

CROWNFALL  
"THE DEEPEST ROOT"  
EPISODE 1

Written by

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OVER BLACK:

The echoing footsteps of a man striding with authority.

TEXT: "Weymouth Palace, Merindal (Year 228 P.E.)"

FADE IN:

**1 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - CORRIDOR - AFTERNOON**

**1**

We follow behind King ETHIEL as he marches through an ornate palace hallway, his boots echoing off the stone.

He turns a corner. A SERVANT BOY goes wide-eyed and presses himself against the wall, bowing and avoiding eye contact.

SERVANT BOY  
Your Majesty!

Ethiel marches past him without a glance.

ETHIEL  
Carry on, Berrick.

SERVANT BOY  
Yes, My Lord!

Ethiel continues onward as the boy scurries away. He rounds another corner and comes to a heavy wooden door. Hardly breaking stride, he shoves it open.

**2 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - KING'S QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS**

**2**

Inside the opulent private quarters, QUEEN CONSORT ORIELLA sits in a large window reading a small book. She wears only a linen towel wrapped around her.

As Ethiel enters, she looks up and smiles.

ORIELLA  
My Lord Husband. Finished for the day so soon?

ETHIEL  
Sometimes I wonder if the sole reason people exist is to complain. And the sole reason kings exist, to listen to their complaints all day.

ORIELLA  
Oh, is that a complaint?

He shoots her a "Don't start with me" glare. She smirks.

He nods toward her towel.

ETHIEL  
New fashion trend?

ORIELLA  
Marveigh felt it was necessary to  
serve a cabbage stew for lunch.

The king frowns.

Oriella pauses for him to get it, but he doesn't. She sighs.

ORIELLA (CONT'D)  
I don't want my dress for the  
banquet smelling of cabbage farts.

Ethiel nods gravely.

ETHIEL  
Marveigh should have known better.  
I can have him beheaded.

She turns back to her book.

ORIELLA  
He also served those little pickles  
I like, so I forgave him.

Firm raps at the door.

HEWS (O.S.)  
Your Majesty, it's urgent!

ETHIEL  
(muttering)  
Everything's always urgent...

Ethiel steps to the door and pulls it open part-way, not revealing the towel-clad Oriella. Captain HEWS stands in the corridor with three guards: KIPPER, NOWAM, and BRENN. All four are armed and ready.

HEWS  
Possible assassin, Your Majesty. We  
need to seclude you immediately.

ETHIEL  
The wedding banquet...

HEWS  
Not a drill, Your Majesty.

Ethiel glances back toward the room. Then he nods.

ETHIEL

Alright, then. The Queen is here as well, but she's--

Oriella steps out from behind the door, already dressed simply, prepared to move.

ORIELLA

I'm ready. Let's go.

HEWS

(to the guards)

Kipper and Nowam, take the Queen to one of the lower safe-rooms. Don't let anyone see which one. Brenn and I will take the King.

Kipper and Nowam nod curtly and step back to make way. Oriella follows them and they quickly head down the corridor.

HEWS (CONT'D)

(to Ethiel)

I suggest we move quickly.

Ethiel nods curtly and they jog the opposite direction from Oriella and the other guards.

Hews leads them, checking around corners and into rooms before they pass. Brenn follows behind, watching for followers.

They come to a simple door, push it open, and enter quietly.

**3 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - GUEST ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

**3**

Hews hastily searches around to make sure the room is clear, then looks out the open window. They're a few floors up. Nobody in sight on the ground below.

Brenn sheathes her sword and moves a heavy bar into place over the door so it can't be opened from the outside.

Ethiel watches his guards as they work, mildly annoyed at the inconvenience but pleased with their professionalism.

BRENN

Captain, I'll take care of the--

Hews turns and shoves his sword into Brenn's chest.

Brenn grunts and looks down in horror, then up at Hews.

HEWS

Sorry, Brenn.

Hews yanks the blade back out. Brenn collapses to the floor.  
Ethiel stumbles backward frantically.

ETHIEL  
Hews!? What are you doing??

Hews turns and approaches him.

HEWS  
(tensely)  
Ending the war.

He lifts his blade and lunges toward the king.

VIANA (V.O.)  
Arissa!

**4 EXT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - GROUNDS - DAY**

**4**

PRINCESS ARISSA (17) flinches as a grape bounces off her face.  
She looks around, disoriented.

She sits in a grassy clearing lined with trees. Weymouth Palace  
and its red mountains rise behind them.

Three other young women sit around a stately picnic spread:  
Arissa's friend SELLA, her cousin VIANA, and her lady-in-  
waiting NEMMIE.

Nearby, two SERVANTS stand near a small cart carrying food.

Sella and Viana laugh at Arissa's reaction to the grape, but  
Nemmie glances at her with puzzled concern.

VIANA  
Oh, welcome back, Arissa! I'm very  
curious where you went just then.

Arissa quickly gets back to her senses. She reaches down to  
grab the grape, then hurls it back at Viana.

ARISSA  
If I threw a grape every time you  
got distracted it'd be the end of  
Merindal's wine industry.

The girls laugh again.

Nemmie catches Arissa's eye and gives her a "You good?" look.  
Arissa gives her a small shake of the head.

SELLA

Arissa, when's your sister arriving?

Arissa, trying to look casual, tosses an almond in her mouth.

ARISSA

Today. Tomorrow. The next day. It's a long journey from Dallax.

VIANA

Oh, she lives in Dallax? When I heard she married a merchant from Ostus, I assumed he owned a nice shop over the border.

Arissa gives her an "Are you crazy?" look.

ARISSA

Darbus is the biggest merchant in Ostus. He could probably buy half our kingdom if he felt like it.

VIANA

I can see how that might be worth moving to the capital for.

ARISSA

Even in Ostus, money and politics seem to always find each other.

SELLA

Does he have any handsome single relatives? An old widower, perhaps?

VIANA

Sella, have some restraint. Every eligible bachelor from shore to shore will be here in a few days.

SELLA

Yeah, but they'll all have their eye on--

She spins her head toward Arissa.

SELLA (CONT'D)

--someone else.

ARISSA

You're welcome to pursue any of the leftovers. Once they pick a husband for me, I'm sure all the handsome men will still be available.

The girls laugh.

Arissa glances back at the servants standing nearby with a handcart full of food containers. She sighs.

ARISSA (CONT'D)  
I do wish we could eat in peace  
without servants hovering nearby.

VIANA  
That's not a very princessy  
attitude, Your Highness.

ARISSA  
Commoners get to eat their food  
without anyone watching. Seems like  
they're better off than we are.

SELLA  
Yes, they do eat their moldy  
potatoes that way. Not sure I'd  
trade with them.

ARISSA  
It just feels--

VIANA  
Don't worry, Arissa, I'll do the  
evil deed for you...

She raises her hand to attract the servants' attention.

VIANA (CONT'D)  
The princess would like some cake!

Arissa rolls her eyes as the servants scurry into action.

**5 EXT. STREETS OF WEYMOUTH - DAY**

**5**

Grimy laborer BALLY FOXWELL stands in the middle of a busy cobblestone road, scrubbing it with a stiff broom and a bucket of soapy water.

Townsfolk, peasants, merchants, carts, and carriages flow like water around her, barely noticing her.

A passerby carelessly bumps her and doesn't even look back.

Farther away, other laborers do similar work, scrubbing the streets in preparation for the upcoming festival.

A slightly cleaner and better dressed SUPERVISOR DIGGINS approaches her. He carries a basket from which he pulls out something wrapped in cheap cloth and offers it to her.

DIGGINS

Eat fast and get back to work.

Bally hesitantly reaches out and takes the item, uncovering it to reveal a slightly moldy piece of bread.

She stares at it.

Diggins gives a bemused frown.

DIGGINS (CONT'D)

You were expecting cake, maybe?

Bally looks up at him.

BALLY

More. I expected more.

Diggins raises an eyebrow.

DIGGINS

Expectations are the fountain of misery, girl. If you've got any, best get rid of 'em.

Bally stares at the bread, bitterly accepting her fate. She picks it up and takes a big bite, chewing it ruefully.

DIGGINS (CONT'D)

Get this street cleaned all the way up to the crossing before you go home today. You'll be pasting posters up tomorrow. Got it?

Bally looks toward the intersection. It's a lot of street to clean. She sighs and nods.

Diggins pauses, waiting for her to say it.

BALLY

Yes, sir.

Diggins nods to himself, satisfied at his excellent leadership skills, and marches away.

Bally watches him go.

BALLY (CONT'D)

(under her breath)

Why don't you go scrub something?

