

THE SILT VERSES: SEASON 3, EPISODE 4

THE PARACLETE'S GULCH, EXT, DAY

We hear the roar of three cars passing us by - and then the chirping of birds before FAULKNER speaks.

FAULKNER sounds tired, and weary throughout this sequence.

When he speaks of happiness, he doesn't believe his own performance.

As he speaks, we begin to hear rising, drifting choral music.

FAULKNER:

(Narrating)

I return home to the sound of music.

Hundreds of worshippers, the entire growing population of the Paraclete's Gulch - more, I think, even than when we left for the south - have gathered before the gates in order to greet me properly.

Their song drifts through the pines in rapturous welcome, and Sibling Rane winds down the windows so we can hear them, a choir so immense that the disjoints and the bum notes are utterly lost in the sea of voices, a **sea** so immense that it sounds absolutely harmonious and perfectly single-minded.

My people are singing the Drowning Song for me.

Music and lyrics written some two hundred years ago by a Katabasian Shaw, who wanted to capture the unease, the dread, and the beauty of the sweet music she'd heard beneath the water's surface, a sensation that she knew could never captured in human chords or human notes - but she wanted to make the attempt, all the same.

She died still working on it, I **think**, but it's beautiful no matter if it's incomplete.

I listen, and I listen, as the sound swells all around me, and I watch as we swing up through the trees and all at once we can see that great crowd, that seething tide of colour, with banners raised high and children lifted upon their parents' shoulders...

...and it's for me. It's all for me.

We hear FAULKNER's car pulling slowly up. The door opens. And he steps out.

FAULKNER:

When I step out from the back of the car, my people drop to their knees amongst the rubble and the roots without a single care for their shins.

There are tears streaming down the cheeks of grown disciples. Flushed passion and love in the faces of siblings who were already deep in the faith by the time I came to it, those who ought to outrank me.

There are disciples from breakaway sects, resplendent in outrageous costumes and barely comprehensible to the rest of us, who've come back into the fold for the first time in a century - and they, too, are on their knees.

It's like they've all been transported by the sight of me.

Like they're all seeing something that I can't.

We hear FAULKNER stepping forward. Silence.

FAULKNER:

(Roaring)

The river rises!

CROWD:

The river rises!

A great roar of voices and stamping feet rises up, and for a moment we hear FAULKNER breathing hard, as if elated or overwhelmed-

-and then both sound and music die, and we're in the darkness of the Gulch. Running water can be heard.

FAULKNER:

(Narrating)

A freshly-woven robe of gold and green and white, waves lapping around the hem and the sleeves, is placed over my shoulders.

Because everyone knew that I went south to be formally acknowledged as a Katabasian of the faith, and now that I have returned, my people have absolutely no doubt that I have been recognised.

I deliver a blessing, something rote and well-worn from the first chapters of the Verses, that comes to me quickly and readily, and I think - I think my voice

sounds reedy and tired and strained, but my people deliver the call-and-response back to me with such fervour and such joy that I wonder whether my self-doubt is merited.

Perhaps my voice sounds strong and certain. Perhaps I'm as all of them see me.

So yes, of course I'm happy, coming home like that.

And if I am not happy, then perhaps this is what it means to lead. To be a vessel for the happiness of others.

Perhaps any guilt is the weight that all great men must bear.

And when the welcome is over, my retinue announce that I must be feeling tired from the journey, and I am led up through the twisting corridors of the Gulch to my chambers, and left there alone in my robe that is heavy and hot, amongst books and gifts and more food and drink than any one person could possibly need.

This is my life - now that I am a prophet, now that I am loved.

I am left alone with every comfort, for long hours at a time, because my people know that I am in direct communication with the Trawler-man himself, and so I need my solitude and my space to make communion with the Garden Below.

We have holy fools and hermits who sequester themselves away for years at a time, zealots who half-drown themselves daily in search of revelation or eat and drink only the thickest silt that the White Gull has to offer-

-and while a Katabasian has responsibilities, a prophet is holier still than all of these.

So they give me space, and they give me solitude, so that I may maintain my purity.

Sometimes my people come to me and tell me what is happening in the world, and I tell them how they must respond. They do not disagree with me, and no matter how it turns out, I never feel the consequence of any one decision.

Sometimes I attend ceremonies and sacrifices, and I play the starring role at each of these,

If I am lonely, then perhaps this is only the loneliness felt by any creature that strays too close to the divine.

No doubt a god would feel even lonelier.

Sibling Rane tells me a great deal that should be pleasing to hear.

Our scouts have been searching in the hills upriver for the White Gull's lost source, the Grand Aquifer. They believe they are close - or at least, Rane **tells** me they believe they are close.

We are not safe here. I'm certain of that. They found us once, and they can do it again.

But Sibling Rane tells me that our people are continuing to flock to the Gulch as a sacred place, the site of our last great battle - and how can we flee, when our strength is growing day-by-day as long as we remain here?

Sibling Rane tells me that anger has been growing towards High Katabasian Roemont for years in parts of the south as well as in the north - that the rapidity of my ascent has led to further questions in turn. "How has one young disciple achieved so much for us in such a short time, and our High Katabasian so little in all of his decades of service?"

