

SECOND CITADEL: THE LADY OF THE LAKE

SOUND: RAIN. TRAIN IN MOVEMENT. TRAIN STOPS. TRAIN DOOR OPENING.

CONDUCTOR:

Ah, good evening, Traveler, and welcome to the Penumbra.  
Take your seat, please, take your seat.

SOUND: TRAIN DOOR CLOSING.

MUSIC: STARTS.

The junction lies just ahead, Traveler. If you'll allow me  
just a moment.

SOUND: TRAIN WHISTLES.

(LAUGHS)

Well, next stop, the Second Citadel.

SOUND: TRAIN IN MOVEMENT.

The wilds around the Second Citadel have always been dangerous, but new perils have taken root of late. Monsters with powers of manipulation have been cropping up everywhere lately, and the Queen has assembled a team to exterminate them for good. And so Sir Caroline is on the case to sniff out the source of these mind-controlling manipulators. But monsters aren't the only threats this world has to offer- a curse has taken the fishing town of Ballast through which Sir Caroline and her team must travel, and if they want to pass through, they'll have to find the source of this strange town's deadly malady.

SOUND: TRAIN STOPS.

Our next stop:

SOUND: TRAIN DOOR OPENING. RAIN.

Lady of the Lake.

SOUND: THUNDER, RAIN FADES.

MUSIC: ENDS.

SOUND: A PIGEON COOING. THEN, A PEN SCRATCHING ON PAPER.

MUSIC: BEGINS.

QUEEN (VO):

Sir Caroline,

This letter should be awaiting you when you arrive in the village of Ballast this afternoon. Your attempt to slip out of the Citadel unobserved was impressive, but ultimately ineffective. To dissuade you from attempting this again, from this moment forward I will require daily reports from you regarding the special mission I've assigned - any significant progress, leads, or evidence you come to in your investigation. Use my pigeon to send them, and remember: I'm trusting you. Don't let me down.

Ever her subjects' servant,  
Queen Mira of the Second Citadel

SIR CAROLINE (VO):

My Queen,

If you'll allow me a candid observation, "trust" seems an odd word for daily check-ins. Your other knights aren't required to complete them, I assume?

When we met yesterday the tasks you assigned me were to assemble a team and lead the investigation we discussed. I've done just that - and even if my team is only two other knights instead of the ten you suggested, I can't see I've broken any of your actual rules.

I am not incapable of compromise. For example, I fully intended to bring only Sir Angelo with me... and would have done just that, if he hadn't brought Sir Damien along looking like his kicked puppy. A very loud, yipping puppy who ought to be kicked harder.

DAMIEN:

What is *she* doing here?! Sir Angelo, you said we were waiting for the squadron for your secret mission!

ANGELO:

And here she is! I must admit I thought there would be a few more of us, but...

DAMIEN:

There are only two of you?!

MUSIC: ENDS.

CAROLINE:

Good morning, Sir Damien.

Sir Angelo. It sounds as though you've had some difficulty keeping our secret mission secret.

DAMIEN:

Your secret mission...?! What...?!

ANGELO:

Of course I've kept it a secret! What is a secret but a truth shared between friends, Sir Caroline?

CAROLINE:

One: that is not the definition of a secret. Two: Sir Damien is not my friend.

ANGELO:

If we are friends, Sir Caroline, then a friend of mine is a friend of yours. That's mathematics. And as to the definition of a secret, well, I suppose we shall have to agree to disagree.

CAROLINE:

No.

DAMIEN:

Only two knights, no, no, there must be some mistake. The Queen must not know... did you tell her who Rilla is?

CAROLINE:

I'm certain she knows.

DAMIEN:

Sir Angelo, I would have charged off hours ago, I would have ridden after that beast the second I found Rilla missing if you hadn't told me there was a team for this special mission to save my fiancée, our herbalist, what will we do without her, why a plague could strike at any second, rain down from on high, they do that, in books, and then where would we—

ANGELO:

Ah! Yes, well, Sir Damien, I understand your confusion. There's been a bit of a misunderstanding, clearly.

DAMIEN:

I should hope so.

ANGELO:

You see, the secret mission... is not about your lizard. There is no investigation into Rilla's disappearance as yet.

DAMIEN:

No investigation... Saints above...!

ANGELO:

I'm here to ask Sir Caroline if I may be excused from her mission temporarily to assist my closest friend and rival on his rescue. Sir Caroline, may I-

CAROLINE:

No.

