

SEASON 3, EPISODE 3

RADIO BROADCAST (BARBERSHOP)

We hear footsteps - and a radio being switched on.

In the background, we hear the snip of scissors - we're in a barbershop.

The same theme - the same topical news show - as last episode begins to play.

SAM KINCANNON:

(On the radio)

This is Sam Kincannon, and you're listening to Hard Truths, with Sam Kincannon.

(Urgently)

All around the country, fanatical groups meet in secret to practice forbidden rituals and plot their rise to power.

Their aim? A world without gods and a world without sacrifice.

It's been called the Tree of Spite in the CLS, the Rancorous Oak, the Many Below, and here in the Peninsula this dangerous terrorist cult has a new name.

The **Woundtree**.

It's struck in our prisons, in our factories, in our farms.

The children of the Woundtree **claim** to oppose industrial-scale sacrifice.

But does its influence in fact render regular acts of offering and prayer inaccessible to marginalised citizens?

Worse yet, could it hand the Linger Straits the chance of victory they've been looking for?

And in an era of cynicism towards divine sacrifice, how can we recapture the sense of community pride and selfless service that once defined the people of the Peninsula?

The barber turns on an electric razor - and light ambient music begins to play as we shift locations.

RADIO BROADCAST (TRAFFIC JAM)

Now we're listening to the broadcast during a busy traffic jam.

SAM KINCANNON:

(On the radio)

This morning, as the first sweep of drafting-raids begins in the South-Western Territory, Adjudicator Gour was forced to called for calm over fears that our indentured soldiers could deliberately brand themselves with the Woundtree's prayer-marks, in order to sow chaos in the Peninsula's camps and on the front lines.

Tonight, we'll be doing a deep-dive into the topic and giving you all the facts you need to make up your mind.

(More cheerfully)

With me today is Adjudicator Shrue of the North-West, who's butted heads with me more than once on this particular issue-

An angry motorist sounds his horn and yells - 'Come on!' - as we switch location again-

RADIO BROADCAST (RESTAURANT KITCHEN)

To a busy restaurant kitchen. Someone is cutting vegetables and softly humming along to the music.

SHRUE:

(On the radio)

I understand - I do understand the concerns, Sam.

But the Legislatures should not be making potentially hazardous decisions about our enlisted military personnel, based on exaggeration and hearsay-

SAM KINCANNON:

(On the radio)

I'll also be speaking with radio star and director Leonard Trunce about his upcoming serial, *Carlie Cape: Rise of Pulchritude*, which will be airing right here on GGR this Fathoms.

We'll be discussing: in a polarised age of extremism and division, what is the function of art?

-and we cut-

RADIO BROADCAST (BATTLEFIELD)

-and we can hear gunfire and explosions in the distance.

LEONARD TRUNCE:

(On the radio)

There's going to be more action, of course, there's going to be bigger villains and the kind of dramatic escalation in scale and scope that we expect from the climax to the series.

But we've also got some big ideas as well.

We know that there's increased pressure on our industrial output right now, we know that we're being asked to find additional sacrifices, but we have to ensure that those sacrifices are sustainable, warranted, and fair.

And then on the other side of the coin, we have something like the Woundtree. We have this fast-growing extremist movement that is clearly very alluring, and which is driving some of our young people towards a very dangerous and anti-societal path.

How do you know when you've gone too far?

RADIO BROADCAST (BELLWETHERS)

The radio retunes.

We can faintly hear howling wind - and both voices and music are now sounding tinny, as if playing through loudspeakers.

ADJUDICATOR SHRUE:

(On the radio)

What you have to understand is that these people are expressing a real and legitimate anger that's been dormant in our society for too long.

An anger at a rate of sacrifice which is unsustainable and a choice of sacrifice which all too often hurts the most vulnerable amongst us.

We have hollowed out our country from the bottom in the name of maintaining our ruling faiths. That's not a, a radical ideology, that's not extremism! It's a simple and a tangible truth.

And what we need to be doing is looking at how to tackle that problem, to demonstrate that there are alternative solutions within our governing infrastructure-

SAM KINCANNON:

(Interrupting)

Adjudicator, would you agree that a god must feed?

SHRUE:

-No, Sam, let me finish, because the conversation about how and why we feed the divine machinery of our nation is something that's been coming for a long time now-

SAM KINCANNON:

(Forcefully interrupting)

Adjudicator. Must a god feed?

ADJUDICATOR SHRUE:

I don't want to get into these gotcha questions, Sam. Sam, I don't want to-

SAM KINCANNON:

(Not getting an answer)

Must a god feed? Must a god feed?

ADJUDICATOR SHRUE:

(Surrendering to the gotcha statement)

A god must feed, certainly, a god must feed. A god must **be** fed.

But if we do not resolve these inequities ourselves through the rule of law, then we have to accept that the natural, awful consequence is...

...is something like the Woundtree-

The music has ended. The broadcast halts.

We're left with the winds. With creaking timbers. And the sound of wind chimes.

The voice of DAN THE FANATIC booms out over the landscape.

DAN THE FANATIC:

These are the truths of the Many Below-

BELLWETHERS: PAIGE'S HOUSE, BEDROOM, INT, DAY

We hear a harsh and violent wind, blowing outside.

And PAIGE's agitated breathing. She's dreaming.

And as she dreams, we hear the groaning of her god, the crack of spreading branches, all around her-

PAIGE:
(Shivering under her breath)
 -tree...tree...tree...

She wakes with a gasp, turns - and then immediately retches into a bin that's been left beside the bed.

She coughs up, spits.

In the background, we can hear DAN THE FANATIC faintly reciting the Truths of the Many Below.

We hear PAIGE get out of bed.

She goes to the window; opens the blind. Stares out over the desolate landscape.

Then she walks to the sideboard, lifts a bottle of something alcoholic. Uncorks it. Pours.