She catches herself and glances around. Nobody heard. She takes another bitter bite of the moldy bread, then stashes it. She turns back to the long stretch of cobblestone ahead of her and attacks it with the broom, harder now, the bristles cracking against the stone.

## 6 INT. TEGARA COTTAGE - DAY

6

SANTI TEGARA sits on a chair in the middle of the room, dressed stylishly in a long embroidered tunic and loose pants. He sighs in frustration as his family's staff scurries around preparing him.

A family advisor, DYMAS, quizzes Santi.

DYMAS  
Arissa's stepbrother?

Santi's valet, MIKOS, carefully evaluates his clothing, smoothing out wrinkles and removing lint.

SANTI  
(bored)  
Prince Jeck, son of Queen Consort Oriella, age 15, birthday the 4th of Frostcome.

An elderly BARBER with a pair of scissors inspects every hair on his head, occasionally reaching in and snipping something.

DYMAS  
Royal chamberlain?

A MANICURIST buffs his nails.

SANTI  
Pellock Wheegan, son of former chamberlain Demmock Wheegan. He's held the position for 12 years since his father's death.

A COBBLER adjusts and laces his leather boots.

DYMAS  
Arissa's favorite food?

A PERFUMER dabs a fragrance on him.

SANTI  
Roast peacock with berry sauce.

Santi's mother ZIA TEGARA and father ARLEX TEGARA sit in ornate, high-backed chairs, carefully watching the action. His sister ELLIA TEGARA leans against a wall with a disapproving expression.

DYMAS  
Second-largest landholder in Merindal?

Santi turns to look at his parents.

SANTI

Is this really what they're looking for in a husband? Keen ability to memorize?

ELLIA

(to Zia)

Are you going to make me do this when I get married?

ZIA

Absolutely. This is like any other deal. We must seize every advantage we can to create opportunities.

ELLIA

You married Father for love. Or is that not the story anymore?

Zia gives her a sharp look. Arlex raises an eyebrow, waiting for the answer.

ZIA

Love is a luxury, Ellia. One your father and I earned.

SANTI

Whether they kick us out or I marry their daughter won't be decided because I remember the name of her cousin's third puppy.

ZIA

Preparation is everything.

SANTI

Do you even know my favorite food?

Zia frowns. Arlex smirks.

ZIA

I have Mikos for those things.

Mikos stands up straight.

MIKOS

Roast lamb in the style of Ostus with an autumn cheese sauce.

Santi abruptly stands, interrupting the staff's preparations.

SANTI

I'm done. If they don't want me, they don't want me. More perfume and trivia won't change that.

Ellia claps her hands together approvingly.

ELLIA  
Yes, brother!

His parents rise to protest but he walks out.

**7 EXT. MERINDAL COUNTRY ROAD - DAY 7**

A simple coach carriage rolls gracefully behind two sturdy horses up a well-used country road through a pretty forest.

A muscular coachman, HECTUS, sits in front guiding the horses' reins.

A covered wagon with similarly simple styling follows behind them, drawn by four horses.

They pass a caravan of merchants traveling the other direction with handcarts and wagons.

**8 INT. COACH CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS 8**

EVABEL AGARA looks the model of poise and confidence as she sits inside the coach, reading a book entitled "TEACHINGS OF KING NUMIUS, VOLUME 2."

Beside her, her prim lady-in-waiting, ANNEXIS PINNICK, busily embroiders a nature scene.

The women look up as Hectus calls to the horses.

HECTUS (O.S.)  
Whoa, now. Whoa, now.

A moment later, he parts the curtains in the open front window and peeks inside.

HECTUS (CONT'D)  
Ladies, I thought you might want to stop and partake of this view.

Evabel and Annexis glance at each other with anticipation.

**9 EXT. MERINDAL COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS 9**

The edge of the forest opens into a clearing with a breathtaking view of the capital city of Weymouth, including its palace, a powerful river, and the background of Merindal's wind-chiseled red mountains.

The carriage has stopped. Evabel stands at the edge of the clearing, looking out. She breathes it in.

HECTUS  
 (to Evabel)  
 I wanted to see if this could trick  
 a smile out of you, you tough lady.

ANNEXIS  
 Hectus, that's not an appropriate  
 way to address your superior.

HECTUS  
 I did say "lady."

Evabel cracks the slightest bit of a smile against her will.  
 She likes Hectus, though she won't admit it.

HECTUS (CONT'D)  
 Ahh, there it is! I'll tell my  
 children's children I got a smile  
 from the future Queen of Merindal!

Evabel turns back to the coach. She can't encourage  
 foolishness.

Hectus begins singing a cheerful song as he climbs back into  
 the coachman's seat, unbothered by the ladies' brusque manner.

HECTUS (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
 Oh, whip crack away! Onward we go /  
 From the break of the day till the  
 sun sits low / Reins in my hand  
 steer our horses two / Gods spare  
 my ass till our journey's  
 through...

**10 INT. COACH CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS**

**10**

Back into the coach, Evabel and Annexis can't help but glance  
 at each other and chuckle.

EVABEL  
 It's strange coming back.

Evabel sits and picks her book back up.

EVABEL (CONT'D)  
 Or maybe I've just grown strange.

**11 EXT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - GROUNDS - DAY**

**11**

Arissa, Nemmie, Viana, and Sella stroll back toward the palace  
 from their picnic. The two servants follow along behind them  
 with the food cart.

When Arissa and Nemmie are a few feet from the others, Nemmie leans over and whispers.

NEMMIE

I'm worried about you, My Lady.

ARISSA

I'm fine. It's just stress.

NEMMIE

It's not the first time I've seen--

She trails off as PRINCE JECK (15), Arissa's half-brother, sprints up the path toward them.

Arissa frowns and moves her hands in a kind of shrug, like "What is this?"

He finally arrives and bends over, hands on knees, trying to catch his breath.

JECK

(panting)

Why can't you just...eat at the palace?

ARISSA

Jeck, did you really run here to ask me that?

He pants some more, then looks up.

JECK

She's in the city. Coming up Kingsway.

Arissa goes wide-eyed.

ARISSA

Evabel?

Jeck nods, and Arissa darts off toward the palace wall gate. The girls glance at each other, then politely jog after her.

The servants resume walking toward the palace, but Jeck, still panting, holds up a hand to stop them.

JECK

Cake. I need cake.

The curtains in the coach are open now. Evabel and Annexis gaze out at the sights of the outer city.

**13 EXT. KINGSWAY STREET IN WEYMOUTH - CONTINUOUS****13**

The carriage and the covered wagon following it rumble along cobblestone street flanked by quaint stone buildings.

Market stalls line the street with vendors calling out offers to passersby for their food, fabrics, and trinkets.

Commoners, peasants, artisans, and merchants bustle about, some stopping to gawk at the passing coach.

Children dart between the stalls and run around the coach, waving or making faces at its passengers.

Laborers busily prepare for the upcoming festival, building temporary seating and decorating the streets with banners and ribbons and floral wreaths while supervisors call out orders.

The carriage and wagon pass Bally Foxwell. She looks up from scrubbing the street. She watches the coach pass. The slightest sneer crosses her face. She shakes her head and goes back to scrubbing.

**14 INT. COACH CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS****14**

Evabel and Annexis whisper comments to each other as they admire the festival preparations.

Arissa's face, grinning wildly, suddenly appears in the window. She has jumped onto the side of the carriage.

ARISSA  
AAAAAAAHH!

Evabel and Annexis jump, then laugh in bewildered shock as they recognize her.

EVABEL  
Arissa!

HECTUS (O.S.)  
(to horses)  
Whoa!

The carriage comes to an abrupt stop, almost knocking Arissa loose from the side.

There's a thump as Hectus jumps to the ground.

HECTUS (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
What's all this?

ARISSA  
I can't believe you're back!  
(MORE)

ARISSA (CONT'D)  
I've missed you so--

Hectus's massive arm wraps around Arissa's waist and effortlessly pulls her off the carriage.

ARISSA (CONT'D)  
--uh-oh.

EVABEL  
Wait! No!

15 EXT. MAJOR STREET IN WEYMOUTH - CONTINUOUS

15

Passersby turn to look as Hectus leans back, preparing to throw Arissa into a fruit stand.

Evabel opens the door to the coach and jumps out.

EVABEL  
Hectus, stop! That's my sister!

Hectus inspects his captive curiously.

HECTUS  
You're Princess Arissa?

Arissa nods enthusiastically.

HECTUS (CONT'D)  
Oh. Hello, My Lady!

He sets her gently on her feet near Evabel, then bows deeply.

HECTUS (CONT'D)  
I'm called Hectus. I'm Lady  
Evabel's servant.

EVABEL  
(quietly, to Arissa)  
And bodyguard.

