

2.10

FIELDS, EXT, DAY

We hear the crowing of a rooster. The sound of wind over the fields.

HAYWARD and PAIGE are reading from their new holy book. They sound reverent, fervent - like prophets.

HAYWARD:

(Narrating)

These are the truths of the Many Below.

The first truth: we hope, earnestly and sincerely, that you never have cause to call upon us.

We hope that you can live your life in peace, worshipping the gods of your mothers and fathers.

The second truth: you are not safe here. You will never truly be safe here.

And no matter how well you're loved and how thoroughly you're needed, there may come a time when they decide to make use of you.

In this moment - if you suspect that it is to be your final moment - call upon us. Draw your marks across your chest.

And speak these words aloud, with courage and with spite.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

"I will die today.

I will not die helpless.

My death will not amount to nothing.

My hand will draw the marks of my revolt. My flesh shall take the great shape of my revenge.

I will steal myself away from their intent for me. My blood will not ripen their soil, nor shall my body blossom into their chosen colours.

I will bring them fear instead.

My death today shall be the quiver in the executioner's hand tomorrow, the wavering doubt in the mind of the justice.

I will be hallowed, but not for them.

I will die. I will not die."

A long silence. We listen to the wind over the fields.

PAIGE:
That's it, right?

HAYWARD:
Yes. Yes, I think that's it.

Their voices fade.

And for a moment we hear the sound of something growing, cracking, rising up from underneath the earth, the unearthly noise of the GOD itself-

LIVING ROOM, INT

-and then the sound fades into the crackle of a radio.

A NESHITE RADIO DJ is speaking. They don't sound hugely impressed.

NESHITE RADIO DJ:

(Drolly)

So if you're just tuning in, our most unusual story this morning - a busy traffic intersection in downtown Nesh has sprung...has sprung a leak, in a sense.

We're hearing it reported that the tarmac of the road itself has erupted upwards into...a kind of vast tree.

Great...great concrete tendrils, lifting up the traffic lights, the lamp-posts, coming alive in a...in a mass of flowers.

White crocus, if you'll believe it.

Very pretty.

(Chuckling indulgently)

Avoid downtown, maybe walk to work if you can manage it. The road is impassable.

(Calmly switching topic)

And these are today's winning lottery sacrifices-

The radio switches off.

DENNIS snorts scornfully. He's unimpressed.

DENNIS:

(Taunting)

Well, look at that - you broke a traffic crossing, and you made some people late for work.

(Sarcastically)

Hopefully they won't be made to suffer for that - but hey, it's all for the cause, isn't it?

An awkward, tense silence. PAIGE is ignoring him.

DENNIS:

I'm gonna make us some breakfast.

You want something, Hayward? Bacon, maybe some hash browns? We've been up too long already.

HAYWARD:

I'm good, Dennis, thank you.

DENNIS:

Paige?

(Perhaps feeling a bit bad)

Kiddo?

He waits. But PAIGE ignores him.

DENNIS:

(Spitefully)

Fine.

He gets up and goes.

PAIGE and HAYWARD sit in silence.

HAYWARD:
(*Reassuringly*)
Small beginnings.

PAIGE:
(*Upset, vaguely*)
It was where Mom died, you know?

I...genuinely thought that would mean something.

Stupid of me, right? Of course it was stupid.

HAYWARD:
(*Trying to cheer her up*)
Take a look at this, co-author.

We hear a flutter of paper as he passes a book to her.

HAYWARD:
Painstakingly typed, double-sided paper. 21 pages of pure scriptural gold.
(*Jokingly proud*)
You'll note the precise staple placement. Just like the professionals do it.

The First Book of the Spoiling Crow, the Many Below.

We start getting this out there, and we'll start making a difference soon enough.

The marketeer in PAIGE takes over. She takes the holy text and starts flipping through it, excitedly.

PAIGE:
(*Appraisingly*)
The first chapter's my favourite. You're not a bad writer, you know.
Spelling errors excluded.

HAYWARD:
Neither are you.
(*Gallantly*)
Less of a surprise, I'm sure.