Sibling Rane tells me that rumours continue to spread - some of it spread by us, of course, but some of it coming naturally.

That there is a plot afoot amongst the Katabasians' Council to legalise us; that Roemont is not firm or fervent enough to stand up to the Legislatures.

That we will surrender ourselves, to avoid the wartime draft and the raids that will follow.

And soon enough our people know the hostility of the Council towards me - how Roemont greeted me with suspicion and without the respect I was owed. Perhaps even with jealousy.

Some, Sibling Rane tells me, are already beginning to curse Roemont's name alongside Devlin's when they drink.

All of this is useful, even vital, to our continued cause, and to my continued survival.

All of it passes over me like water across polished stone.

The sound of the Gulch has faded, now, too. It's just us and FAULKNER.

FAULKNER:

(Narrating)

Because I know that I will be alone in my chamber one day soon and they will come to me with the news that Carpenter is dead.

Killed upon my direct and specific order; her body desecrated.

And I will have to outlast that moment when the news is brought to me. I will have to maintain my calm and my composure.

I must remain holy, and pure, and they must not see a flicker of doubt or guilt or sorrow upon my face.

I remind myself over, and over, that she was a necessary sacrifice.

That I had no other choice and only a few seconds in which to react; that she was already an outcast to the faith; that if anyone had a hope of getting away from the Gulch alive, it'd be her.

All of it feels like performance.

(With finality)

But performance is what my life has become, as a prophet and Katabasian; and so I have plenty of time to practice.

KATABASIANS' CHAMBERS, INT. DAY

Fire crackling faintly in the background.

We hear the voice of FAULKNER, on the radio.

FAULKNER:

(On the radio, crackling)

Children of the Water. I have spoken with the Katabasians' Council, and I am relieved - although not at all surprised - that they have formally confirmed there is no truth whatsoever to the rumours of legalisation spreading amongst our people.

We must band together, be watchful of any attempts by the lawful authorities to sow discord amongst us-

ROEMONT, sniffing in disdain, steps forward and switches it off.

Silence.

KATABASIAN GREVE:
So. How will you kill him?

ROEMONT steps across the room. He pours a couple of glasses of wine as he considers.

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:
It'll need to take place in my own chambers. I, after all, am the intended victim.

The Paraclete's Gulch, as tradition, reserves the Welkin's Rest for its most honoured guests.

It's been a long time, of course - I think I was eleven or twelve the last time I was there! - but nevertheless, I remember the shape of the chambers passing well, and I've been perusing the maps from the recidivist's halls.

The rooms are in the highest reaches of the caves. Secluded. Secure.

On the eve of Faulkner's formal initiation as a Katabasian of the Parish, as is traditional, we'll carry out the ceremony of expurgation, the Drowned Man's Hearing.

I shall be his confessor, naturally, and my chambers will be the proper place for a private hearing.

My man Grenshaw's volunteered to be our sacrifice.

He grew up with Sister Carpenter in the seminary - he even vaguely remembers her. It is plausible enough that they might have been friends and remained allies in secret.

And his mother was born in the Linger Straits, too, which makes him even more suitable as a foreign asset.

I'll summon Faulkner to see me in private for the expurgatory rites. My other men will be somewhere downstairs, enjoying the festivities and visibly in public.

Grenshaw will remain behind, well-hidden.
(Simply)

A gunshot. An alarm. Some screaming.

Silence.

KATABASIAN GREVE:

(A little uncertain)

It seems...almost a brazen repetition of Mason's own death, don't you think?

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

(A little defensive)

An expansion upon earlier themes.

All we truly have are echoes, Greve.

The river turns and it turns again, and every hero and every tragedy in the Verses is a shadow of those that came before.

(Enthusiastically returning to his play)

I emerge, holding Grenshaw at gunpoint, bloodied, battered.

My men come dashing up alongside Faulkner's people; together, we drag him through the halls, shouting the truth - that Grenshaw burst in, his revolver pointed at my head, screaming, 'Linger's Glory, Linger's Might,' and Katabasian Faulkner heroically flung himself in front of the bullet to save my life.

There will be a swift trial, Grenshaw will confess the matter in detail before he is executed, and I shall order Katabasian Faulkner sent to the Garden Below with the greatest of honours.

His final words, delivered in my arms:

(Dramatically, as FAULKNER)

"We have been misled. All of us, tricked. We were taught that our enemy was the government, the policemen, our comrades of this great nation."

(Almost skipping across an imagined stage)

"I am dying, High Katabasian. I can see my life's true love, Sister Thurrocks, waiting for me beneath the black waves-"

KATABASIAN GREVE:

(Interrupting, bewildered)

Sister Thurrocks was his life's true love?

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

(Annoyed at the interruption)

In the tale, in the tale. They'll love it; it's a useful distraction.

A moment of silence. GREVE is growing quietly but deeply sceptical about this plan.

KATABASIAN GREVE:

I wonder, Roemont - are we plotting an assassination, or managing a radio serial?

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

We're doing both.

(Peevishly)

The truth must stir the heart to keep scepticism at bay. It feels honest.