ARISSA  
It's an adventure to meet you,  
Hectus. A princess doesn't get  
picked up very often.

HECTUS  
I mistook you for a very pretty  
bandit.

Evabel grabs Arissa and wraps her in an embrace. Arissa grins and enthusiastically hugs her back.

EVABEL

I see you haven't grown wise in my absence, you little lunatic.

Arissa laughs. They look at each other for a moment, then remember they're in public.

EVABEL (CONT'D)

Come. Ride with us.

16 EXT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - DAY

16

In front of the palace's main doors, MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL COURT line up to receive Evabel as her caravan rumbles nearer in the distance.

Nemmie, Viana, and Sella stand together, having changed into more formal attire from their earlier picnic. Prince Jeck has at least washed his face and put on a clean shirt.

Captain Hews, Nowam, Kipper, Brenn, and other members of the King's Guard stand at strategic locations. Hews surveys the courtyard with a practiced eye and signals two guards to tighten the perimeter near the gate as the carriages approach.

High-ranking members of the court line up in formal attire: High Cleric OAK and her clerics ANVIL, WOLF, and COBBLE in the red robes of the Order of Merin. Chamberlain PELLOCK WHEEGAN stands with Spymaster BONES GRAVES and Royal Physician DAYELLE WASHBOURNE. TYCAS, a handsome young nobleman, stands among other NOBLES, COURTIERS, and SERVANTS.

Between them, King Ethiel and Queen Oriella stride up the walkway toward where the carriages will soon arrive, both dressed in full royal attire to mark the occasion.

Ethiel glances at Nemmie. She gives him a subtle shake of her head.

Ethiel rolls his eyes so slightly only Nemmie sees it.

ORIELLA

I'll bet your dessert against mine, she's in that coach.

ETHIEL

I reject your wager because I know that's exactly where she'll be.

They come to a stop at the edge of the carriage path in front of the palace and stand regally.

ETHIEL (CONT'D)

Try to have one dignified occasion around here...

ORIELLA

You wouldn't like her so much if she actually listened to you.

ETHIEL

Same reason I know you're going to eat my dessert anyway. I should have listened to my father.

ORIELLA

Marry a quiet woman? Miss out on both Queen Ayana and myself? You'd have been bored into your grave.

ETHIEL

What a wonderful way to go.

17 INT. COACH CARRIAGE - DAY

17

As they get closer, the ladies peer out at the assembled party in front of the palace.

EVABEL

Is Jeck really that tall?

ARISSA

Tycas is out there.

She glances at Evabel for a reaction.

Evabel rolls her eyes.

EVABEL

It's been two years.

ARISSA

He's still heartbroken.

EVABEL

Tycas is not an appropriate topic for discussion.

Arissa grins as she looks out at those assembled.

ARISSA

They're going to be so surprised when they see me in here.

18 EXT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - CONTINUOUS

18

The coach and following covered wagon rumble to a stop in front of the assembled welcoming party.

Evabel, Arissa, and Annexis look out cheerfully at them.

ETHIEL

(quietly)

Oh, look, there's my foolish daughter. What a shock.

ORIELLA

The other one's not so bad.

ETHIEL

Let's find out what life among the farmer-philosophers has done to her before we decide that.

Hectus jumps down and opens the door to the coach, gently helping Evabel step down.

Members of the gathered crowd bow and curtsy as she steps down, and she gives a slight curtsy in return.

Ethiel steps forward and embraces Evabel warmly but with appropriate royal decorum.

ETHIEL (CONT'D)

My daughter, welcome home.

EVABEL

Your Majesty.

Evabel turns to Oriella, who offers a wide embrace.

ORIELLA

Come here, girl.

Evabel laughs and they hug heartily.

EVABEL

Your Majesty.

There are murmurs of confusion from the crowd as Arissa steps out of the coach.

The king shoots her a glare, but she just flashes her eyebrows in return, like, "That was a great prank, right?"

Oriella motions toward the covered wagon.

ORIELLA  
 (to Evabel)  
 Who's in the wagon?

Various servants and attendants dressed in the plainer style of Ostus begin climbing out of the back of the wagon.

EVABEL  
 My husband insisted on a  
 substantial entourage, of course.  
 Servants, advisors, guards....

ORIELLA  
 Spies?

EVABEL  
 At least a few. I don't know which  
 ones yet, though.

ORIELLA  
 I'm sure we'll keep them  
 entertained.

Oriella glances back toward spymaster Bones Graves, who meets her gaze. She gives a slight nod toward the wagon. He gives a curt nod in response.

Ethiel looks over and sees Hectus lifting Jeck with one arm at Arissa's insistence.

ARISSA  
 (to Jeck)  
 See? He's so strong.

Ethiel steps toward her to avoid being overheard.

ETHIEL  
 Daughter, it would please me  
 greatly if you would stop finding  
 ways to embarrass yourself and  
 disrespect your sister.

Arissa looks puzzled for a moment, then looks around and sees how many people are watching them.

ARISSA  
 Oh. Sorry.

ETHIEL  
 You're to be married in two weeks.  
 It might help us find you a better  
 husband if you acted like an adult  
 for at least a few minutes each  
 day.

Arissa sighs as if in disappointment with herself. She's annoyed but knows her place.

ARISSA  
Yes, Your Majesty.

Ethiel returns to Oriella.

ORIELLA  
You might find that you miss her after some wealthy man rides off with her.

ETHIEL  
Until then, let's give thanks that Evabel was born first. Can you imagine Arissa leading this kingdom?

**19 EXT. FOXWELL HOME - AFTERNOON**

**19**

A tired and dirty Bally Foxwell trudges down a quiet alley in Weymouth. Her head hangs low, lost in thought.

She reaches a worn door in a long set of humble row houses.

**20 INT. FOXWELL HOME - CONTINUOUS**

**20**

Bally passes through the door and drags herself up the creaking stairs.

She comes to a dark flat featuring a simple wooden table and a few stools, two narrow straw mattresses on the floor, and a few wooden crates. The remains of the late afternoon light struggle through the dirty window.

Bally's brother, ORRICK FOXWELL, sits on a stool staring into space after his own hard day's labor. He gives her a little nod.

She comes around and lowers herself painfully onto a stool.

BALLY  
I just want to go to sleep and never wake up.

Orrick nods ruefully.

ORRICK  
They had me at the quarry today.

BALLY  
I'm sorry. How much did you make?

ORRICK

Two marks...but the taxmen were there to make sure nobody cheated. They gave me one mark and two clips.

BALLY

Half? They took half?

ORRICK

(mockingly)

"For the brave soldiers in Diadazi"

Bally shakes her head.

BALLY

I don't know if I can do this anymore, Orrick.

Orrick sighs, still staring into space.

ORRICK

Was someone handing out options and nobody told me?

BALLY

I didn't even make a full mark. Ten clips two.

ORRICK

It's enough to hold off starvation.

Bally glances around the dimly-lit room.

BALLY

Not enough for candles.

They're silent for a moment.

ORRICK

Maybe it gets better? Lots of people are poor. Maybe we get used to this.

BALLY

Our land, Orrick. Our home. Our fortune...

ORRICK

What's done is done, sister.

He inhales a long, slow breath and sighs.

ORRICK (CONT'D)

I think I'm going to join the Order. They'll feed me, and the signing bonus would keep you in food for a while.

BALLY

Hard to see you as a religious man.

ORRICK

Getting closer by the day, to be honest. I could deal with a life of rituals if one of them were putting food in my belly each day.

Bally flashes her eyebrows like "you might have a point."

A long pause. Bally shakes her head.

BALLY

I hate him, Orrick.

ORRICK (CONT'D)

Who?

BALLY

You know who.

ORRICK

Careful, Bally.

BALLY

He's just going to keep squeezing the people to fund this ridiculous war. Something needs to change.

Orrick turns and faces her.

ORRICK

You can't say things like that, Bal. One word overheard, next day I wake up to the King's Guard hauling you off in chains. We can hate him for what he did to our family, that much is fair, but we can't ever put words to it.

Bally's eyes shine in the fading light as she sets her jaw.

BALLY

If nobody talks, nothing changes.

ORRICK

What about Arissa? It's never just one head on the block.

Bally winces at the name.

BALLY

She probably hasn't given me a thought since it happened. Why would I give her my consideration?

ORRICK

That's harsh, Bal. She was a good friend to you.

Bally stands abruptly and steps over to the crates.

BALLY

Haven't seen any of those friends since all this happened, have we?

ORRICK

We're not exactly in a position to bump into them. I'm sure she feels terrible about it.

Bally pulls some clothes out of a crate. A barmaid's uniform.