And, you know, we **are** going to need a little of that creative innovation to start getting the word out - without attracting undue attention.

PAIGE considers.

PAIGE:

Okay, so. I have been thinking about this.

Maybe we could do something...something a bit like a viral campaign, like the priests of ancient history might have done.

Leave copies on park benches, tucked into library books. Get the word out to people under the radar of the authorities.

(Getting enthusiastic)

In time, maybe the marks start to get recognisable, and we leave a whole chestful of pamphlets buried under a tree that carries the right sign, and it keeps building, and people start to develop it all by themselves.

How many do we have so far?

HAYWARD:

(A little awkwardly)

Uh, so far? Twelve copies.

(Trying to find the bright side)

If we get a second typewriter, maybe we could-

He's interrupted - DENNIS snorts with laughter from the kitchen doorway.

DENNIS:

Library books! Park benches!

Fuck. You don't have a clue, do you?

PAIGE:

(Weary)

Give it a rest, Dad. Go check on your hash-browns.

DENNIS:

I'm glad I gave you confidence, if nothing else.

At this point anyone else might have thought, 'You know what, maybe I'm not the right person to be doing this. Maybe I should go work on a cereal brand instead.' But not you.

PAIGE:
(Rising to the bait)
Excuse me?

HAYWARD:
(Urgently to PAIGE)
Ignore him. Please ignore him-

DENNIS:
(Mock-patiently, coming forward)
Let me, uh, ask you a question. What's...what exactly is the purpose of your god here, daughter?

I mean, I've sat through your seminars, and I've played in your prayer circles, and even I understand, uneducated as I am, that you want to disrupt sacrifices.

That's the aim.

You want to disrupt the working machinery of our great nation - at a time, mind you, when we might very well be going to war.

Big ambition, right there. Like I said - confident!

And this remarkable deity, thus far and in spite of all your efforts, has made itself known in...a few bad headaches. One traffic jam.

(With a surge of frustration)

And turning my house into a fucking arboretum.

You probably never experienced this during your marketing meetings, but when people in the sticks try and make their own gods, with their own hands and their own sweat - people die. The landscape breaks.

Real change comes with real consequence.

Ask your friend the cop, he can tell you.

PAIGE:
(To HAYWARD)
Is that-

HAYWARD:
(Reassuring)
It's not always true. Maybe we got off lucky.

DENNIS:

And now...and now you want to hide your pamphlets in *library books*, like love-notes?

Listen to me, Paige. Just...listen, OK? I'm going to give you a life lesson here.

(Condescending)

If you try and seed this **supposed** god amongst comfortable people, amongst well-off people, you're gonna get a deeply unhappy lesson in just how many good citizens will skim over your pamphlet once and then turn it over to the police.

(Deeply sarcastic)

And then all your hard stapling work? That'll be for absolutely nothing.

Stop thinking like a fucking mark.

You're smarter than this.

This isn't a god for people like you. It's not there to offer comfort.

It's a god for the desperate, the hopeless - all the poor bastards across the Straits who've had to confront the material reality that they could be seized by five armed policemen, dragged down a corridor and hallowed any second from now.

Set your god loose in the prisons. Not the libraries, not the care homes - the prisons.

That's where it can circulate - if there's anything to it.

(Gesturing to himself)

And - hey, think of the convenience. You've got someone here who can help you with that.

If you're willing to let go of your pride for once in your life, and ask me.

Silence for a moment.

HAYWARD considers the proposition seriously.

HAYWARD:

(Enthused)

I mean, that's not...it's not a bad idea, is it?

PAIGE:
Absolutely not.

I'm not getting him involved in this. Just ignore him.

(Grasping at straws)

They sacrifice folks at my old workplace. I can get in touch with somebody there-

DENNIS:

What, so they can trace it back to you? They have cameras in the cities, don't they?

PAIGE:

(Stumbling)

We can figure this out-

DENNIS:

(Scoffing and taunting, throwing up his hands)

Ahhh! She can't admit it!

My proud daughter is constitutionally unable to accept that I made a solid argument-

PAIGE:

(Snapping back)

No, I just know **why** you made it, Dad.