Drinks.

BELLWETHERS: PAIGE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN, INT, DAY

PAIGE turns the radio on, then begins to rummage in the shelves.

We're hearing an illicit, Lord Haw-Haw-esque propaganda broadcast from CHUCK HARM now.

CHUCK HARM:
(On the radio)
 So let's talk about the Tree of Spite, or as our opponents in the Peninsula are calling it, the Woundtree.

And for our courageous listeners in the Peninsula - friend, you will not be surprised that your government is telling you some godsdamned colossal lies.

We've got the evidence. The Peninsular government manufactured the Woundtree in one of its hidden god-making labs. They attempted to set it loose in the CLS as an act of war.

And inevitably, it backfired on them.

PAIGE turns on the toaster. She stands there, tapping her bread-knife idly on the side, listening to CHUCK - and growing more and more silently upset.

CHUCK HARM:

How do we know this? Well, think about it. The Children of the Woundtree say they don't like sacrifice, they say it's cruel, we've heard this stuff a hundred times before.

The CLS conclave is currently considering legislation that would require all sacrifices to be muzzled, restrained and blindfolded a week before the ceremony itself - as a safety precaution against the Woundtree.

If you were really concerned about the welfare of sacrificial victims - well, **you're making things worse for them** by doing this! How is that helping them?

It's obvious. They're plants!

Pardon the pun.

Having had enough, PAIGE crosses quickly to the radio and turns CHUCK off.

Then she returns to the table - and pours herself a second drink.

As she does so, we shift to the outside-

BELLWETHERS, EXT, DAY

-and we're listening to the winds howl and rage over the ruined town.

A moment of silence. And then PAIGE narrates.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

I never saw Bellwethers after the Wither Mark went off.

Hayward did, and he says it was worse than this - which is difficult, honestly, to believe.

By the time our scouts found the ruins of the town, now deep beyond the borders of civilised life, there were no longer any crab-angels or colossal tentacled anemones or writhing saints of silt, and the White Gull river itself had drained back into the soil, leaving only a rich tarry crust of mud and weeds and detritus scattered across the ruined crimson streets.

The houses had rotted away, losing their shapes, the roofs caving inwards, the walls sagging under the weight of dying barnacles.

It was an empty town, a sodden driftwood offering left for us to find.

We'd been on the run for days with our increasingly visible and uncontrollable group of prison escapees trailing out behind us, and we were desperate for any kind of safe hiding place.

We were running out of time.

We needed a miracle, and we'd found one. And that gave Hayward confidence.

(Pause)

It made me so afraid - seeing just how quickly things can change.

This place had made headlines once. A god had risen to claim these streets.

Now it was already forgotten, and its purpose had been lost.

A wretched, broken ruin, dried out and stained with crimson silt and overgrown with creeping ivy.

Scoured by the whispering god-storms that came raging down from the Hungering Territories, the polluted lands to the west.

As forlorn and lifeless as any landscape in the wake of a terrible flood.
(In a mocking impression)

"But nobody's going to find us there," Hayward said.

It was true enough that the remnants of Bellwethers would make a secure hiding place for the mad or desperate; this was a ruin that had long been cleansed from the maps, abandoned to the wilds.

At some point in the past year they'd shifted the border eastwards to exclude it.

The highway that had once led to Bellwethers was already overgrown and blocked off with rough thorn-filled hedgerows and climbing rhododendron in dedication to the boundary-gods that had been planted there.

The road-signs were smashed, or scrawled over with a single, simple warning: UNLIVEABLE.

Someone else had tried to claim it, the scout told us, months before we arrived. Maybe even more than one group, party after party making pilgrimage to this place at the end of the world.

Their camp-beds and their beseeching prayer-marks were still there, abandoned in the ruins.

But the people themselves had moved on, or they'd been devoured by the storm.

And there we were, following in their footsteps - with a stolen army lorry filled with guns and gas-masks and industrial shielding-tents.

Nowhere else to run. Just desperate enough to try.

We renamed the place, tried our best to shed its skin. Forget what it had been and who it had belonged to.

We called it the Grace, by collective vote.

We've been living out here ever since, in this forgotten, sunken carcass of a town that lingers on in the dead man's land between the Peninsula and the god-wild hills to the north-west where nothing can ever be trusted to stay the same.

We hang our laundry on the dried-out coral corpses.

We make our beds in the hollowed-out spiral-shells and the ruined homes alike.

We've built a greenhouse, and a hatchery, and some of our bunkhouses have electricity now, and we've built barricades around the encampment

with wrecked-out cars that would hold off any attackers for at least ten or so minutes.

My god isn't even murdering owls or gulls or whales any more, as far as I can tell - but we stick to root vegetables, eggs and milk, curbing our predators' instincts, for safety's sake.

And every once in a while one of us forgets to put on their gas mask, or they don't zip up their tent-flaps properly overnight, and we die in horrible pain while shrieking the praises of a nameless and unknowable thing.

Twice a day or more those winds roll through the streets from the north-west, a shrieking storm of violet and crimson that scours the buildings and eats away at the concrete.

Whispering in our ears, begging to be fed.

When the winds have passed, they leave heaps of wet grey-white ash behind in the gutters and gathering on the rooftops, long-dead offerings turned to divine excrement.

We keep the starving gods at bay with the loudspeakers of the town, plugged into our single working generator, and a stackful of stolen CDs taken from our raids into the farmlands.

Nothing can endure beyond the border, they say, without losing its shape.

We're keeping our shape here in the Grace about as well as we can, but every single day it gets harder.

-and we hear the sound of a door opening and a tent flap being unzipped as PAIGE exits her house.

Slightly less muffled, we can hear DAN THE FANATIC calling out over the speakers,

DAN THE FANATIC:

These are The Silt Verses! And I dedicate our disciples to the glory of the Woundtree!