Are we saying that a great man such as Katabasian Faulkner would be incapable of love?

(Returning to his performance)

"Let me finish," he whispers,

(As FAULKNER, a dramatic finale)

- "before I go, dear friend, I pass on this final message from the Father In The Water, one weighty task I leave in your trembling hands. There has been too much bloodshed, too many lives lost. Let there be peace."

"At long last, between ourselves and the Legislatures, let there be peace."

He makes a mournful 'final dying breath' sound. End scene.

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

(As himself)

Soon afterwards, Greve, you will move to announce the results of the negotiations with Adjudicator Shrue - the legalisation of the faith. A new beginning.

There will be celebrations. There will be-

KATABASIAN GREVE:

(Protesting)

Why would the CLS want you dead?

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

To sow discord between us and the Legislatures.

To prevent our Parish and our god from joining our faith's great strength to that of the Peninsula.

(Returning to his performance)

"We have been misled. All of us, tricked-"

GREVE is unhappy. This is beginning to feel a bit like a writer's room hashing out plot points.

KATABASIAN GREVE:

(Interrupting, again)

Are we so important, though, to merit such a tangled conspiracy?

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

(Now growing annoyed and perhaps even very slightly hurt)

The faithful will believe we are, for we are everything to them.

You have doubts, Greve. Let me hear them. There can be no secrets between us.

GREVE hesitates for a moment. ROEMONT is pacing.

KATABASIAN GREVE:

Another council member could go instead.

It would be...Roemont, I think it would be an entirely unwarranted risk to put you in harm's way.

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

Well, maybe this is our problem, Greve. Maybe we have become too afraid to take a risk.

(Scornfully)

Who is Faulkner, truly? An...an attention-seeking charlatan, a self-important performer, an egotist.

A chancer. A clown.

This is, this is not a true luminary of the faith, this is not one of the old men of thrashing water and slickened steel, steadfast as the tides!

This is not a man who deserves to be remembered!

(Wearily)

And yet.

And yet stories are currents, and he plunges headlong into those rushing waters, time and time again, and through reckless fortune he survives them, and **this** becomes the proof he needs that all eyes should be upon him, that he possesses a gift beyond the rest of us.

We cannot win against a man like this if we are afraid to even dip our own toes in at the river's edge.

Can we?

(Decisively)

No. I will go to lay the Katabasian's wreath of kelp upon his brow, as is my duty, and Faulkner's people will understand that is meant as a great honour and a momentous occasion, a historic moment that they are blessed to witness - and they will never believe that I was the one who meant him harm.

I will go, and all of the Parish will be horrified to learn that the life of the High Katabasian was threatened by a foreign assassin and the Parish's brightest young star extinguished, and their hearts will soar with relief when they see me alive and well, and they will rejoice at my next commandment, because I will be a buoy and an anchor to them in the flood-tides.

I will go, and afterwards it will be **written** that I went.

Silence between them.

KATABASIAN GREVE:

(A little acidly)

If there are to be no secrets between us, Roemont, then let me take the risk of offending you.

It has been a very long time since I've seen you like this.

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

(Proudly)

Animated.

GREVE speaks with her own kind of passion. It's harder, rougher, and with buried self-reproach as well as a more obvious frustration towards ROEMONT.

KATABASIAN GREVE:

Swept up. Impassioned.

Perhaps misled yourself.

If stories are currents, I think perhaps the storyteller is in the greatest danger of being pulled under the surface.

I would not see you dragged and drowned in a tale of your own invention for the sake of a...a contest of wills against this holy brat.

Faulkner has you at a disadvantage - for now.

He is young, he is unknown. His impurities have yet to make themselves known

His circumstances allow him to act as an agent of change, in spite of his personal flaws.

You **should** remember that, because once you and I, we...were very similar indeed, I think.

We were young, and we were hungry. We could denounce past and present in the name of better things to come, and that made the elders call us as dangerous a foe as the Legislators themselves, and hope was the rushing tide that drove us onwards.

Now, though?

We're the old guard, Roemont, the last generation. We blinked, we dreamt, we slept - and all at once we were no longer chasing reform, we were in flight from it.

We did not intend to act out the same failures as those disappointments, those cowards, those compromisers who came before us - but we broke like water upon black rocks all the same.

The young do not trust us, Roemont. They resent us.

They gnash their teeth at the government out of ancestral habit but make no mistake - you and I are a central part of what they seek to overthrow.

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

(A little insulted)

You don't know if I can beat him.

KATABASIAN GREVE:

(Warily, meaning, 'but you may not be able to beat his story')

I believe you can kill him.

ROEMONT considers.

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

(Frustrated and impassioned)

What, I wonder, is the alternative course of action you're proposing?

We let the lie stand, Mason goes unavenged, the Legislatures turn their back on us.

Does that speak to reform? Will that placate them?

The only thing that will change will be that Faulkner will rise, and rise, until he becomes us and we become his shadow - and our sole satisfaction will be to watch him fail in turn, while our people are arrested and drafted and our long decline becomes fast and precipitous.

Do you think us so cowardly, Greve? So frail, so...so finished?