Do you think you're subtle? I know all of your dance moves, I've learnt them by heart.

Next you're going to suggest a friend of a friend who can help us out - but there are strings attached, of course, a few steps we need to hop through before you can give us what we want.

If you want to hang around and make your little taunts, that's fine. It's your house, like you keep on telling me.

But I'm not going to let you ruin this.

HAYWARD:

Paige. Just hold on a moment-

PAIGE:

(Protesting)

Hayward, **come on**.

I know how he sounds, I know he's reasonable - oh, he's so damned reasonable - but you have to trust me - you didn't grow up with him. You don't understand what he's like.

HAYWARD:
(*Calming her down*)
I understand, OK?

I understand, I really do. He cannot be trusted. I get it.
(*As an aside to DENNIS*)
Sorry, Dennis, but-

He takes a breath.

HAYWARD:
But he's right about us, too.

We don't have a network. We don't know anyone. We're alone out here, and we can't achieve anything alone.

So - absolutely let's hold on to our caution. Let's hold onto our distrust. Let's watch him closely. By all means.

But...let's take the point. We should start in the prisons.
(*Offering DENNIS a lifeline*)
So long as there really are no strings attached...?

DENNIS:
(*A little sulkily*)
I do have a friend - Corvin - who was just recently released, as it happens.

I don't owe them money or anything like that.

Just a friend. Hates the law. 'Fuck the Bronze,' that's what we used to say.

They'll help us, no questions asked. No strings attached.

My recommendation is that I sound Corvin out, see if they can introduce us to someone trustworthy who's still on the inside - someone who might be interested in what we have to offer.

We set up a meet, we make our pitch, we hand over your pamphlet. Glue it into a book, maybe, or find a way of hiding it.

We see if your god can come to anything.

(Snottily)

If we think that might be helpful.

PAIGE stares him down.

PAIGE:

And that's it?

DENNIS:

(Wavering a little)

I mean, we'll need fake IDs, of course-

PAIGE:

(As if catching him in the act and throwing up her hands)

Ah!

DENNIS:

(Annoyed)

-but I'm happy to sort that out myself. Don't worry about it.

You're unemployed, and he's a fugitive. You don't need to owe me anything.

Speaking of which, the Pennie's going to need to stay at home.

HAYWARD:

That makes sense.

DENNIS:

(Sourly)

Yeah, Daddy-fucking-daughter day.

(To PAIGE)

Well? You still want to tell me no?

He waits for PAIGE to decide.

Instead, she ignores him.

PAIGE:

(To HAYWARD)

Hayward, I'm just telling you now, if he fucks this up for us-

HAYWARD:

(Reassuringly)

-you can handcuff me to another railing and leave me for the cops to find.
Sure, that's more than fair.

PAIGE takes a breath.

PAIGE:

All right. Fine.

(To DENNIS)

Dad. You're going to cook us both a damned good breakfast. You're going to make us coffee.

And then you're going to tell us all about this friend and every **single** way your plan could go wrong.

CAR, INT, DAY

We hear a car rolling over gravel in the rain. Pulling to a halt.

DENNIS and PAIGE have arrived at the prison. They're waiting to be admitted for their visit.

It's a very awkward silence between the two of them.

DENNIS:

(Tersely)

OK. We'll have twenty minutes from the bell.

Like we practiced. If anyone asks you direct, just repeat that you're Esther Grammen's niece, Abigail, and you've come to see her before she's sacrificed.

Show them your ID without being prompted. Answer every question. Don't lie unless you have to.

And carry yourself casually.

Don't act like you've got something to hide.

PAIGE:

(Snapping)

What makes you think I'm going to look like I've got something to hide-

DENNIS:

(Snapping back)

Because you **already** look like you've got something to hide, and we haven't even left the sodding car yet.

I wouldn't buy a used toaster from you.

They'll pick up every book.

Examine the cover, leaf through the pages.

Don't react when they get to the one with the pamphlet inside.

If we don't give anything away they're not likely to spot it. If we look stressed they'll look closer.

PAIGE:

What happens if they realise the IDs are fake?