Lucille Valentine. Laurence Owen. Alison Campbell. Jimmie Yamaguchi. Ishani Kanetkar. And Méabh de Brún.

A moment of silence, and then PAIGE also unzips the protective tent-seal and steps out.

She takes a breath, a few steps - and then runs to her car, fumbling for her keys, as if she's hoping to avoid being spotted.

Too late. DAN spots her and calls out:

DAN THE FANATIC:
(Enthusiastic, booming)
 Widow of Wounds!

An electric squeal as he drops the mic. PAIGE groans sourly beneath her breath as he comes running up to her.

PAIGE:
(Quietly)
 -let's fucking get this over with-

DAN THE FANATIC:
 Hail to the Widow of Wounds!

Queen of Spite, Mother of Martyred Flesh!

PAIGE:
(Not quite politely)
 Good morning, Dan!

DAN THE FANATIC:
(Just as enthusiastic)
 Blessed Widow! Did the Tree visit you with visions of triumph in the night?

PAIGE:
(Trying to keep up her cheeriness)
 Not last night. But I'll let everyone know, just as soon as-

DAN THE FANATIC:
(Exalting)
 Soon! Soon the Tree will speak!

And the oppressors and the high priests and the hungering gods
 themselves will shiver at the final instrument of their undoing!

PAIGE unlocks her car door.

PAIGE:

(Trying to get away)

Okay, well-

DAN THE FANATIC:

(Apparently at random)

Officer Edward Penton!

PAIGE stops in her tracks.

PAIGE:

...what?

DAN THE FANATIC:

He was the very cruelest of the oppressors against me! He shall shiver too, Widow, when the Tree speaks!

I pray night and day to the Tree, Widow, that my hand will draw the marks of my revolt against him.

That my flesh shall take the great shape of my revenge upon Officer Edward Penton!

When I wrap my arms about him and the Tree surges forth from my body into his, we shall show him fear!

(Emphatically)

We shall show him fear, Widow!

PAIGE just stares at him.

PAIGE:

All right!

I'm late for a meeting, Dan!

She steps into her car.

DAN THE FANATIC:

We will keep vigil here, Widow! We shall wait for your return!

PAIGE:

OK, Dan.

-and she slams the door.

PAIGE:

(Doing up her seat belt)

I'm going to be, like, an hour, though, so...

(Under her breath)

...go inside, get yourself a snack, stop hanging around like a freak outside my house, maybe?

She turns the engine on.

Outside, DAN is hammering on the window excitedly.

DAN THE FANATIC:

Widow!

-PAIGE accelerates and speeds off.

DAN is left behind.

DAN THE FANATIC:

(Calling after her)

Blessed Widow of Wounds!

He stands there, alone, staring after her. A slightly sad silence.

Then, rallying, he stamps his foot enthusiastically and calls out,

DAN THE FANATIC:

We will show them fear!

BELLWETHERS (MONTAGE), EXT, DAY:

A quick montage ensues - a vintage soul song plays over the loudspeakers as PAIGE drives on into the heart of the town.

SECURITY GUARD:

(Into his walkie-talkie)

-uh, Central, I have eyes on the Widow of Wounds. She's entering the main compound now.

We hear hammering and building work as PAIGE drives past-

-and then a small group of worshippers, practicing the prayers of the Many Below.

WORSHIPPERS:

I shall die today. I will not die helpless. My death will not amount to nothing-

-and as PAIGE pulls up outside the HATCHERY, the montage and music ends.

BELLWETHERS: HATCHERIES, INT, DAY

A chicken crosses the floor, squawking and clucking-

-and then SNAP. Something in it breaks, and twists, turning into a shrieking fleshy abomination-

-and ALICE THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE quickly crosses the floor, switching on a flamethrower, torching the horrid thing.

She's efficient but not frightened.

As the CHICKEN-ANGEL burns and screams, it falls silent-

-and breathing through her gas mask, ALICE crosses back across the floor and puts down the flamethrower. She removes her mask.

Behind her, the tent flap unzips, and PAIGE steps inside.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

(Calmly)

Good morning, Widow.

(Perhaps a little pointed, perhaps just being friendly)

Glad to see you up.

PAIGE comes walking forward.

PAIGE:

Hey, Alice.

Looks like you've been through it.

ALICE picks up a broom and begins to sweep. She is - presumably - sweeping up chicken ashes.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

(Observing the damage, grimly)

Window seal broke in the night. Wild god got into one of the chickens. It changed, and it slaughtered the rest of the roost.

Had to barbecue the lot of 'em.

This worries PAIGE.

PAIGE:

Fuck. Where's that leave us?

HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

We'll need to make another run into the farmlands soon, get our hands on a few more birds.

The Rootkeeper, he said he'd approve the request.

PAIGE isn't sure she agrees with this.

PAIGE:

Well, there are a lot of troops moving north along the roads right now, so we do just...we need to be careful, Alice.

We've got enough tinned goods in the storeroom to last us a while longer.

The HATCHERY DISCIPLE continues sweeping.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

Maybe, maybe.

I told the Rootkeeper; we could do with our own protection out here; some prayer-wards on the walls and floor, maybe. Our very own god of the roost.

He said he'd think about it.

PAIGE:

(Annoyed)

I don't think he really meant that, Alice-

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

I mean, the Tree wouldn't mind, would it? A little supplemental worship?

It's not competition, not really. We need to be practical, that's what I said to him.

PAIGE:
We don't sacrifice-

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:
(Interrupting her)
We had our own watching-god at the farm back home. I told Rootkeeper that.

Tom Sharp-Eye, we called him, and he kept his eye on the rabbits and chickens and saw that the foxes stayed well away.

He was an old god. A respectable deity, not like these new ones. He didn't ask for too much, he wasn't greedy.