KATABASIAN GREVE:

(Calmly and coldly)

I think that most of the world's great stupidity is acted out by those who cannot stand to lose control.

ROEMONT paces across the room - and then stops.

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

(Wearily)

In a month's time I will be seventy-one years old.

Perhaps my life is already written out.

A good, long life and a decent act of service in dangerous times, I'd like to think, no matter what failings or compromises were required along the way.

I led our people through some of our darkest hours, through foul purges and lurking in fouler hiding places.

(Insistent)

I was the first High Katabasian to lay my hands upon the wreck of the Gulfwalker. I was the first to read the translations of the Pishing vision. I gave the order for the reclamation of the Gulch.

These were not insignificant things, Greve - this was not an insignificant life.

I have seen the passages they've drafted for me, I've read my chapter, I've approved the words - it reads well!

And yet in a century's time perhaps some scribbler will be thumbing through the Verses, making revisions, amending and trimming down as he goes, because so much will have happened since then that needs to be included...

...and he will look at my chapter, and he will look at Brother Faulkner's life as a rival to mine, packed with incident and cheap, empty sentiment, and some ludicrously exaggerated battle-scenes in which he claims to have played the central part...

...and my life's record will be neatly snipped away and tossed to the floor. Cuttings and ends, as his immortality is inked and printed and bound instead.

How could anyone stand that, Greve? How could anyone be expected to come to the last footfalls of their life, and upon looking back, watch as everything they've built is swept away?

GREVE - who of course is not in a position to be included in the Verses at all - just gives him a hard look.

KATABASIAN GREVE:

(Deadpan, but insincere)

I lament your ill fortune in having such troubles, High Katabasian Roemont.

ROEMONT has fallen quiet and gloomy.

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

But if I can bring our people back into the fold, without further harm - if the Legislatures accept us as a licenced faith, if we're protected from the draft! - that would be historic.

Wouldn't it? It could well end up being my life's true legacy.

They won't be able to excise that from the record, will they, now?

(To GREVE, doubt falling back over him)

Am I wrong about that, too, Greve?

Do you think Mason was wrong?

Silence.

KATABASIAN GREVE:

No, I don't think so.

I can understand what the true believers like Faulkner are afraid of. I can picture the inevitability of what's coming next, the crassness of it.

Revisions to the sacred texts.

Advertising opportunities. A partnership with the Jolly King Kipper, perhaps.

More compromises, more impurities.

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

(Softly in agreement, as if quoting from the Silt Verses)

Few clear waters stay that way for long.

KATABASIAN GREVE:

But they have river-gods in the Linger Straits, too.

Maybe we toss away Mason's proposal. We embrace our continued retreat; we watch as our disciples are caught and drafted or hallowed into battle-saints.

And then the government wins its war and next year it celebrates its newfound powers and popularity with a fresh round of purges against the illicit faiths, and the cycle continues, and that opportunity doesn't come around again.

Or maybe the CLS wins, and their priests will be standing victorious along the riverbanks, preaching a new name and a new history for the god that used to belong to us.

(Drily, half-chuckling)

If we must be devoured, at least we can negotiate the seasoning.

Silence.

KATABASIAN GREVE:

It's going to be hard, though.

No matter what comes, it's going to be hard, and there are few people and few faiths in this world capable of great change without greater fracture.

Some of those who love us now will come to hate us. And those who always doubted us will turn their backs.

But maybe that's not such a bad thing.

Maybe a schism with Faulkner and his people now, a clean and a clarifying break, is better for us in the long run than something that tangles and twists and festers on for decades to come.

(Her eyes on ROEMONT, a little accusatory)

But then, I suppose, that would become your legacy, too, wouldn't it, Roemont?

One final sentence in your immortal chapter. The man who broke the faith.

Pause.

ROEMONT is no longer listening. He's pacing, practicing being FAULKNER again.

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

(In FAULKNER's voice)

"We have been misled. All of us, tricked. We were taught that our enemy was the government, the policemen, our comrades of this great nation, when a far more terrible foe threatens us from the north—"

KATABASIAN GREVE:

Roemont.

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

(Roused)

Hm?

KATABASIAN GREVE:

What happens if you fail?

HIGH KATABASIAN ROEMONT:

(As if it's just occurring to him)

Then...then you must take my place until a new leader of the faith can be properly elected, Greve.

Finalise the negotiations, announce our legitimacy. Give Faulkner no choice but to obey or split with us.

Anything is better than letting him win. You must promise me this.

KATABASIAN GREVE:

(Her eyes on ROEMONT, concocting a plan of her own)

Yes.

Yes, I quite agree.

All right. Let's kill the bastard.

They clink glasses-

COTTAGE, INT, NIGHT (KITCHEN)

-and the clink becomes the sound of THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE), washing up.

We can hear the gentle whistle of something cooking on the stove. And the radio is playing a broadcast from CHUCK HARM.

CHUCK HARM:

(On the radio)

So I have to admit something, my friends. On this show, we like to think the best of people.

So I, Chuck Harm, have been extending an olive branch to the citizens of the Peninsula, though they are our enemy.

On our last episode, I addressed the Peninsulan military directly. I told them; your saint-strikes are missing their targets. Ours are striking with precision.

