guard duty.

LEONA: I was there earlier. I thought you were meant to be there as well.

RIVER: I did hang around for a little while, yes. Flirted with a few merchants, put the fear of the Emperor in a few nobles, the usual routine. But I did that because I was *invited* there, as a *guest*. People actually enjoy *my* company. Unlike you - who I'm still fairly convinced is meant to be there keeping watch from the shadows, on Mr. Cross's orders.

LEONA: I am, but I was thinking it was late enough that -

RIVER: See, that's the thing about thinking - you don't have to. And clearly, you don't. Or else, you'd remember what a *tremendous* mistake it is to go against orders. And coming all the way out to the edge of the woods to do it - tell me, just what did you think you were thinking of doing?

LEONA: [stammers slightly] I - I...I needed to leave the party. I was feeling overwhelmed. All the people, and all the noise, and all of them staring whenever they caught sight of me, it was all too much. I needed to go for a run in the woods to clear my head and feel comfortable again. I'm sorry.

Extended, tense moment of silence as Leona waits for River to buy it - or not.

RIVER: [in a mockery of sympathy] Well, of *course* you did, you poor, pathetic thing. You always did melt under the spotlight, didn't you? Honestly, it was just

unnecessarily cruel of Mr. Cross to put you in that position in the first place, but I suppose even management has to pull from the dregs when we're so short-staffed.

Silent beat. River waits for Leona to bite.

RIVER: Well, that's no fun, you just staring back at me all stoney-eyed. When did you stop being so fun to torment?

LEONA: Likely when I learned that not reacting would take the fun out of it for you.

RIVER: [chuckles] Maybe there's some thoughts rattling around in that empty head of yours after all. [sighs, relenting] Alright, I suppose I can go back to the party in your place and have attention lavished over me so you can go on your little run. But you'll owe me one.

LEONA: Of course. Thank you.

SFX: River begins to turn to leave - then stops.

RIVER: Oh, and, Leona? Try not to stay out too late. It's not safe out there alone.

LEONA: I know. Thank you.

SFX: River turns and walks away.

RIVER: [singing, voice fading away] Poor little Leona, all alone in the dark. [chuckles]

SFX Once he's fully gone, Leona begins to walk into the woods.

LEONA: [with newfound determination] Thank you, for always being willing to underestimate me. But I won't be alone out here. Not for long.

SFX: The scene fades out with Leona's footsteps - and the beginning of our intro music fades in.

MUSIC: The Curtain Rises by Trace Callahan.

Starfall: A fantasy audio drama

Premiering July 23.