ANGELO:

Drat and blast!

DAMIEN:

But--!

CAROLINE:

Sir Angelo. Say goodbye to your playmate. We're going to start by canvassing the Citadel with some questions. What we need now is direction.

ANGELO:

Sir Damien, my friend. I am sorry.

DAMIEN:

On what authority do you order him about? The greatest knight in the Second Citadel? Hmm? How do we even know you? You've been a knight for just a few years, hailing from Saints-know-where. Sir Angelo, she could be a monster herself! A lizard! Does she have a tail? Has anyone thought to look for a tail?

CAROLINE:

Sir Angelo...

ANGELO:

Yes, yes, quite.

(TO DAMIEN)

Perhaps you haven't heard, my friend? The Queen has appointed Sir Caroline her Investigator-General! The first in a century!

DAMIEN:

She...? ... You?

CAROLINE:

Me.

DAMIEN:

Saint Damien, your Tranquility... the world has lost its order, nothing is as it was... surely when knights are governed by foreign women and love is plucked from its nest and lizards speak poetry and twist your mind with their eyes, their violet eyes, the fate of our Second Citadel must soon mirror the first...

CAROLINE:

What was that?

ANGELO:

Oh, he does this quite often, Sir Caroline. I've found it best to let him ride it out.

CAROLINE:

What was that about twisting your mind? A lizard, you said?

DAMIEN:

(YELP)

What? Nothing! Who said anything about a lizard?

CAROLINE:

Ugh!

SOUND: CAROLINE SLAPS HIM.

DAMIEN:

Ow!

ANGELO:

Sir Caroline!

CAROLINE:

I'm trying to make him snap out of it!

ANGELO:

By hitting him? Begads, now he's just upset and in pain!

DAMIEN:

Ha ha! What is a lizard? I've no idea at all. Feathers?  
Fur? Mysteries abound!

ANGELO:

Here, see, *this* is how you do it. Come up here, my friend.

SOUND: ANGELO LIFTS DAMIEN.

DAMIEN:

Ah! Let me go, Sir Angelo! My Rilla, I have to find her, I  
have to—

ANGELO:

Shh, now. Speak your heart, Sir Damien. You did not tell me  
about this lizard's eyes before. Do they... have some sort of  
powers of manipulation?

CAROLINE:

Sir Angelo!

DAMIEN:

The lizard... He tricked me, Angelo. I don't know how he did  
it, but... his eyes, his words, his mind. He made me... made  
me... .. he made me show him mercy, and I have never before  
shown a beast mercy. He must have... what was the word you  
used? Manipulation. He must have manipulated my heart.

CAROLINE:

Your heart?

ANGELO:

Well, where else does one feel mercy, Sir Caroline?

CAROLINE:

I suppose...

ANGELO:

I notice a familiar flicker in your eye.

CAROLINE:  
Hmph.

ANGELO:  
Could this be...  
(STAGE WHISPER)  
... a "lead?"

CAROLINE:  
I know what it is!  
(PAUSE)  
Fine. Do you know where we might find this lizard, Sir  
Damien? Sir Damien?

DAMIEN:  
I will tell you. But only if I may ride with you.

ANGELO:  
Oh...! An unexpected twist...!

CAROLINE:  
Indeed.  
(PAUSE)  
Fine. Be ready in one hour.

ANGELO:  
Huzzah! Come along, Sir Damien. Let's get you suited up.

DAMIEN:  
Thank you, Sir Angelo. And... Sir Caroline.

SOUND: THEY WALK AWAY.

ANGELO:  
We really do have to work on your manners, Sir Damien. She  
is your superior officer, now.

DAMIEN:  
So she is. But Rilla's life hangs in her hands, Sir Angelo.  
I would be critical of this leader even if it were you.

ANGELO:  
With all respect, I'm not sure that is the case. You see,  
I...  
have been reading a Book!  
(CHUCKLE)  
You may not have heard this, Sir Damien, but I have become

very worldly in recent weeks - and women governing actually holds historical precedent. Why, my Book suggests there may even have been civilizations made up entirely of women! Governing themselves! Can you imagine?

CAROLINE (VO):

As I said, my Queen: I am not incapable of compromise. I merely find it distasteful.

At any rate, Sir Damien then told us the only other thing that he knew about the lizard in question: that he is hired by other monsters to create traps and other strange devices. If the monsters have become this organized again we need information as quickly as possible, my Queen. I'm sure you can understand why I did not wait to confirm with you as a result.