BALLY

Maybe she has time to feel sad about it. I don't. I have to get ready for my second job.

Bally takes the uniform and steps behind a partition to change.

Orrick sits alone in the dim room. He looks at the partition, then down at his hands. He stays very still.

**21 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT**

**21**

Arissa sits on a cushioned window seat in a well-decorated sitting room, peering out the open window. She leans slightly behind a drape to avoid being noticed from the outside.

In the courtyard below, lit by candles and oil lamps, royal staff attend to a nobleman and his entourage.

The door opens and guardsman Nowam enters. He notices Arissa.

NOWAM

Your Highness.

Arissa doesn't look up from the courtyard.

ARISSA

Good evening, Nowam. Late for you to be making rounds, isn't it?

NOWAM

Dendrick twisted his ankle playing  
farmball. Said he'd polish and  
sharpen my sword if I took his  
rounds tonight.

Arissa nods, distracted.

ARISSA

I see.

Nowam steps slowly closer.

NOWAM

What are you looking at, My Lady?

ARISSA

My suitors are beginning to arrive  
in the city for the vetting. In two  
weeks I might be married to that  
man down there. Or that one over  
there.

Nowam nods slowly, his expression tightening.

Arissa turns to look at him. She holds his gaze a beat longer  
than a princess should hold a guardsman's.

ARISSA (CONT'D)

Did you notice anyone else around?

NOWAM

Most have retired for the night.  
Some are still downstairs drinking  
and playing games. I...haven't seen  
anyone else in this part of the  
palace.

ARISSA

His Majesty?

NOWAM

Your father is meeting with your  
sister, the chamberlain, and the  
lady steward.

ARISSA

Hmm.

NOWAM

Hmm.

She nods toward a nearby wall-mounted candle sconce.

ARISSA

Seems like someone left this window  
open and the candles blew out.

Nowam turns and blows out the candles with a puff. The room  
goes dim. They're lit now by blue moonlight and the faint warm  
glow of some candles on the far side of the room.

Arissa rises and paces softly toward him.

Nowam glances around, confirming they're alone.

ARISSA (CONT'D)

I wish...

NOWAM

I do too.

He extends his hand and she takes it, folding hers together  
with his as she comes close and rests her head on his chest.

ARISSA

I really wish.

NOWAM

This was always doomed, My Lady.

ARISSA

Say my name.

Nowam hesitates, then leans close to her ear.

NOWAM

(softly)

Arissa....

She sobs quietly and clutches his hand to her heart.

He gives her a moment, then slowly takes a half-step back.

NOWAM (CONT'D)

(apologetically)

This is too risky.

Arissa straightens and wipes her cheeks.

ARISSA

I know. I know.

NOWAM

I'm sorry, Arissa.

She nods begrudgingly, like "It's okay."

He takes a few steps back, setting a respectful distance. He  
gives her a wistful smile.

NOWAM (CONT'D)  
 (silently)  
 I love you.

She gets choked up again, but smiles.

ARISSA  
 (silently)  
 I love you.

He straightens up into the attitude of a proper royal guardsman, gives her a final nod, and leaves.

**22 INT. DERKIN'S TAVERN - NIGHT**

**22**

The tavern isn't full, but it's busy, filled with working-class people eating, drinking, and laughing loudly.

An exhausted Bally, now wearing her barmaid uniform, clears tables and brings trays of food and drink to patrons.

Santi Tegara enters the tavern. His long embroidered coat draws glances from the other patrons.

He spots a small table in the back corner and approaches, nodding politely to a few gawkers. He takes off his coat and rests it across a chair down before seating himself.

A moment later, Bally approaches him. Noticing he's a foreigner, she gives him a subtle once-over before speaking.

BALLY  
 Good evening, sir. We have beef  
 stew and pork pie tonight. To  
 drink, mead, cider, perry, mulled  
 ale, or spiced wine.

She sways a little as she speaks. Santi frowns in concern.

SANTI  
 Are you well?

She shakes her head to clear her mind.

BALLY  
 Sorry. I'm just a little tired.

SANTI  
 Long shift?

She sighs.

BALLY  
 I just got here, actually.  
 (MORE)

BALLY (CONT'D)  
It's going to be a long night.

SANTI  
I pray your goddess Merin blesses  
you with the strength of the sun.

She smiles a little.

BALLY  
Then I ask Imios to make your  
prayer especially persuasive.

Santi raises his eyebrows.

SANTI  
You know about Imios?

She gives a little shrug.

BALLY  
I wasn't always a barmaid.

From the counter, a big man, DERKIN, calls out.

DERKIN  
Busy night, Bally! Keep it moving!

Bally gives a "Sorry, boss" wave, then turns back to Santi.

BALLY  
What'll you have, sir?

SANTI  
Beef stew and whatever you  
recommend to drink with it.

She nods, gives him a half smile.

BALLY  
I'll come up with something.

She walks off and he watches her go, amused.

**23 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT**

**23**

Still dressed formally after a long day of meetings, Evabel quietly steps down the dimly-lit corridor. Her lady-in-waiting, Annexis, follows close behind with a candle in hand.

They come to Evabel's room and Annexis steps forward to open the door. Instead of entering, though, Evabel turns to her.

EVABEL  
 (whispering)  
 Annexis, I need to speak with my  
 sister. Don't wait up for me.

ANNEXIS  
 We do have an early morning  
 tomorrow, My Lady.

EVABEL  
 I trust you'll find a way to make  
 me look well rested. Good night.

ANNEXIS  
 Of course, My Lady. Good night.

Annexis enters the chamber, and Evabel continues down the hallway to another door. She gives it a few light taps.

**24 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - ARISSA'S CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS 24**

Arissa sits bathing in a large portable tub in the middle of her bedroom floor, the water covered with soap suds and flower petals.

Her lady-in-waiting Nemmie sits on a chair behind her, methodically brushing her hair.

They both look up as they hear the knock at the door.

NEMMIE  
 Who goes there?

EVABEL (O.S.)  
 A traveling philosopher from Ostus.  
 I've come to debate the teachings  
 of King Numius.

Arissa's face lights up with a smile.

ARISSA  
 Let her in, let her in!

Nemmie smiles, then pulls the door open.

A cheerful Evabel steps into the room. Nemmie gives her a deep curtsy.

ARISSA (CONT'D)  
 Finally! Where have you been?

Evabel removes her cloak and tosses it on the nearby bed.

EVABEL

Meetings. Father wanted to catch me up on the affairs of the kingdom.

ARISSA

Forgive me if I don't curtsy. Anything interesting happening?

EVABEL

Too much, actually. It's a wonder kingdoms survive at all. You should come tomorrow.

ARISSA

Those meetings are so boring, and father doesn't like it when I try to make them more interesting.

Evabel smiles, then turns to Nemmie.

EVABEL

Nemmie, I need some private time with my sister. Would you go keep Annexis company for a while?

NEMMIE

Um...Of course, My Lady.

Nemmie glances at Arissa, who nods, then slips out the door.

Evabel takes the seat behind Arissa and picks up the brush.

ARISSA

Ev, you don't have to do that.

EVABEL

Don't you dare stop me. Let me act a normal person for a few minutes.

Arissa smiles as Evabel starts brushing.

ARISSA

Normal was never your destiny, dear sister. But I will make this sacrifice for you. Brush away.

25 INT. DERKIN'S TAVERN - NIGHT

25

Bally glances over at Santi's table and sees that he's left, so she goes over to collect his plate and cup.

When she lifts the metal plate, she sees a large silver-gold coin underneath it.

She's stunned for a moment. She picks it up and inspects it.

Her face turns serious as she realizes it's real.

She tucks it quickly into her bodice, trying to avoid being noticed. She almost laughs.

She takes the plate and cup over to the counter and sets them in front of Derkin.

BALLY

I have to run outside. I'll be back  
in a minute.

DERKIN

Hey! I didn't say you could leave.

But she's already halfway to the door.

**26 EXT. DERKIN'S TAVERN - CONTINUOUS**

**26**

Bally bursts out the door into the dark street. She spins around trying to find Santi, but there's no sign of him.

She turns to a drunken man, EGGGA, sitting on the ground with his back to the tavern. She nudges him with her foot.

BALLY

Egga! Hey! There was an Idissian  
man that came out in the last few  
minutes. Which way did he go?

Egga just groans and rolls over.

Bally takes off up the cobblestone street and looks around, but doesn't see him.

She jogs back the other direction and looks around, but sees nothing. She's lost him.

She stands there in the street for a moment before sighing and walking back toward the tavern.

**27 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - ARISSA'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT**

**27**

Arissa lies on top of her bed wearing a simple chemise. She stares up at the ceiling with a sober expression.