DENNIS:

(Offended)

You think you're talking to an amateur, daughter?

PAIGE:

(Sarcastically)

Gee, I don't know, Dad, How do you know so much about prison visits, anyway?

DENNIS ignores this.

DENNIS:

Don't tell Esther too much about your god. Don't say anything incriminating.

Just let her know you're here to help, keep it vague, and leave the book with her.

If she isn't receptive, let it go.

Don't expect her to be an engaging conversationalist, either. She's being hallowed in three weeks.

PAIGE:
What did she do?

DENNIS:
It doesn't matter.

PAIGE:
Of course it matters-

DENNIS:
(Snapping)
Don't think about it.

If your little god takes off, you can rewrite history - tell everyone she was a political prisoner or something.

Silence between them.

DENNIS:
Think your friend will be all right back at the farm?

PAIGE:
(Quietly)
I hope so.

DENNIS:
(Trying to keep the conversation going in the awkward silence)
I like him. Didn't think I would, but I do. He's got a funny way about him.

He's kind of a...mess with momentum.

He said he was going to have a traditional Peninsulan dinner ready for us when we got back.

What is that, stew or something?

Silence between them.

DENNIS:
(To himself)
I think it's stew they cook down there.

Silence between them.

DENNIS:

You could say thank you, at least. For arranging all of this. For sticking my neck out to try and help you.

PAIGE:

(Icily)

Thank you, Dad.

DENNIS:

(Icily back)

You're welcome.

Silence.

DENNIS:

I'm not looking for money from you. I'm not working any angles like you always seem to think I am.

I'm just trying to help, see if I can give you a leg up with this plan of yours. Reckless though it may be.

That's all.

PAIGE hesitates.

And then she says, like she's been holding onto it for a very, very long time.

PAIGE:

I know you think I'm being ungrateful.

The problem is...

(Simply, honestly)

...I really do hate you.

That's it. I don't have any other way of saying it.

And for a very long time it's been the embers of hate - the long tail of it, the exhaustion and the acceptance.

I know who you are. I've...I've come to accept it.

You've had more than long enough to persuade me you were capable of being anything else, and you've let me down at every turn.

And I guess I just...

...I just can't **stand** the faint possibility that you're suddenly turning over a new leaf in helping us now.

Because...because if that's true, then we're going to have to paper over what a fucking terrible father you've been all these years, and all of the pain you've caused me, that needs to be forgiven and forgotten, right? And then we can both move on.

I just need to get over it, and say thank you.

And I really don't think I can do that, because I can't stand the possibility that you've decided to be a better person just as soon as another witness has come along.

I can see Hayward giving me these sideways glances, and I know that to him...I must look crazy for hating you so much. For refusing to see anything decent in you.

And if you **are** sincerely trying to help us, if you're not working any kind of angles...

...then you must have it in your head that if you help us now, if you prove yourself to me, you'll be able to step away from all the horrible shit you've done, and there can be some kind of reconciliation between us, but...

...but no. It's just another abandonment, Dad.

I knew who you were.

I knew you, and I'd fully accepted that you were someone I could never, ever rely upon, someone I'd have to keep at bay for as long as I lived - and now you're stealing that certainty from me, too.

That's the very worst of it, you know. I'm waiting **eagerly** for you to screw things up again.

I'm excited to prove myself right - to feel reassured that I wasn't wrong to hate you.

No matter how much it costs me, no matter how much is on the line.

Doesn't that make you ashamed, Dad?

Because it should.

A very long silence between them.

DENNIS:

(Awkwardly)

Well, um, thank you for being honest with me.

PAIGE:

You're welcome.

DENNIS sighs.

DENNIS:

(Lightly, as if prison will be a 'relief')

All right, let's go to prison.

We hear the car doors open and slam as they get out.

PRISON, INT, DAY

We hear the footsteps of PAIGE and DENNIS.

Overhead, on the loudhailer, we hear the voice of the CHAPLAIN:

CHAPLAIN:

(As if preaching)

'And I shall become a cage unto myself. My flesh shall be confining walls about my innards; my nails and teeth the razor wire that pricks and bleeds; my mouth the very padlock upon the door that prevents my release.'