Tree wouldn't have anything against him, a god like him. A little deity, a quiet thing.

I know Dan wouldn't like it, but the problem with Dan is, he's not reasonable. And when times get tough, when we're grubbing in the soil to make things grow, that's when you need reasonable people to lead the way-

PAIGE:
(Growing audibly upset, her breath tightening)
Alice, I-

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:
(Pushing harder. Venting her own frustrations)
He's not the kind of god we're opposing.

It doesn't need to be a **person**. That's what I don't think he understands.

We kept Tom fed on chickens. He took his prize and we took ours. It wasn't exploiting anyone, it wasn't harming anyone.

PAIGE:
(Harshly)
That's enough, Alice.

ALICE stops sweeping. They just glare at each other for a moment.

Then PAIGE turns to go.

PAIGE:

We'll let you know about the farmlands run in due course.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

(Shrugging)

Mm.

(Calling spitefully after her)

We were sorry to miss you at morning prayers again, Widow. Yesterday, too.

Maybe tomorrow?

That makes PAIGE stop in her tracks. She half-smirks to herself, but doesn't retort.

She turns and goes up the stairs.

MEETING ROOM, EXT, DAY

HAYWARD and ELGIN, a polite and professional subordinate, are midway through a meeting.

HAYWARD:

OK, so how much more room do we realistically need? Can we wait for the excavation work to finish, or do we need to be looking at expanding the compound walls?

ELGIN:

The bunkrooms are nearly at capacity as it is. We can have a few day-shift volunteers sleep on bedrolls over here or in the hatchery for as long as we need to, but we really need to start thinking about carving out space for a proper infirmary. A quarantine-zone, if folks start getting really sick.

The old fire station's mostly intact, and it's secure. No more than a five-minute walk to the compound. We could treat it as a secondary headquarters, expand from there.

HAYWARD:

(Disagreeing)

Powell said he saw an angel moving up near the fire station last week. Could be he was getting spooked, but I'd still rather give that whole region some distance until we can be certain.

ELGIN:

In that case, Rootkeeper, we need to look at digging faster. If any of the scouting parties can find us proper equipment, that could really help.

HAYWARD:

OK, we'll see what we can do.

HAYWARD scribbles a note. He takes a breath.

HAYWARD:

(Nodding to the minutes)

All right, what's next on the agenda?

-at which point, PAIGE bangs in through the door.

PAIGE:

(To HAYWARD, deeply frustrated by her previous conversations)

You should have fucking woken me.

She comes and takes her seat at the table.

HAYWARD:

(Smoothly)

Elgin, you can put that in the minutes as, 'The Widow of Wounds joined the meeting, feeling rested and refreshed after a well-deserved full night's sleep.'

(To PAIGE)

It was all OK. Honestly. We figured you were tired, and Elgin handled the morning prayer herself.

PAIGE stares at ELGIN. She's worried now, more than annoyed.

PAIGE:

Were they angry?

HAYWARD:

(Just as smoothly)

They were more than happy with Elgin, they liked hearing from her!

(Sincerely and firmly)

Paige - I'm really glad you slept.

Come on. We've got a few items left.

(To ELGIN)

Back to you, Elgin. What's next?

ELGIN:

(A little wryly)

The brain-trust wants to know if you've read their latest chapters.

HAYWARD:

I have. I loved it.

(A little uncertainly)

Do they want more than that?

ELGIN:

(Politely)

Maybe, uh, a little more direction-

HAYWARD considers.

HAYWARD:

OK. I mean, I'm no intellectual, I'm not a thinker.

(With great diplomacy)

But it seemed to me that their conception of an essentially anti-sacrificial, essentially godless society was...hugely detailed on the proposed national level - but less so when it comes to a scalable blueprint that communities can take on themselves at a local level.

Know what I mean? What do you think, Paige?

I'd say it's sorta, uh-

PAIGE:

(Dully, with barely-veiled anger)

Glib, glossy narcissism that ignores the difficult task of finding a clean break away from what's come before.

A heaped web of references and counter-references to other academic material in constant shrinking avoidance of lived reality.

A self-satisfied journey through the author's favourite utopian intangibles and personal grudges against his fellow utopians.

A tense silence.

HAYWARD:

Not in those words, but, uh-

(To PAIGE)

It's rough, I'll admit that. They've got a way to go yet.

But we've got to have a vision for what comes after.

(With dogged optimism)

And if half-a-dozen white-collar criminals sitting in a stolen radiation tent can't beat the philosophers of all recorded history in coming up with a foolproof blueprint for a better world, maybe...maybe at least they can manage a workable first draft.

What do you think?

PAIGE:

(Dully)

Whatever you think.

HAYWARD stares at her for a long time - then lets it go.

HAYWARD:

Okay. Uh. Next item.

ELGIN:

(Checking her minutes)

Last item, in fact.

A few of the disciples from North-Eastern are petitioning for a name-change. They don't like the Woundtree.

HAYWARD:

(Annoyed)

We changed it once already. We're not changing it again - people will get confused.

ELGIN:

It's still spreading as the Tree of Spite in the CLS. They think a show of international unity can only strengthen the cause.

(Meaningfully)

They **are** doing well in the CLS.

HAYWARD:

(A little wearily)

They're doing better than us.

(Glancing at PAIGE)

The issue is the word 'spite.' That's not, that's not how we understand this god, that's not how it's revealed itself to us.

The focus needs to be on justice, it can't be about revenge.

ELGIN:

(With a little quiet impatience)

I think they understand that, Rootkeeper. They just believe unity is more important. If the movement is going to survive.

HAYWARD:

I'll talk to them. Can you ask them to come find me later in the canteen?

ELGIN:

Yes, of course.

HAYWARD:

Thank you.

(Looking around the room)

OK. Anything else before we head out? I've got one surprise item.