Next to her, still in her dress, Evabel lies on her side watching Arissa, head resting on her elbow.

ARISSA

You weren't kidding when you said there was too much going on.

Evabel nods.

EVABEL

I knew about some of it from Father's dispatches, but the details are a little overwhelming.

ARISSA

How long do you think the war in Diadazi will last?

Evabel sighs.

EVABEL

I don't see a way to end it.

Arissa pauses to let that sink in. She rubs her head.

ARISSA

The people won't put up with it much longer. The taxes, the deaths....

EVABEL

Whoever claims that territory has the resources to dominate the rest of us. The only thing keeping the balance is that all four kingdoms keep fighting over it. We don't have to win. We just can't let anyone else win either.

Arissa rolls over toward Evabel.

ARISSA

Nobody sees that, though. They just see taxes and people dying.

Evabel nods grimly.

EVABEL

I'd give all this up if we could go back to how things were before Diadazi collapsed.

ARISSA

Can't your husband talk to his brother? We could unite with Ostus, draw up a treaty...

EVABEL

Darbus didn't marry me for my charm. I'm his influence over Merindal. He's a merchant to his bones, always trying to forge a better deal. If they won Diadazi, it'd only be months before they turned and found a reason to "unite" Ostus with Merindal, by force if needed.

ARISSA

Your own husband would do that?

Evabel opens her mouth to speak, then hesitates.

Arissa frowns, sensing something's up. She props herself up on her elbow.

ARISSA (CONT'D)

What?

Evabel pauses, then shakes her head.

EVABEL

I'll tell you later.

Arissa studies her sister's face. There's something behind the hesitation. Not just reluctance. Fear.

Arissa almost pushes, but lets it go out of respect.

Evabel smiles in appreciation, then rolls over off the bed.

EVABEL (CONT'D)

It's late. I should sleep. I'll come find you again tomorrow.

She walks over to the mirror and adjusts her hair.

28

INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - HIDDEN PASSAGE - NIGHT

28

Evabel stands facing us, adjusting her hair. Arissa lies on the bed in the background. The view is distorted through the darkened glass of the mirror, seen from the other side.

ARISSA

Is it rude to say I'm glad you'll be queen and not me?

EVABEL

I wouldn't wish it on anyone.

Evabel turns and walks away from the mirror.

We pull back, revealing a slot in the wall where a stone has been removed.

In the dark passage, we see eyes just barely illuminated by the light from the other room passing through the mirror.

They're the eyes of an Ostan spy, DOMILLA, who was part of Evabel's entourage.

She gently lifts a stone and silently nestles it back into place, blocking the secret viewing hole and throwing the passageway into complete darkness.

**29 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - COURTYARD - NIGHT 29**

Domilla emerges from a small service door tucked behind some bushes, her fine dress out of place for stealthy activity.

She glances around to see if anyone's near. The courtyard is quiet. Just the river and the distant shuffle of horses in the stable.

Satisfied she's alone, she emerges from behind the bushes into the courtyard.

**30 EXT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - ROOF - NIGHT 30**

Spymaster Bones Graves sits in a weathered wooden chair on the roof of the palace, his head outlined in the moonlight as he peers down at the courtyard below.

He watches from a distance as Domilla adopts a more ladylike posture and strolls slowly away, as if she'd merely been out for an evening walk.

BONES

That's a strange door for you to have come through, young lady.

**31 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - WAR ROOM - MORNING 31**

A large map of the kingdoms of Ethildar rests on a strong wooden table in the center of the room, the nations each featured in a different color. Markers on the map indicate military units in or near the central territory of Diadazi.

Around the table, King Ethiel, Chamberlain Pellock, Spymaster Graves, High Clerk Oak, Captain Hews, Evabel, Arissa, GENERAL EFFY KEEGER, and a few others sit or stand around the table, studying it.

Morning light streams in through high windows.

EFFY

...and we've successfully opened a conversation with a mine owner in Southern Idissia who's willing to smuggle wrought iron to the border despite the new trade restrictions. But it won't be cheap.

ETHIEL

Don't say five regals.

EFFY

Six regals a ton, Your Majesty.

Ethiel shakes his head in disbelief.

ETHIEL

Do I dare ask how much for actual steel we can make into weapons?

EFFY

We're trying to find another contact who can turn the wrought iron into steel, but I would expect it to be close to 20 regals a ton.

Ethiel is silent for a moment.

ETHIEL

(to himself)

At those prices I'm tempted to just surrender.

As they continue talking, Arissa leans over and whispers to Evabel.

ARISSA

Ostus is trading grain for steel with Idissia, right?

Evabel nods.

ARISSA (CONT'D)

If we gave concessions to Ostus in eastern Diadazi, could they assign us some of the Idissian steel in exchange?

Evabel frowns.

EVABEL

That's not a bad idea. What concessions, though?

ARISSA

I don't know. What are we about to lose to Ostus?

Evabel peers at the map thoughtfully.

EVABEL

The Valley of Kobasa. They think we have a lot more troops there than we actually do.

Arissa gives her a shrug, like, "Could work, right?"

EVABEL (CONT'D)

Say it.

Arissa shakes her head.

ARISSA

You're the future queen, you say it. You need to get these people used to listening to you.

Evabel almost protests, but sees Arissa's right.

At the table, the conversation has stalled. Ethiel drums his fingers.

Evabel clears her throat.

EVABEL

We have negotiating power against Ostus in the Valley of Kobasa, as they think we have a stronger position than we actually do. I can get a message to the King of Ostus that we're willing to give them Kobasa in exchange for paperwork assigning us a portion of their next iron shipment from Idissia. They'll take it around the coast anyway, so we can take possession of it at Chinley and haul it the rest of the way by barge. All it would cost us is a valley we're going to lose anyway.

Everyone stares at her for a moment as they absorb what she's saying and realize it could work.

PELLOCK

Princess Evabel, you could find yourself in a difficult position if your husband finds you negotiated this while knowing our actual weakness in Kobasa.

Evabel holds her head high.

EVABEL

Chamberlain Wheegan, I may be married to Ostus, but I am Merindal. I know my priorities.

Ethiel smiles and nods his appreciation to Evabel. The others present react with admiration.

EFFY

That's quite a daughter you have, Your Majesty.

ETHIEL

I sometimes wonder if I shouldn't retire to a farm somewhere and just let her take over the Kingdom now.

Laughs all around.

Evabel leans over to Arissa.

EVABEL

Thank you. That was really good...

She frowns.

EVABEL (CONT'D)

Arissa?

Arissa's face is slack, her eyes staring into space--

**32 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - GREAT HALL - NIGHT**

**32**

--then she blinks as she finds herself sitting in a banquet at the high table, surrounded by her family and members of the court. Large platters of food sit on the table in front of her. Jeck sits to one side of her and Evabel to the other, both talking to other people.

She glances around, trying to understand what happened. It feels like she's in a dream.

A servant, DECKLER, comes by with a bottle of blue wine. He pours into her glass to top it off.

Arissa looks up at the troupe of dancers performing nearby.  
A strange woman's voice comes as a barely-audible whisper.

KAH-TIGA (V.O.)

There.

Arissa frowns. Did she hear something?

KAH-TIGA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The servant.

Arissa hesitates, then turns to look at Deckler, who now approaches King Ethiel to refill his glass.

With a barely-noticeable motion, Deckler pulls something small from his belt and drops it into the bottle.

Ethiel speaks animatedly with Oriella and others nearby, his nearly empty wine glass in hand.

Deckler holds out the bottle, offering the king a refill.

KAH-TIGA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Did you see it?

Arissa frowns and watches as Ethiel offers his cup out to be refilled. Deckler dutifully fills it up.

ARISSA

Wait...

KAH-TIGA (V.O.)

Poison!

Arissa stands abruptly.

ARISSA

Father!

But it's too late. He's drinking it. He glances at her with a confused frown.

The guests turn to look at Arissa, then the king.

Arissa watches in horror as her father suddenly stops drinking, lowering his glass with a pained look on his face. Then he drops the glass and clutches his throat.

ARISSA (CONT'D)

Noooo--

33 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - WAR ROOM - MORNING

33

Arissa's suddenly back in the war room with everyone.

ARISSA  
--ooooo!

She blinks and looks around, confused and emotional. She shakes her head and frowns, trying to understand.

Captain Hews is already on his feet, hand on his sword, eyes scanning the room for a threat.

EVABEL  
Arissa?

Evabel looks up and sees everyone staring. She stands and helps Arissa to her feet.

EVABEL (CONT'D)  
She's fine. She just dozed off and had a nightmare. Stress about the festival. I remember having trouble sleeping before mine as well.