(In a more normal voice)

If you're interested in becoming a cage unto yourself, then please enquire at the chaplaincy about our release programme.

PAIGE and DENNIS stop at a guard booth.

PAIGE:

Sophie Grammen. Here to see Esther Grammen.

DENNIS:

And Buster Grammen. How you doing?

PAIGE:
Is it - this way?

OK, thanks.

A door buzzes open and they pass through it into the VISITOR'S ROOM.

DENNIS:
(Quietly, to PAIGE)
You're doing great.

PAIGE:
(Curtly)
I know I am.

DENNIS and PAIGE take their seats.

Another muffled buzz. Another door clanks open and shut.

ESTHER takes her seat in the booth facing them.

PAIGE:
It's great to see you, Auntie Esther-

ESTHER:
(Muffled)
You have to press the button.

I can't hear you, you have to press the button.

A click and buzz as PAIGE pushes the intercom button.

PAIGE:
Thanks. It's, uh, so good to see you, Auntie Esther.

ESTHER:
(More audible now, unimpressed)
Mm-hm.

DENNIS:
(Pretending to be relaxed and cheerful)

How you doing, Esther? They treating you all right in there?

ESTHER:

Yeah, I'm fine.

(Goads them a little)

You missed my birthday this year, you know. "Brother."

DENNIS:

(A little thrown off)

Uh.

Yeah, sorry about that. We've been busy.

PAIGE:

(Maybe speaking a little too loudly, as if she thinks she's being observed)

On that note, I did actually bring you a gift, Auntie - a few books from the library at home.

They're going to deliver them direct to your cell once they've been checked for contraband.

There's one I know you'd been looking forward to reading - *Caer Last and the Vermilion Wilds*.

It's a great read, especially once you get to Chapter Twelve-

ESTHER:

(Scoffing)

Oh, sure. Thanks. Really kind of you.

(Leaning forwards)

So, listen...don't keep me in suspense. What am I supposed to become?

Silence.

ESTHER snorts with laughter.

ESTHER:

(Scoffing)

Gods, you've gone pale.

Relax, they're not listening to us.

There's too many of us in here for them to make the effort, and the Conclave rep won't spring for cameras, and you have to understand that someone like me is the least of their concern.

(Enjoying the story)

Right now they've got about half the screws out in the yard, watching genpop.

Granpally and her girls have started worshipping a sand-god she can use to fuck up Moss, and Moss is up to something in the kitchen that's not going to be good news for Granpally.

Nobody knows **exactly** when it's going to kick off, but the screws have all been working too many long shifts without overtime pay so they're in the mood to cut loose and start breaking skulls.

It's going to be a three-way carnival.

(Firmly)

Come on, don't waste my time.

Our mutual friend said you wanted to convert me. I told them I'd hear you out.

If I take you up on the offer, what am I going to become?

PAIGE:

It's really better if you read the book. The, uh, the pages have been glued together, so you'll need to-

ESTHER:

(Interrupting her)

Pfft, what kind of sales pitch do you call that? Come on, lure me over.

In three weeks' time, I'm down to be sacrificed to the Wirebitten Child. Do you know what that means?

Brand new fibre-optics, in the heart of the city.

(Lightly, mockingly)

I'll be brightening the lives of my fellow citizens.

(More sincerely)

They say it isn't even so bad - in terms of the pain, I mean.

It may not be how I wanted my life to end up, but **fuck**.

If I just keep going as I am, live out my final days without causing trouble to anyone who might notice, it's going to hurt a lot less - a lot less - than it could.

And believe me, I've seen how it can hurt.

On the other hand, if I try and give myself over to your god, instead...well, that'll be a waste, and it'll harm their contracts, and if they can still make me suffer for it, they will.

I have just a few joys left to me in the days before it ends, and those can all be taken away.

So. You're going to need to give me a damned good pitch.

Tell me. If I accept your offer, what am I going to be?

PAIGE:

We don't know yet.

(Sensing that this is not a damned good pitch)

But we think...we think it's going to be something to help you spit in the face of the people who are doing this to you.