(To PAIGE)

Anything from you?

PAIGE:

There is something I need to talk to you about, actually.

(Trying to get ELGIN out of the room)

Um, Elgin. I'm really sorry. I woke up in a hurry.

Could I ask for just a, a coffee, or-

ELGIN:

Yes, Widow, of course-

ELGIN begins to rise.

HAYWARD:

(Firm and fatherly and maybe a little patronising)

No, no. Come on - hey. That's not how we do things.

Elgin, you sit back down.

Everything in these meetings goes on the record. That's for posterity, and it's for transparency. That's how a better world starts.

What was the item, Paige?

This deeply annoys PAIGE.

PAIGE:

OK.

(To HAYWARD)

I just wanted to tell you that - I can't go on like this.

Silence.

ELGIN closes her logbook and stands again.

ELGIN:

(Quietly and professionally)

Milk in the coffee?

PAIGE:

Black, as always. Thank you, Elgin.

ELGIN retreats. The door slams shut behind ELGIN.

HAYWARD and PAIGE are left alone in the silence.

HAYWARD:

(Annoyed, but shrugging it off)

Little more patience there could've gone a long way.

PAIGE:

Transparency, you said.

(Acidly)

'That's how a better world starts.'

Silence between them.

HAYWARD:

In the name of transparency. Did you hit the bottle hard last night?

PAIGE does not answer him.

HAYWARD:

OK, so.

Will you talk to me? What's going on?

PAIGE:

(Wearily)

It's nothing new. You know how I feel. You're probably sick of hearing about it.

The weight just keeps piling up.

She stares into the silence for a moment.

PAIGE:

(Under her breath)

'What comes after.' 'A better world to come.'

It's so stupid, it's all so painfully, hopelessly stupid.

Because there's not going to **be** any after, is there?

Every time someone comes up to me and starts opining about the greatness of the Woundtree or the importance of our cause or the better world we're building together, I just want to scream at them.

"Stop lying to yourself. You're with me in the flames, and you're fucking burning alive, and you need to get out.

Fucking run, because this is all going to end in a hail of bullets and a heap of very righteous corpses.

It doesn't matter if this was meaningful to you. It doesn't matter if you found purpose in the decency and the defiance and planting seeds in the poisoned ground in a ruined city at the end of the world.

This ends in death; and when we are dead, we will all become dead traitors and murderers who got what was coming to them, and the purpose you **thought** you'd found will be lost and repurposed against you."

HAYWARD hesitates to find an answer to this.

HAYWARD:

It could all end that way, sure.

But if there's a chance of it ending any other way, it begins with courage.

It has to.

PAIGE scoffs.

PAIGE:

(Tiredly)

"It begins with courage."

It's a good line. We should work it into the next chapters, they'll go crazy for it.

But it doesn't help me, and I don't think it helps you either. Everything's got...so, so much more complicated than that for both of us.

We've outgrown the slogans but we have to keep on performing them.

Let me ask you something.

Do you remember everybody's names in camp?

HAYWARD:

(He doesn't)

Well, I **try** to-

PAIGE:

(Pressing him)

No, but seriously.

How long has it been since you could remember everybody's names?
Since you felt like you knew all of the people around us?

And if we don't know them, how are we meant to put our trust in them?

How long is it going to be until the first of our people turns on us?

HAYWARD:

You can't think like that.

PAIGE:

Or what happens when someone decides they've had enough of living out here, but we know damned well we can't trust them not to sell us out?

Are we going to find a place to lock them up? Are we going to put a bullet in their head? What's the plan, exactly?

HAYWARD:

You're not naive, Paige. You knew what we were getting into.

This isn't something that can happen without a few hard choices. Without making a few-

He catches himself and stops.

PAIGE:

Sacrifices?

HAYWARD:

Just saying the word doesn't make us like them.

PAIGE:

(Impassioned)

But this thing we need to kill, Hayward - it lives on in tongues. It speaks in hymns of sorrow and joy. That's how it outlasts us.

And the longer this all goes on, the more obvious it becomes that we were always going to lose to it.

Because its song is forever rising in our throats even when we rail against it, and in the hard choices that becomes inescapably clear.

A thought occurs to her.

PAIGE:

Of course, for all I know, that moment has come and gone already, and you just hid it from me.

We've had scouts in the forests who didn't come back.

(Quietly accusatory)

Have you been making hard choices, Hayward?

HAYWARD is silent for a long moment.

HAYWARD:

(Carefully)

I'll be honest with you, if you want me to.

But as I see it, my job is trying to keep the weight off you as much as I can, because you're taking on far too much already.

Silence between them.

Then PAIGE gets to her feet. She walks slowly to the window.

PAIGE:

We have accomplished so much more out here than I ever could have imagined possible.

But there's no comfort.

There's nothing we can grow outside the shadows already cast.

Not even here, in a dead city, an unwanted place.

There's nothing we can build that cannot be retaken and repurposed.

There's no song we can sing that doesn't become a hosanna to our enemy's triumph.

And every compromise we make out here, it draws us further back to them.

The rot creeps into everything.

(Weakly)

Do I sound ungrateful?

HAYWARD:

You sound like someone who's put an impossible weight on her own shoulders, for the bravest of reasons.

PAIGE:

That-

HAYWARD:

(Calmly)

Yeah, I know. It doesn't help.

He takes a breath.

HAYWARD:

OK. What do you want to do?

PAIGE guffaws despairingly at that.

PAIGE:

Well, I can't **kill** myself, obviously-

HAYWARD:

(Under his breath)

-OK, good to know that's the first choice-

PAIGE:

(Bitterly)

I mean, I've started considering it, Hayward.

Not with any kind of urgency. You don't need to worry.

It wouldn't **help**, of course, and I know that - because I'm already branded by this thing we made.

I belong to it now.

What would even happen?