Hews relaxes his grip on the sword and settles back.

Graves glances at Ethiel, who returns the look.

ARISSA  
(muttering)  
I'm fine. I'm fine.

Evabel locks eyes with Ethiel and speaks reassuringly.

EVABEL  
I'll take care of her.

With that, she ushers Arissa toward the door. Hews moves to open it for them.

34 EXT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - GROUNDS - DAY

34

Evabel leads Arissa along a flower-lined path. Two guards follow at a polite distance behind them, along with Annexis and Domilla from Evabel's entourage.

Arissa walks stiffly, arms crossed tight against her body.

EVABEL  
Okay, Arissa, what happened in there?

Arissa stops walking. She stares at the ground.

ARISSA  
I watched him die.

Evabel turns to face her.

ARISSA (CONT'D)  
I saw a servant pour something into  
his wine at a banquet. And he drank  
it. And he died.

Evabel is quiet for a moment.

EVABEL  
That's the second time?

ARISSA  
Different people. Different ways.  
But he always dies.

Evabel stares at her, the concern on her face shifting into something harder. Something she's been wrestling with.

She takes Arissa's arm and they walk a little more quickly, putting distance between themselves and the entourage.

Evabel turns to confirm that they're out of earshot. She hesitates, then decides just to throw it out there.

EVABEL (CONT'D)  
I'm concerned my husband might try  
to kill our father.

Arissa's eyes go wide.

Evabel watches her sister's reaction. Her own expression is steady. She's had time to sit with this.

EVABEL (CONT'D)  
I have no proof. I've only  
overheard fragments of business  
conversations. When I become queen,  
he obviously expects very favorable  
terms for selling grain from Ostus  
to Merindal. He must see that he  
stands to become one of the richest  
men in the world...as soon as our  
father dies. I have to believe he's  
considered expediting that event.

Arissa shakes her head in astonishment at the weight of this.

ARISSA  
Have you told Father? Hews? Bones?

EVABEL

I have nothing to tell. No evidence, no plan, just suspicions. And I'm sure you can see the downsides of raising doubts about my own husband. Those rumors would spread through Merindal like fire in a hayloft. They'd bring into question every action I take for the rest of my life. Plus my husband could be entirely innocent and I might be inventing all of this in my mind.

ARISSA

Evabel, we have to--

EVABEL

We have to keep it quiet, Arissa. We can't let this get out without some kind of evidence.

Arissa takes a shaky breath.

ARISSA

What if these daydreams I'm having...what if they're not just daydreams?

Evabel studies her for a moment with a concerned look.

EVABEL

It's probably just stress, but You should see Lady Washbourne right away. The Rite of Blooming is not easy, and you'll need your full mind to get through it.

Arissa is annoyed but begrudgingly nods in agreement.

ARISSA

I'll go see her. But what do we do about...?

Evabel casually glances back at their followers.

EVABEL

We listen. We watch. We investigate. Quietly. You're the only person I've told because you're the only person I really trust to keep it confidential.

ARISSA

Because you have so many of my own secrets you can hold over my head?

Evabel shrugs like "you're not wrong...."

ARISSA (CONT'D)

Do you trust Father?

EVABEL

His Majesty never liked Darbus much in the first place, but we needed his grain for our soldiers. If this conspiracy isn't real, I need to strengthen their relationship, not destroy it. I need to know for sure before I say anything.

She pauses, coming to the real question.

EVABEL (CONT'D)

Arissa, there are too many of my husband's people around me. I can barely squat over a chamber pot without three people watching me. I can't do this myself.

Arissa sighs nervously.

ARISSA

But nobody pays much attention to the second princess, right?

EVABEL

Letting people underestimate you is one of the best strategies of all.

Arissa chuckles ruefully, like that must make her one of the most strategic people in the land.

EVABEL (CONT'D)

Will you do it?

Arissa is thoughtful for a moment, then nods.

ARISSA

Of course.

Evabel squeezes her hand. They hold each other's gaze for a beat. Then Evabel glances back toward the palace.

EVABEL (CONT'D)

I should get back.

She gives Arissa a small, brave smile and walks back toward the palace with the entourage falling in behind her.

Arissa stays on the path alone. She watches her sister go.

35 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - CORRIDOR - DAY

35

Arissa walks quickly through a stone corridor, arms folded tight across her chest. She's holding herself together, barely.

She turns a corner and spots Nowam standing at his post near a stairwell, spear in hand. He straightens when he sees her.

NOWAM  
Your Highness.

She doesn't slow down. She grabs his wrist and pulls him toward a recessed alcove off the corridor, half-hidden behind a stone pillar.

NOWAM (CONT'D)  
Arissa, what--

ARISSA  
Just come here. Please.

They step into the alcove. She takes both his hands and grips them tight, pressing them against her chest. Her eyes are red. She's trembling.

NOWAM  
What happened?

She opens her mouth. Nothing comes out. She shakes her head.

ARISSA  
I need you to trust me tonight. At the banquet. If I ask you to do something, just do it.

NOWAM  
Of course.

ARISSA  
Promise me.

NOWAM  
I promise.

She nods, pressing her forehead against his hands. He watches her, his concern deepening.

He pauses for a moment, considering the timing of his next words. It's clear he's been carrying this for a while.

NOWAM (CONT'D)  
Come with me.

She looks up.

NOWAM (CONT'D)  
Tonight. After the banquet. Two  
horses. We ride east before anyone  
knows we're gone.

She stares at him.

ARISSA  
Nowam...

NOWAM  
I can't do this. I can't stand here  
and watch them give you to someone  
else.

ARISSA  
You think I want that?

NOWAM  
Then come with me.

She pulls her hands from his and presses them flat against the  
stone wall behind her, steadying herself.

ARISSA  
I can't leave.

NOWAM  
Of course you can. You just get on  
a horse and go. It's easy.

ARISSA  
I have responsibilities. I won't  
abandon my family.

Nowam searches her face. She's serious.

A painful silence.

NOWAM  
Then I'm going to request a  
transfer after the festival.

ARISSA  
Nowam--

NOWAM  
I'm not strong enough for this,  
Arisa. I thought I was. I'm not.

She nods slowly.

ARISSA  
 (bitterly)  
 This was always doomed.

He holds her gaze for a moment longer. Then something shifts in his posture. His shoulders square. His jaw sets.

NOWAM  
 I'll be at the banquet tonight, My  
 Lady. Whatever you need.

He turns and walks back to his post.

Arissa stays in the alcove. She presses her palm flat against the cold stone and closes her eyes. Takes one long breath.

Then she opens her eyes and keeps going.

**36 EXT. KINGSWAY STREET IN WEYMOUTH - MIDDAY**

**36**

Standing at the corner of two cobblestone streets, a group of several workers (DENK, HAMES, BONN, GIDDO, VENNA, and a tired-looking Bally) gathers in front of Supervisor Diggins, who reads from scratched notes on a piece of paper.

Crates and containers of decorations are stacked nearby.

DIGGINS  
 Denk and Hames, ribbons on the  
 torch posts. Bonn and Giddo, scrub  
 any walls that smell like piss.  
 Venna and Bally, paste up posters  
 from Market to High Street. Any  
 questions?

Denk raises his hand.

DIGGINS (CONT'D)  
 Denk, don't even ask. You'll get  
 paid when it's done. Get going.

The grumbling workers disperse toward the supplies.

Bally goes to a box of rolled-up posters. She pulls one out and unfurls it.

It's a simple hand-painted portrait of Arissa with the text "ARISSA" and "PRINCESS OF MERINDAL."

Bally glares at the portrait for a long moment. Her lip curls in disdain and disappointment.

Nearby, Santi walks down Kingsway exploring the town.

He happens to notice Bally. He stops, amused, and approaches.

SANTI

Well, mistress, I see you told the truth about your long hours.

Bally looks up, confused for a moment, distracted by the portrait of Arissa and suddenly trying to place this familiar face out of context.

Then it clicks, and her demeanor softens. There's a little light in her eyes.

BALLY

Hello again, good sir.

SANTI

Peace and rest be with you.

BALLY

I, uh...I tried to find you last night. I wanted to thank you for the kind gift. I wish I had the strength of character to say it was too much and give it back to you, but...I need it, so...

She shrugs.

Santi smiles.

SANTI

Then it was a coin well invested, and I'm happy about it. I couldn't believe you came up with Idissian tea in a Merindal tavern. That was thoughtful of you.

She smiles a little.

BALLY

I knew the recipe and we use some of the same spices for other dishes, so I did the best I could. I'm sure it wasn't perfect.

SANTI

Oh, it was terrible, but it meant the world to me. I needed something familiar. How did you come to know about things like Idissian tea?