Our Lord of Breeze and Brine is a thousand times more powerful than your Grand Mistral, and he summons a favourable wind for us, day after day after day.

You're not hitting a barn door right now.

And it seems that the Pennies, they didn't like that, because I understand they've been draping some banners over their cliffs.

(Tetchily)

'Where are you, Chuck?' 'Cluck, cluck, Chuck'. 'Come stand in front of the barn door, Chuck.'

I - I get the impression that they think simply because I am reporting from behind a desk in Nesh, that I am unqualified to make judgements on the state of this war or the sorry state of their military.

That I am a coward.

As if coming to the coast and reporting from there would be proof of courage. Or proof of anything.

(Very obviously goaded)

I will not be goaded.

(Persuading himself)

But I also...I also have nothing to fear from the misguided bravado of a nation in collapse, or the tauntings of fascist grunts.

And I would be proud, of course, to stand amongst our troops on the front lines and review the condition of the war from there.

Immensely proud.

So...we'll see.

I think everyone's going to see.

The grandfather clock on the wall chimes seven on the hour - and quite suddenly, *the doorbell rings.*

And it rings again.

THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE) removes her washing-up gloves.

COTTAGE, INT, NIGHT (HALL)

THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE) walks through the hall - to the door, which she begins to unlock.

We catch a flash of jazz music and a smooth RADIO HOST introducing the next show.

RADIO HOST:

(On the radio)

How you doing tonight, CLS?

That was Chuck Harm, with news from Nesh. But now it's seven o'clock on the hour, and we're playing smooth tunes through the night. Starting you off with a little B. Narr, some Sophie Lynch and Steve Hendrickson.

Follow it up with some Chrysanthe Grech, a little Marta da Silva, and then we're going to finish things off with Rhys Lawton and HR Owen.

Enjoy.

COTTAGE, EXT, NIGHT

THE UNNAMED WOMAN opens the door. We can hear cicadas outside.

THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE)
(Brightly)
Hello!

VAL is standing outside.

VAL:
(A little haltingly)
Hello, hello!

Sorry to bother you so late.

I'm just, ah, headed towards Nesh, and I wanted to check that I was going the right way?

THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE):
(Sympathetically)
Good evening, dear.

Yes, it is the right way, but you've got a way to go yet.

THE UNNAMED WOMAN stops and thinks - thoughtfully drumming her fingers on the door, watching VAL..

THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE)
(With a little growing suspicion)
You come a long way?

VAL:
(Calmly)
Yes, I came inland from the coast.

THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE):

(Her suspicion building)

I'm surprised they let you through, then. There's a military blockade on the coastal road.

VAL:

(Just as calmly)

Yes, there was.

THE UNNAMED WOMAN *hesitates*.

THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE):

(On the verge of accusatory)

Your accent - it sounds a little Peninsulan, doesn't it?

VAL:

No, it doesn't.

A moment's silence as the Last Word takes effect. And then-

THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE):

(Losing her suspicion at once)

Oh. All right, then.

VAL:

Still, I'm tired and sore, and I have to admit - I just caught the smell of something delicious from your window.

Do you mind if I ask what you're cooking in there?

She's perfectly casual, but she is making up her mind about whether she's going to come into this woman's house and - likely - kill her.

THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE):

(Taken aback)

Just a casserole. Some beef, a few parsnips-

VAL considers.

VAL:

Do you live alone?

THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE):

(Beginning to explain)

Oh. Oh, no, my husband is coming home from work-

VAL sighs in annoyance.

VAL:

(Quite sharply now)

Actually, you **do** live alone.

You don't have a husband, and you've never had a husband. You never met anyone who cared for you.

That's what the Last Word tells me, and the Last Word does its homework, so you've got no cause to doubt.

Silence for a moment, and then-

THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE):

(Accepting the new reality)

I don't have a husband.

VAL:

Good. Invite me in for dinner.

THE UNNAMED WOMAN (CANDICE):

(Making a hesitant noise)

I-

From this point onwards THE UNNAMED WOMAN: grows increasingly confused - and over time, increasingly frightened.

VAL:

(Firmly)

You don't need to be afraid of me, Candice.

(Before THE UNNAMED WOMAN can interrupt)

And that's your name, by the way. Your name is Candice.

You don't need to be frightened of me, Candice, because as soon as you saw me, you recognised me as your eldest daughter.

Come home at last to stay the night - after a very long time away.

Silence for a moment.

And then, quite suddenly, CANDICE (formerly the UNNAMED WOMAN) sounds different - her accent is no longer West Country but received pronunciation, mirroring VAL's.

CANDICE:
(*Confused*)
Oh!

I, I'm so sorry, darling - I wasn't expecting you-

VAL:
You're wearing the same pinafore that you wore when I left, the same dull and stinking slippers, your hair pinned back as tight and severe as it always was.

You felt so much love at the sight of me. That's what the Last Word says.

Love, sudden and spontaneous and unforced, like you'd never felt before towards your daughter.

You hugged me, at once.

CANDICE:
(*Still confused, but feeling the affection rise in her*)
Oh, of course, what am I thinking - come here, darling.