Would my god let me die?

HAYWARD gets to his feet and approaches PAIGE.

HAYWARD:

I don't want you to be afraid of it. That defeats the purpose.

PAIGE:

(Softly, and darkly amused)

I am so grateful to you for everything, Hayward. But it's far, far too late for that.

I'm frightened all the time.

HAYWARD:

Then I'm sorry.

PAIGE takes a breath.

PAIGE:

It's not your fault.

HAYWARD watches her.

HAYWARD:

I am honestly **not** sick of hearing about it, you know.

PAIGE

HAYWARD watches PAIGE. He's been waiting to spring the surprise on her for some time now - that CARPENTER is in camp.

HAYWARD:

Paige.

You want to see a real miracle?

PAIGE:

(Dismissive)

I heard about the chickens.

HAYWARD:

No. Not that.

Something **good**.

A moment's silence.

-and we cut to-

CARPENTER'S DREAM

Footsteps on soil.

We hear CARPENTER's frantic, frightened breath for a moment.

The earth beneath her shakes. Something is coming.

-and then it erupts. A great tree rises up into the air, and as it rises, we hear the whispers of the CAIRN MAIDEN-

CARPENTER:

(Pleading, terrified)
No. Not yet.

Not yet.

Just give me a moment-

BELLWETHERS INFIRMARY, INT, DAY

CARPENTER stirs in bed - and then wakes.

PAIGE is sitting next to her.

PAIGE:
Hey.

CARPENTER stirs.

CARPENTER:
Hey.

They just stare at each other for a moment.

CARPENTER:
I thought you'd gone home.

PAIGE:
I came back.

Silence.

CARPENTER:
Hayward, um, found me in the woods.
(About to mock her)
I have, uh, an entire litany of questions-

PAIGE:
That's very understandable.

Silence.

CARPENTER:

Want to tell me how all of this happened?

PAIGE:
Uh, sure.

It's all kind of a mess, it's all sort of tangled-

CARPENTER:
(Gently)
I've got the time.

PAIGE takes a deep breath.

PAIGE:
(Softly, cathartically)
Well.

First they told me I'd caused an international incident.

Then they told me I was in shock-

Her voice fades out. We hear the rattle of the window-

BELLWETHERS ROOFTOP, EXT, DAY

-and then we're outside again. Wind chimes sound faintly.

A trapdoor swings open - and CARPENTER, limping heavily, steps out onto the roof.

She gazes out over the silent ruins of the town - and then distantly, watches as a war-rocket soars over the horizon, far away.

As it lands, we faintly hear the whispers of the CAIRN MAIDEN again - a warning? Or an omen?

The trapdoor bangs shut. PAIGE steps out.

She hands CARPENTER a bottle. CARPENTER drinks, then lowers herself down onto the edge of the rooftop with a grunt.

PAIGE:
How does it feel, being back here?

CARPENTER:

Like I'm always ending up back where I started.

Like I don't ever seem to recognise the place once I come back to it.

The endless spiral and the endless road.

They keep walking.

PAIGE:

And the Trawler-man?

CARPENTER considers.

CARPENTER:

I don't see him here, amongst the ruins.

Only the bones left by his passing.

Which is a hard thing, a very hard thing, to make any sense of.

He's meant to be eternal. He's meant to be enduring.

Silence.

CARPENTER:

Your people are doing good out here, though.

That's obvious, even at a glance.

There's something here.

PAIGE walks along the edge of the rooftop.

PAIGE:

(Mock-announcer voice)

"A bold new social experiment coming to you, live from the very worst place in the world."

(Normally)

Hayward says that's an unhelpful description.

All we told them at the start was - *if you're coming with us, no-one dies in the name of anyone's god. Not even volunteers.*

We didn't intend more than that.

But people started saying, well, there's more to it, right? There has to be more to it? What does a life without sacrifice look like?

A world without gods - or just one god, anyway.

Our prayer-meetings are getting more and more confrontational.

We've got a few hardliners who say the ultimate aim should be to live without them at all. Starve them out. End our reliance upon them altogether.

Others say that maybe the Woundtree should remain as the one true god and the last refuge of worship, since it only feeds upon death itself.

A few more are arguing for a reset. That in time, without human interference, we can go back to worshipping according to the old ways, without excess and undue harm.

And then there are the pragmatists who say we should just focus on trying to stay alive, whatever the cost.

What's that...four schisms in a faith that's six months old?

CARPENTER:

How many people are you hiding out here?

PAIGE:

Now? I think maybe sixty.

Fuck. It keeps on growing.

Hayward's got his trusted officers now, off the back of the Almhands jailbreak. They go out into the countryside looking for farms, factories, anywhere that's likely to need sacrifice.

When we free them, we give them a choice.

Go your own way, or come and join us to see what a better world could look like. But either way, the decision will be permanent.

We've had maybe...eleven failures in the field, maybe more. And that means losing our best people, each time.

And we've had five successes, and each time that means a new wave of disciples who we do not know, and can't rely on.

Far below on the ground, we hear the voice of DAN THE FANATIC, booming up.

DAN THE FANATIC:
Widow! Blessed Widow of Wounds!

PAIGE:
(Under her breath)
Oh, God, kill me-

DAN THE FANATIC:
I pray that the Tree has spoken to you in dreams of ecstasy and wonder!

I pray that he has visited you with his vision for our assault upon the carrion-faiths and the false government!

PAIGE:
(Calling out)
Like I already said this morning, Dan - nothing last night, and nothing the night before.

And it's not a 'he', either!

DAN THE FANATIC:
(Yelling as he departs)
I will keep praying, Widow. I will pray that he visits you soon!

PAIGE:
(Calling back)
Unlikely, I think!

DAN THE FANATIC:
(As a final battle-cry)
We will show them fear!