She looks down.

BALLY

This may be hard to believe, but I was a noblewoman until just recently. The King...made some decisions that brought...difficulty to my family. And now I'm here.

Santi looks at her thoughtfully.

SANTI

I'm truly sorry to hear that. For what little it's worth, I see the nobility in you plain as day.

She gives a polite smile, hiding her real feelings, and nods.

BALLY

And what about you, sir? I assume anyone here from Idissia is on business. What do you trade?

He sighs.

SANTI

Myself, I'm afraid. My family wants me to marry Princess Arissa at the festival, so I'm here competing with dozens of other suitors.

Bally's brain stops and takes a moment to get going again.

BALLY

Arissa.

SANTI

Yes. I don't know her yet, but I'm told she's a good woman.

Bally looks down at the poster in her hand. She turns it around so Santi can see it.

He laughs.

SANTI (CONT'D)

Ah, is this her This is actually the most I've seen of her so far.

Bally looks at the poster.

BALLY

We grew up together.

SANTI

Did you really?? Can you tell me about her?

Supervisor Diggins marches toward them.

DIGGINS

Beg your pardon, good sir, but  
Bally here is doing the King's work  
and we're on a deadline. I'm afraid  
she cannot visit right now.

SANTI

Ah, forgive my intrusion.  
(to Bally)  
I don't want to get you in trouble.  
Another time, perhaps?

BALLY

I, uh...yes...perhaps.

37 INT. FOXWELL HOME - AFTERNOON

37

Orrick sits on a chair, slumped against the wall next to him,  
having fallen asleep from exhaustion.

A door slams and he's jolted awake.

Stomping from the stairs.

It's Bally.

BALLY

I'm done, Orrick. I'm done being  
sweet. I'm done being polite. I'm  
done being a loyal subject to that  
lying pig of a king.

As she marches up the stairs, Orrick stands and holds out his  
hands, trying to contain her anger.

ORRICK

Quiet, now, Bally. You can't say  
things like that.

She speaks at a lower volume but with no less intensity.

BALLY

I spent all day pasting Arissa's  
stupid face up and down Kingsway.  
She gets a whole damned festival,  
at great expense to the kingdom, of  
course. They couldn't use that  
money for the war, could they? No,  
they had to destroy our family to  
pay for that. Why? Why, Orrick? Why  
is this acceptable in any way?

She's shaking and there are tears in her eyes now.

ORRICK

Bally, you're talking yourself into a storm. You've gotta calm down right now.

BALLY

I saw him again today. The man from the tavern, who left me the coin.

ORRICK

I'm telling you, Bal, if he's from Idissia...

BALLY

How can he be trying to sell me something if I'm obviously broke and he's the one giving out money?

ORRICK

I don't trust Idissians, that's all I'm saying.

BALLY

He's a good man, Orrick. I like him. I wanted to talk to him, to know him. But can you guess why he's here? Why he came to Merindal?

Orrick shrugs.

ORRICK

To sell leather coats at twice a fair price?

BALLY

He's one of the suitors. The bachelors. He's here to try to marry Arissa at the festival.

She pounds her fist against a storage crate.

BALLY (CONT'D)

I'm sick of her! I can taste it in my mouth. Why didn't she stand up for us? Why didn't she help us? And why does she get everything and I get nothing?

ORRICK

Bally...

BALLY

Arissa's banquet dress cost more than this entire street earns in a year. And they're charging us a levy to pay for the party.

ORRICK

Bally! Shut your mouth. You're going to get us killed.

BALLY

Maybe, but I'm taking them down with us.

Orrick reaches out and slaps her.

ORRICK

You stop this nonsense right n--

She swings and punches his head, knocking him to the floor.

BALLY

You can hit me all you want, Orrick, but know two things: I'm so angry I can't feel it anymore, and I hit back now!

Behind her, a wooden cup rattles off the edge of the table and clatters to the floor. Neither of them notices.

Orrick glares at her, panting.

ORRICK

You're truly mad, aren't you?

BALLY

I've never thought so clearly.

Still on the floor, he works his jaw and rubs where she struck him.

ORRICK

I'm trying to restore our name, Bally. It'll take years, but I could do it. But you're talking high treason right now. Your temper will destroy us. If you don't stop, I...can't be near you. I can't live with you. I can't even be your brother.

BALLY

Orrick, he killed our parents.

ORRICK

They killed themselves.

BALLY

Because of what he did to us. I can't forgive that. I can't give that family any more grace than I already have. I'm done.

She crosses her arms.

BALLY (CONT'D)

I'm firm as a tree on this subject. I will not rest until that family's dragged out of the palace. It's time for a change.

Orrick stares at his sister. Something leaves his face.

ORRICK

Then this is our goodbye.

38 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - GREAT HALL - NIGHT

38

Members of the royal court, including most of the same COURT MEMBERS who showed up to receive Evabel yesterday, now sit at tables throughout the great hall as the staff scurries around loading them with great platters of elaborate food. The room is filled with the sound of good-natured conversation.

The hall is large and opulent, with high ceilings and grand tapestries hanging from the walls. It's well-lit by candles and oil lamps.

The high table sits at the head of the room with Ethiel, Oriella, Evabel, Arissa, Jeck, Pellock, Bones, and a few other high-ranking nobles.

There are several other tables for guests. Clerics Oak, Anvil, Wolf, and Cobble sit in their red robes at one table, along with some acolytes.

At another table are seated together various ladies in waiting (including Nemmie and Annexis, as well as Oriella's lady FAYONA) along with high-ranking staff such as Dayelle.

Captain Hews, Nowam, Kipper, Brenn, and other members of the Royal Guard stand at positions around the room, watching the guests.

Nowam steals a glance at Arissa, a dark look in his eyes.

Several members of Evabel's Ostan entourage, distinguished by their plainer clothing, are scattered at tables throughout.

At a guest table near the far wall, Santi Tegara sits among other visiting nobles. He studies the room quietly, looking slightly out of place.

Various other nobles, officials, and guests attend, along with their families.

Once the final dishes are delivered, King Ethiel stands, and all conversation quickly dies as the guests turn to face him respectfully.

ETHIEL

This banquet is the first of many events celebrating my daughter Arissa's ascent into adulthood over the next fortnight. There will be feasts and games and entertainment. There will be tests and trials to prove her worthiness. And then there'll be a wedding.

He turns to Oriella.

ETHIEL (CONT'D)

There'll be a wedding?

Oriella plays along and gives a dramatic nod, and the guests laugh. Ethiel turns back to them.

ETHIEL (CONT'D)

There'll be a wedding! And our family will grow by one, and eventually more.

He turns to Evabel and Arissa.

ETHIEL (CONT'D)

It's been two years since Evabel wed Darbus of Ostus, who is unfortunately unable to attend the festival due to other family matters. We have missed our daughter greatly and are elated to have her back. A king could not ask for more intelligent, courageous, and spirited daughters than Evabel and Arissa. They are truly great and worthy women of Merindal.

The guests applaud heartily, and Evabel and Arissa both smile at his comments.

ETHIEL (CONT'D)

That said, I'm all out of princesses, so let's make this last Rite of Blooming a truly great one. Now, I don't want your food to grow cold, so please eat, and enjoy, and drink a toast to Arissa and her Rite of Blooming.

The guests applaud again, and Ethiel sits and settles in.

Everyone waits quietly for him to take the first bite.

He starts cutting his meat slowly and deliberately.

ORIELLA

(whispering)

Don't be silly, Ethiel. Let the people eat.

ETHIEL

In good time, my beloved.

Finally, he holds a forkful of food up to his mouth...and pauses, holding it there.

The guests wait eagerly...then realize he's playing with them. They laugh.

Ethiel smiles and finally takes the bite, and a wave of conversation and tinkling silverware washes across the hall.

Near a side entrance, Captain Hews notices the door is unattended. He catches Kipper's eye and gives a quiet nod toward it. Kipper moves to cover it without a word. Hews returns to scanning the room.

Oriella leans close to Evabel during the meal and whispers something we can't hear. Evabel considers it, then nods.

**39 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - GREAT HALL - LATER**

**39**

As the banquet winds up, many guests have risen from their seats and mingle in small groups. Others have changed seats and are talking around the dining tables.

Arissa excuses herself from the high table and moves through the room. Her gaze sweeps across the tables and lands on Santi, sitting among other visiting nobles. He's looking down at his plate, turning a fork over in his fingers like he's not sure what to do with himself.

Nemmie appears beside Arissa.

NEMMIE

That's the Idissian. Santi Tegara.  
One of your suitors.

ARISSA

He doesn't look like he wants to be  
here.