We just need to test it out once, so we can know how useful it's going to be.

ESTHER:

(Neutrally)

Mm.

This something new? Homemade?

PAIGE:

Yes.

ESTHER:

What's it called?

PAIGE:

The Many Below.

ESTHER:

Sounds copyrighted. You're sure it isn't copyrighted? Just sounds like something I've heard before.

(Directly, staring into PAIGE's eyes)

Can you promise me that it'll hurt me less? Than the Wirebitten Child would?

PAIGE wavers - and she's honest.

PAIGE:

No.

(Swallowing)

No, I can't promise you that.

DENNIS rapidly intervenes.

DENNIS:

But. **But-**

The pain isn't what lasts. You and I both know that. It's not what really matters.

(Becoming the polished salesman)

And we'd be asking you to make that first all-important sacrifice, that first significant step, to make a genuine difference for working people.

(Chuckling)

Esther, when this thing launches properly, they're gonna be toasting your name up and down the country-

ESTHER:

(Sharply)

I wasn't asking you. I was asking her.

(Back to PAIGE)

So you can't tell me what's going to happen to me. You can't even tell me how much it's going to hurt.

Then you don't really know what you're asking me to do to myself.

PAIGE:

(Holding her gaze)

No.

ESTHER:

I guess it hasn't occurred to you that you might want to be your own lab rat.

PAIGE:

(Calmly)

No. It has.

DENNIS:
(*Taken aback*)
What?

ESTHER:
Why are you doing all this?

PAIGE:
Because I can't...I can't stand it any more. I can't stand to be a part of this wound upon the face of the world.

I'm exhausted, and I'm furious, and I know I have to act before my exhaustion saps my fury away to nothing.

And I have to believe there are others who feel the same way.

ESTHER:
(*Not unsympathetically*)
Soft girl, aren't you?
(*Perhaps joking*)
You realise I could turn you in. You've told me a lot more than you should have. You haven't been careful, have you?

PAIGE:
I'm hoping you won't.

I...have faith that you won't.

ESTHER chuckles lightly.

ESTHER:
Find yourself in a corner - a real desperate corner. You'll lose that faith soon enough.

She pauses, and then says, with real hard feeling.

ESTHER:
That's what they're so damned good at. I can tell you that from experience.

You make one bad mistake, one error of judgment, and they box you into a place like this - where the possibilities of your life contract into

something small and hard and brutal you've got no choice but to keep on making more bad mistakes, day after day.

In a place like this, there's no faith to be had in other people, and you're more alone than you've ever been, and the only meaningful choices are the ones that come with bloodied fingers.

You'll stay in that corner until you run out of choices.

That's when they waggle their finger and say, '*ah-ah*, you've gone too far this time, Esther. You're an animal. We tried our level best with you, but you're just beyond helping, aren't you?'

(Nodding towards DENNIS)

Even if I don't turn you in, there are always other people, aren't there?

Do you trust the people you're doing this with?

PAIGE:

I think so.

ESTHER:

You mustn't.

If there's life after death - whether I'm a lizard or a dung-beetle, I'm doing it alone. I won't rely on anyone else.

You can't build anything that lasts on the backs of other people.

ESTHER holds her gaze for a long while.

ESTHER:

(Gently)

You sure you're the right person to be doing this?

PAIGE doesn't answer.

ESTHER:

There's still time to walk away - before you make that first real error of judgment.

PAIGE:

(Coolly meeting her gaze)

It wouldn't be my first.

ESTHER snorts with laughter.

ESTHER:

I like you, soft girl. I'm going to do us both a favour.

Go home.

Forget you spoke to me.

Live long and well for the both of us, and get to a ripe old age without trying your luck, and without ever once getting sacrificed to anything.

DENNIS:

Now, just hold on-

ESTHER:

No. No, there's nothing more to be said.

(With finality)

Go home. I'm tired of the sound of my own voice, and I'm not going to change my mind.

(After a moment)

Thank you for the books.

PAIGE:

Thank you for the conversation.

It..really meant a lot to meet you, Esther.