Ohhh.

She gives VAL a great big hug. VAL winces.

VAL:
Softer.

Less bony.

CANDICE's 'ohh' turns into a cry of pain. We hear her bones forcibly reshape to make for a softer hug.

VAL:
Better.

And then, Mum, you told me just how much you loved me.

Just a moment of hesitation.

CANDICE:
(Adjusting to the reality)
 I love you so, so much-

VAL:
 And you were proud of me, too - you told me that next.

CANDICE:
(Gushing with affection now)
 Oh, I **am** proud - you know I am! I'm **so** proud of you.
(Recalling her actual son)
 I'm proud of you, and I'm proud of your brother Jamie, as well-

VAL:
(Tetchily, annoyed at having the narrative yanked back from her)
 Not Jamie. Not Jamie.

There was never any Jamie. How could you have a Jamie when we've just erased your husband from existence? How would that make any sense?

CANDICE:
(Unable to comprehend)
 I don't-

VAL:
 I was your only child, Mum. And your pride was for me, and me alone.

CANDICE blinks - and then accepts the new reality.

CANDICE:
 I **am** proud of you. Of course I am.

VAL:
 Good.

Invite me in, please.

CANDICE:
(Still struggling to get her head around it all)
 Yes. Yes, of course. Come on through.

We hear the front door slam.

COTTAGE, INT, NIGHT (DINING ROOM)

The grandfather clock is ticking softly in the background as CANDICE and VAL enter the dining room.

CANDICE:

Um. Take a seat at the dining table, dear. I'll get some extra cutlery, and I'll get supper ready for us both.

(To herself, as if trying to remember something important)

Yes.

VAL:

Thank you, Mum.

VAL takes a seat at the dining table.

CANDICE hurries into the next room to finish off dinner.

CANDICE:

(Calling out)

Are you tired, my love?

VAL:

(Calmly calling back)

A little, but it's all right. I don't actually have to sleep any longer.

CANDICE:

Oh.

(Not knowing what else to say)

That must be nice.

VAL:

Less than you'd think.

CANDICE comes hurrying back through and puts the cutlery out in front of VAL.

CANDICE:

Knife, fork, napkin-

(Looking up - VAL is watching her intently)

What's wrong, dear?

VAL:

It's just funny, coming face to face with you again.

(Still lightly, but with a dangerous edge in her voice)
Do you remember how much pain you caused me, Mum?

CANDICE:
(Hurt and a little shocked)
Oh, I- pain, my darling? What pain? I, I don't-

In the background, the sound of the grandfather clock stops.

VAL:
Let me remind you.

The last time you saw your daughter, the Last Word tells me, she was laughing.

They'd given her a uniform, and a private's rank.

She was going off to serve her country, a volunteer for the war that was to come, and she thought that'd make you proud of her at last, so she was laughing, and you laughed too even though you'd never had a sense of humour.

And she'd been expecting that at long last, you'd tell her that you were proud of her, and you accepted her - she'd dreamt of that moment upon parting.

You didn't say it, but even that couldn't ruin her mood.

I don't know what you were thinking as you watched her go.

Perhaps you knew that she was being deeply, absurdly naive, and she would suffer terribly at the hands of the military scientists before she died, and after she suffered and she died she would become something terrible.

Perhaps you knew, but you were too cowardly to tell her, or the government stipend you'd receive as a consequence of her decision was far too attractive a prospect to give up.

CANDICE
No. No, I didn't. I didn't-

VAL:
Perhaps you didn't know.

(With spite)

But if you **didn't** know, you **should** have known, because mothers are supposed to protect their daughters from the horrors of the world.

You were the one she cried out for, as they hurt her, as they branded her, and as they twisted her into a shape of their own making.

Hour after hour, day after day, over and over again.

(Firmly)

You're crying for her now. Just like she cried for you.

The ticking of the clock comes back into focus. And CANDICE begins to cry.

CANDICE:

I'm- I am crying-

I'm so sorry, my love. I don't know what I did, I don't understand it, but I'm sorry-

VAL:

Do you remember my name, Mum?

CANDICE:

(Still crying)

I'm sorry. I don't.

VAL:

Nor do I.

I remember very little of my life from before they hallowed me.

A few faces. A few names. A few lingering moments.

(Coldly)

Your face, though. Your face sticks with me.

(More casually)

For a very long time afterwards, I thought my name must be Val because that's what the doctors kept on referring to me as amongst themselves, but eventually I realised that Val wasn't my name at all; it was shorthand.

Can you guess what it stood for, Mum?

CANDICE:

(Distressed)

No, no-

VAL:

(Simply)

It stood for valuable.

There were forty cells in that substation, and they were all full when I arrived, and by the time I left, each cell had a new inhabitant.

Some died before they could become sacred.

Others became saints, but were simply not valuable enough to be kept.

Silence between them.

VAL:

(With her anger building, quivering with rage and sorrow by the end)

The hallowing procedure took sixty-four days.

And because I was a volunteer, because they'd given me a uniform and a rank, at first they apologised to me.

Just for the first few days. Then they settled into the usual routine.