Instead, we traveled immediately in the direction Sir Damien pointed: toward the Swamp of Titans' Blooms. To get there we will have to cross the Lake of Tranquility, which lies a ten days' ride northwest. There are fishing villages across the lake, of course, but the land is treacherous - and so I set our course for the closest village on the closest inlet: Ballast.

MUSIC: BEGINS.

I was immediately disappointed. The local leaders saw to that, with the most inane rule for a fishing village to ever disgrace my ears:

BROTHER HENGIST:

Oh, there are no boats in Ballast.

SISTER HORSA:

Oh, none at all. The lake's cursed, you see. Terrible.

BROTHER HENGIST:

Terrible! No boats at all.

SISTER HORSA:

Except the one, of course.

BROTHER HENGIST:

Well, of course there's that one.

SISTER HORSA:

But it wouldn't be responsible to give it out. As good as murder, I'd say.

BROTHER HENGIST:

Unless...

SISTER HORSA:

Hm, yes, unless...

CAROLINE (VO):

The leaders are referred to as Brother Hengist and Sister Horsa. They claim to be twins, and the people here say that this gives them some amount of prophetic sight. I cannot help but notice that they only ever seem to predict things which have already happened, but soothsayers are respected where I come from, and so I had intended to let them talk. But Sir Damien... held other priorities.

DAMIEN:

You said there was a boat? Please, Brother and Sister, Sister and Brother. I must have that boat. My fiancée, my Rilla, my Amaryllis, she's been stolen—

SISTER HORSA:

Give you the boat! And have a death on our hands?

BROTHER HENGIST:

I forsee you floating to shore, limp and pale...

DAMIEN:

I don't care what state I'm left in, I must save Rilla!

ANGELO:

Sir Damien, please! Rilla doesn't want you a pale knot of noodles any more than I do.

DAMIEN:

But Sir Angelo, I must speak my heart—

CAROLINE:

*Again?*

ANGELO:

No, no! I'll stop you right there, friend. Take this trial as progress in our mission. We will clear this curse upon the village of Ballast and come that much closer to understanding our adversary!

CAROLINE:

I am leading this investigation, Sir Angelo. We have no evidence that this curse is in any way connected to the monsters' plot.

ANGELO:

Of course it is! Cursed water just before the lizard's home? He must leave evil in his wake!

CAROLINE:

Sister Horsa, how long has this curse been active?

SISTER HORSA:

Oh, one hundred years, at least.

BROTHER HENGIST:

I would say one hundred and one.

ANGELO:

My hypothesis, foiled! I see this is why you are the Investigator-General, Sir Caroline.

CAROLINE (VO):

But even so, it seems that Brother Hengist and Sister Horsa will not move on the issue of the boat until the curse has been lifted. Accounting for the local terrain and the bulk of our supplies I predict it would take two weeks to find another point of crossing - and so, for the time being, we are stuck here in Ballast.

I asked Brother Hengist and Sister Horsa about the nature of the curse, but by the time I had done so it was growing late, and they invited us to return in the morning. As we left they gave us only this warning:

BROTHER HENGIST:

Oh, and please, Knights: stay out of the water.

SISTER HORSA:

Oh, yes! Do not be tempted. Do not even dip a toe.

BROTHER HENGIST:

The things that come out of there... mm, they aren't right.

SISTER HORSA:

Poison to the touch, if you aren't careful.

BROTHER HENGIST:

And that's not even accounting for the hound..

SISTER HORSA:

Yes, the awful, howling hound..

MUSIC: FADES OUT.

CAROLINE (VO):

I have yet to hear the howl they spoke of. Only the wind, wailing in the distance. Only Sir Damien, wailing close by.

DAMIEN:

Tranquility! This is cursed water, Sir Angelo, and Saint Damien is the saint of waves, a sign of his wrath, do you know what it takes to invoke the wrath of the calmest saint, do you?! And then what could happen to Rilla..?!

ANGELO:

Please, please, you're talking nonsense! Sir Caroline, could you lend a... hand..

(PAUSE)

Sir Caroline?

CAROLINE (VO):

I could not investigate freely with them on my heels, and so I let Sir Angelo handle the situation. He seemed best suited to it.