ESTHER:

(Shortly)

Yeah.

She replaces the receiver.

CAR, INT, DAY

We hear PAIGE and DENNIS get back in the car. The doors slam.

Together, they take a breath.

PAIGE is quietly devastated. DENNIS reassuring but awkward.

PAIGE:

Fuck!

DENNIS:

(Genuinely trying his best)

I know you probably think that went badly.

But she's got nothing else to do in there but think.

She...she may yet come around.

PAIGE:

(Dismissive)

She's not going to come around, Dad.

DENNIS:

Well, then we have other options.

There's no shortage of incarcerations up and down the country, and the Pennies, they love locking up people even more than we do, so maybe Hayward-

PAIGE:

Like you said. This was always going to come to nothing.

A dead end for a fake god, and then I'll give up and go back to work, and all of this can be forgotten.

You think I'm ridiculous. Don't you?

A long moment of silence.

DENNIS:

(Quietly, haltingly)

I think you're brilliant, daughter.

Always have.

I don't always understand you, mind.

I definitely don't understand why you're doing **this**.

But maybe I don't need to understand, that's what I keep telling myself.

Maybe I just need to support her.

(Urgently)

That's not me trying to give you a good impression of me, or anything like that.

I know why you hate me. I get it.

I...use you all the time. I use your brilliance for all it's worth.

I ask you for money when I need it because I know you can't say no.

I brag to my friends about you, I let 'em buy me drinks, and I promise them you can get their children jobs in turn.

(Shrugging helplessly to himself)

But the thing is, kid - brilliant people, they get eaten up every day.

This has all been going on for far too long. Nobody's going to let it stop, and you're not the first to try.

And I don't know what I'd do if I lost you, Paige.

(His voice breaking a little)

None of the others will even talk to me-

He stops and catches himself.

DENNIS:

How's about this?

Going forward, I'm going to make a concerted effort not to make our conversations all about me.

PAIGE:

(Laughing in spite of herself)

You know what?

That'd actually help.

DENNIS puts the keys in the ignition and starts the car up.

DENNIS:

We didn't die, we didn't get arrested. I think today could have gone a lot worse.

Let's go home.

(Trying to cheer PAIGE up)

We're going to need to call on all of our acting talents again, you realise, when the Pennie makes us taste that fucking stew-

Their voices, and the sound of the car, fades out.

MONUMENT, EXT, DAY

-and we hear the gentle sound of shears at work.

HAYWARD:

(Narrating)

While they're gone, I take a pair of shears out of the woodshed, and I walk out across the fields to the old war monument.

I prune back the weeds, just like I promised I would, until the names of my country's enemies are once again visible on the stone.

And as I prune...I worry.

I worry that Dennis is right. That this has all come too easy.

I keep thinking about the instructional videos they made us watch in training. 'Renegades Gone Wrong.'

Slide after slide of swollen, eyeless faces. Imploded flesh. The consequences of illegal experimentation in the divine.

Perhaps we're only kidding ourselves that there's really something out here for us to find.

And then, on the way back to the farm, I almost trip over something that makes me change my mind.

There's a hare in the grass, half-buried and bloodied.

A barn owl has latched onto its back, its talons driving deep into the flesh of the hare.

Both animals are dead.

Familiar black stone veins protrude from the carcass of the victim, twisting like branches, driving upwards into the predator's skin.

Hare and owl are locked together, inseparably.

The god must have struck just as the prey died.

White crocus is flowering up from the two entwined bodies.

(Unhappily)

And suddenly I begin to feel deeply afraid.

It all makes me think of a dormouse, dead in the dirt, its ribs showing. Of rabbits, teeth chattering, hungering from their cages.

I kick dust up over the corpses. Nudge them aside into the long grass so they can't be seen from the path.

Paige doesn't need to know about this, I tell myself.

There's no sense in worrying her. Not yet.

CELL, INT, DAY

We can hear the distant buzzing of cell doors and laughter outside.

ESTHER is pacing, quietly, in her cell. She's reading the pamphlet.

ESTHER:

(Softly)

"I will die today.

I will not die helpless.