Liars' gods aren't much in circulation any more. So they had a lot of old prayer-marks to test. They had to perfect the formula.

They branded me.

When the skin healed, they tried again.

And as they marked my flesh, they moulded my mind into something my god could inhabit, a warm and inviting shape.

They piped in lies, shrieking and furious lies, through the speakers of the cell.

They told me that you were dead, and I was too. They told me that there was no cell, and I was outside in the rain, shivering. They told me that the world had ended.

They kept me awake, and told me I had slept.

They made me lie to them, bold and outrageous lies, and they hurt me when I failed to convince them.

When I finally died, I didn't realise it. I couldn't recognise it.

And because I could no longer die, I remained awake - no longer myself, but something else.

(Staring down at her hands)

And with every lie I tell, the prayer-marks spread, and shift across my skin.

I'll never be rid of them.

(Softly)

I could have loved any god. That's what occurs to me now.

I could have shaped my body and spirit into any image I chose, monstrous or beautiful or both at once - and at the very least the choice would have been mine.

Instead I let them choose a shape that was useful, that served a function.

Because I wanted to impress you, and I wanted to become something **you** could be proud of.

Something you could love.

I could have changed for myself, but instead I did it for you.

You came to see me twice. I remember that, as well.

Since I'd volunteered, that was my reward; you could come and see me as often as you wanted.

But you came twice.

Once on the third day. Once on the fourteenth.

I remember your face, Mum, I remember you gazing down at me from the porthole window of my cell.

On the third day, you waved.

On the fourteenth day, you just looked at me, and then you left.

(Her fury rising)

You didn't come again. **And there were 50 more days after that.**

Will you look at me now, Mum?

Are you proud of me?

Can you tell me my name?

Silence between them.

CANDICE is still quietly sobbing.

VAL:
(*Like a cat losing interest in its prey*)
Is dinner ready?

CANDICE:
(Softly)
It's simmering.

VAL:
(*Quietly, casually ominous*)
Is there anything else that needs to be done before dinner's ready?

CANDICE:
I just...I just light the candles-

VAL:
Good.

CANDICE begins lighting the candles. Her hands are trembling as she does so.

VAL:
That's all I need from you, then.

Even CANDICE, bewildered and broken as she is, can understand that something horrible is about to happen to her.

CANDICE:
(Weakly)
Uh...I need to serve you.

VAL:
So serve me.

CANDICE goes to the stove.

She returns with the stew; places it down. Ladles it up.

CANDICE:
(Still trying to maintain her enthusiasm)
There - there you go. Sorry - sorry for spilling it.

CANDICE turns back as if to go.

VAL:
Mum. Wait.

Turn to face me.

Silence.

VAL:
(Through clenched teeth, with growing anger)
It didn't feel right, did it? Seeing your daughter again.

Scarred, branded, changed.

Gazing at her face, and seeing something missing there, something lost.

It was like drowning.

That's what the Last Word tells me, and the Last Word, it never lies.

You realised something. You were not worthy of looking upon your daughter.

Of hearing her voice, of touching her face.

So you went through to the kitchen, while she was busy eating her dinner.

You opened the kitchen drawer, and you took out the largest pair of scissors that you found there.

We hear CANDICE, faltering, going through into the kitchen.

She opens the drawer.

VAL:
(Calling after her)

Are they sharp?

CANDICE:

I - I think so-

VAL:

(With cruelty)

No. They weren't sharp at all.

You can come back on through, Mum.

CANDICE returns.

CANDICE:

(Utterly broken)

I...I...

VAL:

You made your decision.

You'd wait by the stove until she'd finished her dinner, until she'd gone upstairs to bed.

And then you'd punish yourself for your transgressions against your daughter, whose name you'd lost.

(Softly, sweetly)

You'd take the scissors to your lips.

Then your ears.

Then your eyes.

Then your fingers.

You'd take off every part of yourself that had heard her, held her, beheld her.

VAL:

And when you were done with mutilating yourself, you'd stumble out into the road, bleeding from your emptied face and ruined hands.

You'd walk south through the countryside until you came to the end of the land, the great white cliffs of the northern channel-

-and then you'd toss yourself down into the polluted waters to sink amongst the other lost and forgotten things.

That - eventually - was how you died.

The noise of the grandfather clock slowly rises again. CANDICE is sobbing.

CANDICE:
(*Whimpering*)
I...I...

VAL - who we have not heard at any point eating - scrapes back her chair.

VAL
Mm. That was delicious.

Thank you, Mum.

Good night. Sleep well.

She gets to her feet, leaves the room, and quietly heads upstairs.

We hear her footprints recede.

CANDICE continues to whimper.

BEDROOM, INT, NIGHT

VAL sits on the bed with a contented sigh.

Below, we can hear a sudden, horrible scream from CANDICE.

Silence for a moment.

And then we hear CARSON on the other end. He's shaken.

CARSON:
(*In her earpiece*)
Val, we...we really need you to stop doing that. OK?

GOVERNMENT OFFICE, INT, NIGHT

CARSON swivels about in his chair. We can hear the chatter of workers behind him.

CARSON:

You're making some of the folks back here a little nervous.

VAL:

(In his earpiece)

She was an enemy combatant.