PAIGE:
(Through gritted teeth)
Yeah, you do that, Dan.

She walks back from the edge.

CARPENTER:

(Softly)

Why's he calling you that? 'Widow of Wounds'?

PAIGE:

Hayward's idea.

We were struggling, at first, until he came up with it. Nobody trusted us.

Lot of people still thought the whole thing was a sabotage attempt from across the border. They'd seen the news reports, they thought of it as a foreign god.

So we made up a story, and we changed the name to make it palatable.

The Widow of Wounds lost her one true love to a breach of contract and a lawful sacrifice.

And as she wept before the grave, the first buds of the Woundtree stretched out around her and formed a bower to shelter her from the falling rain.

(Sourly)

It's tragic, it's compelling. People understand it, they sympathise with it. It keeps us safe.

(Softly)

I hate her, quite a lot.

Silence. She takes a swig.

PAIGE:

I just didn't want to lie.

Hayward says you can't build anything real without a little performance, and I tell him we can't build anything new on the back of the same old deceptions.

We disagree on just about everything these days.

If he wasn't so...so fucking infuriatingly cordial, this whole thing would have fallen apart months ago.

CARPENTER:

Do you trust him?

PAIGE reflects on it.

PAIGE:

Strangely enough...

More than anyone, I think.

The hope's what's changed him.

It's...filling his lungs, like he's breathing a better kind of air, it's giving him lightness and it's given him grace.

He's found his courage and his decency.

He's become a better version of himself, and I'm so thrilled to see that change in him and I'm so ashamed not to have found it in myself.

(Considering)

No - it's worse than that, you know.

I'm **ashamed** that I've come to resent him for his growth, because I don't feel any different. I don't feel like I've changed.

But I don't want to be hoodwinked by hope, either. I don't want to view any of this as stable or any of these people as true allies of mine, and I don't want to anticipate any possibility of success.

I want to be ready for the moment when all of this falls apart and I know that we've failed.

She walks out across the rooftop.

PAIGE:

When we started out, I thought this god could be a weapon for other people to use. A way for any stray victim to strike upwards at their victimiser.

Now it turns out it's not a weapon, it's a **cause**.

And that means I have to keep acting the part of the leader even as they change the entire thing out from under me.

I'm not in control any more. But I'm bound to it, and I have to stand there and watch them yanking it about in opposing directions.

She has a thought.

PAIGE:
Do you dream, Carpenter?

CARPENTER hesitates.

CARPENTER:
Most nights.

PAIGE:
You might want to take something before you go to sleep.
(Joylessly shaking her bottle)
I've got my own remedies.

There's voices in the wind out here. Old gods, lingering in the dirt, coming in from the west.

Everyone has bad dreams in the Grace. Nobody gets enough rest. It's the only constant.

CARPENTER picks up on something here.

CARPENTER:
You told your friend back there that you weren't dreaming.

Silence as they keep walking.

PAIGE:
(Softly)
I see it every single night, Carpenter.

I just can't tell them about it.

It's about the one thing Hayward and I agree on.

CARPENTER:
The tree?

PAIGE:
(Weakly)
Yeah, sometimes. Sometimes it's a tree.

A great black oak, with branches that split the sky apart like lightning.

And as I gaze up up towards it, its roots coil around my ankles and my waist, and it lifts me high into the sky-

-and it speaks to me.

CARPENTER:
What does it say?

PAIGE:
It tells me it hates us all.

It sings of sorrow and spite.

It tells me that we've all hurt each other. We're all tainted by the pain we've caused.

There's not one innocent left amongst us.

And there has to be a reckoning for that.

The wind chimes have grown louder. And louder.

And we can hear the whispers of the CAIRN MAIDEN rising up around us, and as she hears them, CARPENTER begins to breath, hard and frightened-

PAIGE:
Carpenter?

Hey, Carpenter, what's wrong?

CARPENTER blinks.

And snaps out of it.

CARPENTER:
I-

Uh. Just bone-tired, still, I think. Sorry. Didn't mean to scare you.

PAIGE is a little concerned.

PAIGE:
OK.

OK, well...let me walk you to the canteen. And we can get you some food. How does that sound?

CARPENTER:
Yeah. Yeah. Food sounds good.

PAIGE:
Hayward wanted to cook you a welcome lunch.
(After a moment)
Just to warn you, he's going to make it awkward.

KITCHEN TENT, INT, NIGHT

HAYWARD is happily working away in the canteen. He cleans, humming the old shanty song from Season 2.

We can hear the radio behind him - SAM KINCANNON's broadcast from the start of the episode.

CARPENTER, slowly, enters.

CARPENTER:
Um-

HAYWARD turns to face her.

He turns the radio off.

They both awkwardly stare at each other in silence for a moment.

CARPENTER:
(Lightly)
Paige said you were cooking me a welcome lunch.

HAYWARD:
(Taking the sarcasm on the chin)
Sure - take a seat. Any requests?

We don't exactly have unlimited resources out here, but I'll see what we can spare.

CARPENTER hesitates - and then warily comes to sit at one of the tables.

CARPENTER:

Do you do pancakes?

HAYWARD:

Depends **very** much on whether I can find you a trustworthy egg. Out here, seed and flesh tend to be pretty, uh, unreliable.

(Cracking an egg - a little disturbed by what he sees)

Something's up with that one.

(Satisfied as he finds a better one)

There we go.

For much the same reasons, I'd recommend you take your coffee black.

He whisks in silence for a moment, then speaks up.

HAYWARD:

Carpenter. I'm, uh - aware we were at odds, the last time we met.

(As if reciting something he's been practicing)

And I, uh - I'm keen for both of us to address that head-on, in a healthy and a constructive manner.

CARPENTER:

(Scornfully amused)

Has Paige been coaching you for this conversation?

HAYWARD:

(A little embarrassed)

She gave me a few pointers.