My death will not amount to nothing.

My hand will draw the marks of my revolt. My flesh will take the great shape of my revenge.

I will steal myself away from their intent for me. My blood will not ripen their soil, nor shall my body blossom into their chosen colours.

I will bring them fear instead."

She scoffs, lightly - but uncertainly - and puts the book to one side.

A moment later, we hear faint approaching footprints - and the sound of the cell door opening.

The CHAPLAIN has arrived.

ESTHER:
Hello, chaplain.

CHAPLAIN:
Esther. Reading anything good?

ESTHER:
Ah, nothing special.
(Setting the book aside)
Any good news for me?

CHAPLAIN:
(Choosing his words carefully)
Yes, it's good news, Esther. In...a sense, although I understand this may come as a shock.

ESTHER:
(Warily)
Go on.

CHAPLAIN:
Because of the increasing...probability of military action with the Peninsula, our commercial contracts have been temporarily suspended.

You will **not** be sacrificed to the Wirebitten Child.

Instead, you'll be put towards the coming war. A new battle-saint. I don't...I don't know what design or what god, exactly, it'll be confidential.

The good news is this - it comes with a full pardon.

Your family will be glad to hear that, I'm sure.

ESTHER swallows. This is very much not good news.

ESTHER:
No, no - chaplain, please. C'mon.

Is there...is there any chance of appeal on this? Because we had an agreement, we had that in writing-

CHAPLAIN:
I'm afraid not.

ESTHER:
You, um...there has to be something else. Doesn't there?

Chaplain. Is there no way out of this?

CHAPLAIN:
(Patiently)
I'm sorry, Esther. The delegation has already arrived. I understand they want to begin working with candidates as soon as possible.

ESTHER:
Now?

CHAPLAIN:
I can ask them to let you have a little time.

ESTHER:
Time to...time to do what? You going to give me enough time to write a play, chaplain? To write letters to everyone I already cared about? Can I learn an instrument?

Chaplain, how much time do I have?

CHAPLAIN:
Twenty minutes, Esther.

ESTHER:
(Desperately)
Wh-what if I have information?

CHAPLAIN:
What kind of information?

ESTHER:
Maybe I know something. Something that could be of interest to the Conclave, to the authorities.

Could that help me? Could that give me more time?

CHAPLAIN:
Yes, it could. So long as you're not making up stories.

What are you trying to tell me, Esther?

ESTHER:

(Licking her lips)

You promise me it can make a difference, chaplain?

CHAPLAIN:

(Lying, but sincerely)

Have faith, Esther.

ESTHER stares at him - and then something in her hardens.

ESTHER:

I'm sorry, Chaplain. I was...I didn't mean that.

Like you said, I was making up stories. I just thought if I could come up with something, maybe it'd make a difference for me, but-

-it was stupid. I was being stupid.

There's nothing to be done. I get that. I do.

CHAPLAIN:

Ah.

(With a little kindness)

Only natural, under the circumstances.

(With a warning underneath the kindness)

Esther, I told the delegation you'd be cooperative. But I don't know how patient they're going to be.

ESTHER:

No. No, I'll cooperate, of course.

Just, ah, let me have those ten minutes to sort my head out. Please.

CHAPLAIN:

Thank you.

(Getting to his feet)

Yes, of course-

ESTHER:

Um, Chaplain?

I borrowed a few books from the library last week. Friend of mine works there in cataloguing, and I don't want her having to chase around after 'em.

They're there on the table. You mind seeing that they all go back to the library?

CHAPLAIN:

Yes, of course. I'll take them just as soon as you've left.

He goes to the door and opens it.

CHAPLAIN:

Thank you for making this easy, Esther.

ESTHER:

That's all right, Chaplain. Thank you for everything.

Give me a moment, yeah?

A moment of silence as ESTHER stands alone in the cell.

Then the gentle movement of the book's pages.

ESTHER:

(Under her breath)

'I will bring them fear instead...'

Then she calls out-

ESTHER:

(Simply)

Okay.

Okay, I'm ready to go.

Fade out. A long silence.

END OF EPISODE.