NEMMIE

Neither do you, if we're being  
honest.

Arissa almost smiles. Then her eyes drift across the room and catch Nowam's. He's standing at his post near a doorway, watching her. For a moment, neither of them moves.

He looks away first.

Arissa steadies herself and scans the room for Domilla.

Domilla sits at a table slowly nursing her dessert dish and looking around with keen interest, trying to overhear what she can.

Arissa slides into a seat next to her.

ARISSA

May I intrude to meet you? I'm  
Princess Evabel's sister Arissa.

Domilla is momentarily surprised, but quickly regains her composure and gives a low bow while seated.

DOMILLA

Of course, My Lady. I'm Domilla,  
Lady Evabel's dresser.

Arissa lights up.

ARISSA

Ooh, I wondered which of you was  
the dresser. Do people get as  
jealous about that role in Ostus as  
they do here?

Domilla smiles.

DOMILLA

As much as we Ostans talk about  
logic and moderation, we can get  
just as jealous as anyone else. We  
just act more humble when we do it.

ARISSA

That's probably best.  
(MORE)

ARISSA (CONT'D)  
 In Merindal we hardly bother to  
 hide it.

She motions toward Evabel, who's standing nearby talking to a  
 group of nobles.

ARISSA (CONT'D)  
 So tell me about this outfit she's  
 wearing tonight.

DOMILLA  
 I'm sure you're aware that farming  
 dominates the culture of Ostus, so  
 modest peasant apparel is the  
 foundation of our fashion. But I  
 styled this dress to suit a  
 princess of Merindal in her home  
 kingdom. A little more...

ARISSA  
 It's okay. You can say it.

Domilla searches for a polite word.

DOMILLA  
 ...decorative?

Arissa smiles.

ARISSA  
 We do enjoy our pretty things here.

DOMILLA  
 I personally find myself drawn to  
 simpler fabrics that bring  
 attention not to themselves, but to  
 the woman inside them.

ARISSA  
 A fine answer, Domilla. If Evabel  
 can spare you, I may ask you to  
 review my wardrobe. I haven't done  
 enough to annoy the more old-  
 fashioned members of our court, and  
 I need to stir things up more.

DOMILLA  
 With the lady's consent, I'd be  
 honored to serve you at any time,  
 of course.

ARISSA  
 Wonderful! I won't know my schedule  
 until tomorrow, unfortunately.

(MORE)

ARISSA (CONT'D)

My father has just learned of an urgent situation in Diadazi, and I may be accompanying him to visit with our generals. However, as soon as I can, I'll come find you.

DOMILLA

My Lady, curiosity gets the better of me. May I ask the nature of the situation in Diadazi?

But Arissa is now distracted by a servant walking around pouring drinks for guests.

It's Deckler, the man she saw in her vision.

Arissa glances around the room, looking for a guard.

ARISSA

Domilla, forgive my rudeness. I need to speak with someone.

DOMILLA

Of course, My Lady.

Arissa is already out of her chair and moving toward Nowam, who stands near a doorway.

NOWAM

(coolly)

My Lady.

ARISSA

Who's the servant behind me pouring drinks?

Nowam looks over Arissa's shoulder, then frowns.

NOWAM

I don't know him.

ARISSA

Why is someone unknown to the King's Guard serving drinks at a royal banquet?

Nowam's coolness toward her shifts into professional concern as he understands the weight of what she's saying.

He steps past Arissa and moves toward Deckler, who's cheerfully pouring blue wine for various nobles.

NOWAM

Good sir, would you please  
accompany me? There's a matter  
requiring your immediate attention.

Deckler is confused, but knows better than to protest.

DECKLER

Of course, of course.

Nowam escorts him to a nearby door, passing through quietly.

In another corner of the room, Brenn notices and watches them  
with interest.

Arissa takes the long way around to the door, trying not to  
arouse suspicion. A few people try to gain her attention but  
she politely brushes past them.

**40 INT. WEYMOUTH PALACE - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS**

**40**

Arissa pushes open the door and enters the dimly-lit corridor.

She comes up behind Nowam, who speaks with Deckler.

DECKLER

Sir, my name is Deckler. I'm cousin  
to Beldrick. I recently moved here  
from the north, and he recommended  
me to work here.

NOWAM

I'm sure you understand the need  
for security. I'll bring  
Chamberlain Wheegan to verify your  
identity.

DECKLER

Of course, sir. I met him  
yesterday. I'm sure he can vouch  
for me.

Arissa's staring at the man, trying to make sense of this.

ARISSA

Check his belt.

NOWAM

His belt?

ARISSA

Check his belt. I saw something.

Deckler looks at her in barely-masked fear and confusion.

DECKLER

I have nothing in my belt, My Lady,  
I assure you.

ARISSA

Right side.

NOWAM

Please remain still, sir.

Nowam reaches for Deckler's waist, but Deckler pulls back.

DECKLER

This is a bit much, sir!

NOWAM

(authoritatively)  
Stand. Still.

He reaches again, but Deckler turns and bolts off down the corridor.

He doesn't make it far, though. Brenn steps out from an intersecting corridor and clotheslines him, knocking him to the ground and taking the wind out of him.

Nowam further subdues him with a quick punch to the head.

Brenn puts a heavy foot on him to hold him down while Nowam fumbles with the man's belt, feeling underneath it.

He finally comes up with a small clod of a powdery substance.

Arissa stares at the poison. The color drains from her face.

ARISSA

That's...poison.

Nowam and Brenn exchange a look over the subdued man.

Arissa turns back toward the banquet hall. Through the walls, she can still hear her father's voice carrying over the guests, warm and alive.

She stands there, the weight of what just happened settling onto her.

**41 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE DERKIN'S TAVERN - NIGHT**

**41**

Bally steps out of the tavern, pulling her coat tight. Long shift. She starts walking.

She slows. The faint sound of music drifts down from the palace on the hill. Warm light glows from the windows up there. They're feasting. For the princess.

Her eyes land on a festival poster pasted on the wall nearby. The Rite of Blooming. Arissa's name in elegant script beneath the royal seal.

Bally stares at it.

She reaches into her apron and pulls out the charcoal stub she uses for marking work assignments. She turns it over in her fingers.

Then she steps forward and draws a hard, deliberate line through the royal seal.

She steps back. Looks at what she did. Her chest is heaving.

She pockets the charcoal and starts walking again.

A shape moves near the tavern door. A stocky man, THORNBURY, mid-30s, is sitting against the wall with a thin blanket pulled up to his chest. He's been there the whole time.

Bally freezes.

THORNBURY

I know your brother from the quarry. You're Bally.

BALLY

Who are you?

THORNBURY

There's a meeting tomorrow night. People like you. People with dangerous opinions. You should come.

BALLY

I don't know what you think you saw. I have tables waiting.

She moves past him into the dark.

THORNBURY

I'm Thornbury.

She doesn't look back.

42 EXT. KAH-TIGA'S HUT - NIGHT

42

Illuminated by the moonlight, the sorceress KAH-TIGA, dressed in black, steps down the front porch of her hut and walks to a well-tended garden nearby.

KAH-TIGA

(muttering)

I must be the deepest root that holds the tree up in the dark storm. So said Elha-Kahl, and so say I.

She bends and plucks the green leaf off a peculiar plant.

KAH-TIGA (CONT'D)

I hope you believe me, little girl. We're the last stronghold. After us, there's nothing left.

Then she moves to a different part of the garden and plucks the head of a small weed-like flower.

KAH-TIGA (CONT'D)

There's so much worse to come, just you wait and see. The walls are getting weaker. The cracks are getting bigger.

She presses the head of the flower into the center of the leaf, then folds the leaf over it a few times.

KAH-TIGA (CONT'D)

Oh, little girl, at least you don't have to do this.

She places the bundled leaf into her mouth, between her back teeth, and bites down, grinding it to extract the juices.

KAH-TIGA (CONT'D)

Ughhh.

She tilts her head back, looking up toward the moon as the juice runs down her throat.

KAH-TIGA (CONT'D)

Show me now. Show me. Show me.

Her eyes roll back in her head as her vision begins.

**43 INT. CAVE - NIGHT**

**43**

The walls of the cave are covered in strange writing, partially obscured by moss and other plant growth. It's obviously ancient.

A large, cracked stone blocks the passageway deeper into the cave, apparently placed there long ago to block the way.

There's a strange, deep, animal grunting sound.

Where the large stone has cracked, some of the dust and fragments move. A piece falls loose.

The grunting grows more intense as a clawed finger, thick as a man's wrist, pokes through from the other side, frantically trying to clear an opening to get through.

CUT TO BLACK

END OF EPISODE