She's told me a lot about you.

Her time with you, I think it really taught her a lot about herself.

He continues to whisk. They watch each other for a moment.

CARPENTER:

(Slowly and mock-sweetly)

In the name of healthy constructiveness, one point.

The last time we met, you said you'd spend the rest of your life hunting me down.

Are you in the habit of telling lies?

HAYWARD:

(Simply)

These days I find myself lying all the time.

To myself a little less, perhaps.

Are you in the habit of holding grudges?

A long silence.

CARPENTER:

Do you remember my accomplice, Hayward? The one you never caught?

HAYWARD:

The lorry thief?

Yeah, Paige told me about him.

CARPENTER hesitates, and then speaks quietly.

CARPENTER:

I...loved that boy like the brother I'd lost.

And he turned on me to save his own skin.

Hesitated for a second before he did. Maybe one second, that was what he gave me.

And the truly shitty thing is that even now I can't decide, I've been turning it over and over, every night, shivering in the rain-

-if I was ever to see him again, whether I'd grip my hands around his fucking neck and watch him gasp his final breaths, or if I'd hold him close and exalt that we were both still alive in spite of everything.

Given all that, it seems foolish to carry hate in my heart for anyone else.

You can't compete with him.

She's silent for a while.

CARPENTER:

Do you believe in what you're doing here, Hayward?

HAYWARD doesn't answer for a moment. Then he cracks another egg and says,

HAYWARD:

Another bad egg. It might have to be pancake, singular.

CARPENTER:

(Drily)

The glorious revolution has a resourcing problem.

HAYWARD turns the gas on and begins to cook the pancake.

HAYWARD:

(Deadpanning back)

Oh, we're a glamorous operation out here.

I've, uh, already added your name to the latrine rota.

(Shrugging with sincerity)

Honestly, I never thought fighting back would be any kind of easy.

CARPENTER:

(Quietly, to herself)

Never was. Not for me, anyway.

Silence.

CARPENTER:

It's such an idiotic phrase, isn't it? 'Fighting back?'

Precisely who are we fighting? And how do we hope to win?

HAYWARD:

But you know what I mean, don't you?

CARPENTER:

Of course I know what you mean.

HAYWARD continues cooking the pancake in silence.

HAYWARD:

(Calmly, sincerely)

Yeah, I believe in what we're doing here.

It's what keeps me going.

It's embarrassing, really. I used to look down on people who felt like that.

Here's your pancake.

He turns the gas off, puts the pancake plate down beside CARPENTER and sits opposite her.

CARPENTER picks up her knife and fork and begins to eat.

CARPENTER:

(Eating)

A world without sacrifice. A world where the gods are left to starve.

Growing up, I'd have got a hard slap for even raising the question of that.

Even now, it seems unlikely, wild, impossible.

But making the attempt?

It's brave. No matter how it turns out, Hayward, you're doing something brave here.

(Quietly watching him)

Paige, though - she's unhappy.

HAYWARD reflects.

HAYWARD:

"A god must feed. A god must be fed."

Around that simple idea we've accumulated so many complicated cruelties, but it all comes back to that.

In the end, that's the idea we have to kill.

Paige looks at the mess, the complexities, the chaos of what we're building here - and it makes her think we'll never win.

I just think - this was always going to be messy. This was always going to be chaos. It was always going to take a hundred lifetimes or more, and it was always going to kill us.

Just look at the size of the splinter, the age of the wound.

There was always going to be blood, and screaming.

There were always going to be days, and months, and centuries when we could only conclude that all we'd achieved was a fatal hemorrhage.

A long silence.

CARPENTER:
(About as soft as she's ever likely to be with him)
You still talk too much, Hayward.

HAYWARD:
(Happily)
Yeah. I'm not going to work on it.

Is the pancake good?

CARPENTER:
(Simply)
Not at all.

Thank you for making it.

HAYWARD:
Yeah, you're welcome.

She eats in silence.

HAYWARD:
I know we can't rely on you sticking around with us for long.

But I've been thinking a great deal about our next move, and I'd appreciate your help convincing Paige that it's the right way forward.

I think she might listen to you.

CARPENTER:
Why won't she listen to you?

HAYWARD:
Because she believes there's no hope for us, and she's not wrong to feel that way - but it's not helping her.

She can't stand the thought that this thing has taken over her life and is already out of her hands, uncontrolled and uncontrollable.

I get it. I do.

She's called her god down upon the world. Now she's lost in the flood.

CARPENTER:

Like you said. She's not wrong to feel that way.

HAYWARD:

Not at all. But what was all of that pain for, if we give up now?

Will you help me talk to her, before you go?

CARPENTER considers.

CARPENTER:

What did you have in mind?

HAYWARD gets up and walks to the radio. He begins to tune it.

HAYWARD:

Paige thinks I'm blinding myself to the realities of our situation. It's a position I do have some sympathy with.

Every day, I sit and I tune and retune this thing, because we need to hear what they're saying about us in the outside world, and it's nothing but bad news.

There are so many weapons arraigned against us, Carpenter. So many angles.

The blunt and the subtle. The spiked cudgel and the slow poison.

We could die in flames or in a hail of bullets, but it'll be the stories they tell that really mean the end of us.

We need someone who can tell a different kind of story.

What's the worst-case scenario, what if the Lingers storm the coast and begin advancing on Glottage? How many of us have to die then?

Because there will **be** a worst-case scenario, somewhere buried in the planning. A moment of absolute crisis and collapse when every single one of us becomes expendable.

When all the beautiful stories fade away and all that's left is the glint of the knives.

We need someone who can speak that truth aloud.

We need an insider.

HAYWARD finishes tuning the radio.

And we hear the voice of SHRUE, repeating their same words from the start of the episode.

HAYWARD:
We need a defector.

END OF EPISODE.