CARSON:

No, she wasn't.

VAL:

(In his earpiece, feigning ignorance)

Oh.

Well, I can make her one, then. It won't take long.

Screaming in CARSON's earpiece.

VAL:

(In his earpiece)

Too late. She's just lost her ears.

CARSON:

(Taking a breath)

The cruelty, Val. It's too much.

I need people to feel like they can rely on you.

VAL:

(In his earpiece)

Well, Press Secretary, perhaps when I've won this war for you, you can point me towards my actual mother, and I'll no longer be feeling quite so frustrated.

Silence. CARSON takes the point.

CARSON:

You need to move quicker.

VAL:

(In his earpiece)

Do I?

CARSON:

CLS is gathering their forces by the old channel crossing. We think they're prepping for an assault across the water.

We've maybe got a week.

VAL:

(In his earpiece)

I'm sure your defences on the coast will hold up.

CARSON:

They won't.

We need you to take the Conclave.

VAL does not reply.

CARSON:

(Pleadingly)

I...Val, get this done, do it quickly, and we'll give you your mother.

We'll track her down and we'll give her to you, I promise.

Silence.

VAL:

(In his earpiece)

Who else?

CARSON:

Wh-

I mean, who else do you want?

VAL:

(In his earpiece)

The doctors. The nurses. The soldiers who guarded the compound. The attendants who served the meals.

I want a phone call with all of them on the line.

I want that before I win your war for you, Press Secretary.

CARSON:
(In her earpiece, weakly)
 You **volunteered** for this, Val.

VAL:
(In his earpiece)
 My mother's daughter volunteered.

The whole point of the exercise was to make her into something new, and now that I'm here, I **disagree with her decision**.

Silence.

CARSON:
 Yes, you can have them. You can have anything you like.

VAL:
(In his earpiece)
 And when Nesh has fallen, you'll give me my mother.

CARSON:
 Like I said.

Silence.

VAL:
(In his earpiece)
 Sleep well, Press Secretary.

Click. She's gone.

CARSON sighs and rolls back in his chair.

PARACLETE'S GULCH (CHAPEL), INT, NIGHT

The sound of running water. FAULKNER is alone down here.

We can just hear his ragged, guilty breathing, close to tears.

RANE:
 (Distantly)

...Prophet Faulkner?

FAULKNER stirs.

FAULKNER:
Sibling Rane?

RANE approaches, cautiously and politely.

RANE:
I'm...I'm so sorry, prophet. I wasn't sure if you were asleep, or-

FAULKNER:
No. No, I was just, uh...

I was just reflecting.
(Trying to explain himself)
Direct communion with the Father in the Water can be a...a difficult weight to bear.

A god inside your head.

I was overcome.

RANE accepts - or pretends to accept this.

RANE:
I am sorry to add to your worries, then.

We've heard from the team upriver.

They found the body of Brother Fade.

Anathema Carpenter must have overpowered him.

FAULKNER reflects on this.

FAULKNER:
Carpenter's still alive?

RANE:
Yes, prophet. I fear she is.

I've asked the low-tide congregation to arrange a special ceremony for tonight in the Dreaming Pools; we'll offer up five sacrifices to the Trawler-man in commemoration of the hero Brother Fade, and we'll pile endless curses upon the head of the Anathema Carpenter.

I thought you might want to-

FAULKNER:

(Abruptly)

Yes. Yes, exactly the right decision, Rane.

I'll be right there.

Is that everything?

RANE:

Not quite. We've had word from downriver.

High Katabasian Roemont wants to pay the Gulch a visit. To formally bestow the kelp wreath upon you.

In honour of your achievements.

FAULKNER:

(Correcting them)

Our achievements, Sibling Rane.

Our achievements.

Good. We'll make him welcome. What else?

RANE:

(Meaningfully)

Brother Philly is ready to depart for Glottage - for the task you've set him. He wanted your blessing before he goes.

FAULKNER:

He'll have it, of course.

Give me a moment, please, Sibling.

RANE:

Of course, Katabasian. Please excuse me.

RANE turns and goes.

FAULKNER waits - and then exhales.

FAULKNER:
(Breathless, softly, relieved)
 She's alive.

She's alive, she's alive-

PARACLETE'S GULCH (DREAMING POOLS), INT, NIGHT

-and we cut instantly to the ceremony. RANE, in the background, is preaching to a large crowd.

Ominous gong sounds underline the ritual.

RANE:
(With anger and venom)
 -and we beseech you, Father, to descend upon Anathema Carpenter, and
 to visit her transgressions upon her tenfold.

Let her be swallowed up by one mouth and regurgitated from the other.

With my feet in the water and my arms to the sky, I curse her.

I curse her.

I curse her.

I curse her.

The congregation joins in.

CHORUS
 I curse her.

I curse her.

I curse her.

*And in the quiet, we hear FAULKNER, whispering the prayer himself - but he says the words
 with love, and joy.*

FAULKNER:
(Half under his breath)
I curse her.

I curse her.

I curse her.

He begins to half-chuckle under his breath as he says it.

And we hear the sound of the Drowning Song rise once more.

END OF EPISODE.