Meanwhile, I investigated Ballast and tried to make sense of this fishing village without boats. It seems the fishermen of Ballast have built long piers which stretch out far into the water - some so far that it can take nearly an hour to reach the end by foot. The piers are lined with traps, which I gather the fishermen empty in the morning, repair throughout the day, and bait at night. But by the time I walked the village the sun had already begun to set and the fishermen were returning to their homes, but I saw three items of note:

First: a great many of the traps they dragged back with them were broken, the nets torn and the pots chipped.  
Second: there was a hollowness to each face, a hunger in each set of eyes. And third: not a single one would speak to me.

Evidently they don't care for outsiders here, whether by curse or habit. No matter. I don't much care for them, either.

The village has gone to sleep, since. We've been given rooms in Brother Hengist and Sister Horsa's abode. And an unsettling feeling has crept into me since darkness fell. It has something to do with the sound here. Sir Angelo managed to get a glass of ale into Sir Damien, and now, at last, the latter's moaning has quieted. The only sounds I hear now are Sir Angelo's outhouse trips every twenty minutes -

SOUND: BACKGROUND, ANGELO RUNNING TO THE OUTHOUSE.

ANGELO:

Hup-hup-hup-hup-hup!

CAROLINE (VO):

(IMITATING ANGELO)

"A knight must be ever-hydrated, Sir Caroline!" -

SOUND: OUTHOUSE DOOR CLOSES.

ANGELO:

Hup-hup-hup-hup-hup!

CAROLINE:

... and the sound of the water outside, lapping up against the docks.

Emotions are crucial evidence in magical affairs, and so this tightness in my chest may be too important to ignore. Or it may be my own associations clouding things: in the village I grew up in, the lapping of water was always accompanied by the creaking of boats through the night. Whether my sleeplessness is caused by a curse magical or a curse nostalgic I cannot yet report.

That is, in fact, why I started writing this status report in the first place - to see if it would put me to sleep. It has.

Goodnight. I will write tomorrow, unless I don't.  
S.C.

SOUND: PIGEON COOING, PEN SCRATCHING ON PAPER.

QUEEN (VO):

Sir Caroline,

Message received. Sending a boat to your location. Should arrive in ten days.

In the meantime, you are instructed to make yourselves useful to the people of Ballast. You are still Knights of the Crown, remember. I expect a report tomorrow.

Final note: this is perhaps not the case where you're from, but in the Second Citadel it is considered good manners to sign all correspondence with your name, title, and home. I expect to see this in the future.

Ever her subjects' servant,  
Queen Mira of the Second Citadel

SOUND: PEN SCRATCHING ON PAPER.

SIR CAROLINE (VO):

My Queen,

A reply by morning! My, you were up late. But that is what makes you the Queen - never resting, pleasure only for the latest hours.

If only your knights had such self-control. Sir Damien was found this morning on the shore, as pale and limp as Brother Hengist foresaw. Fear not: he was breathing. Snoring, in fact. We could hear him all the way to the other end of the village.

He is still groggy, but this is the story as best we could shake it out of him:

DAMIEN:

I was... what was I doing? Sir Angelo put me to bed, but! I was very, very sneaky, Sir Caroline. You would be proud. For I only pretended to sleep, yes, pretended, he he! And once you'd all fallen into slumber I found a wooden plank and tried to float across the lake with it.

ANGELO:

Begads, man! The water was poisoned!

DAMIEN:

Well, that's what the plank was for, wasn't it? And I wrapped my hands well enough to paddle, or so I thought. And then, then, I remember, I heard the howl.

CAROLINE:

Howl? Describe it.

DAMIEN:

It was like a hound, I recall... the noise made the calm water chop at the sides of my board. I thought it was the vengeance of Saint Damien, to kill me in the seat of his victory, and I prayed to him for help, and though the howling continued and the waves still struck my sides I felt... tranquil again... as though the waves... were rocking me... to...

(SNORES)

SOUND: SLAP. DAMIEN YELPS.

CAROLINE:

Keep talking.

DAMIEN:

I will ask you not to touch me again, you... fiend! I will not be touched by any woman except... oh, except...

(SOBBING)

Rillaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

CAROLINE (VO):

And that was all we managed to pry from Sir Damien.

(SIGH)

Two pieces of information were gained from this little voyage, at least: first, the howling. The clues Sir Damien has given us - the water shaking, the noise clearer over the lake, the houndlike wail - are more likely to suggest a monster than a curse. And the second piece of information regards the poison in the water. Because of Damien's fatigue but overall lack of illness we can conclude that the toxin must be a sleeping draught of some kind; not deadly in itself, but had Damien not taken the wooden plank he would certainly have drowned.

This combination of factors suggests a single simple conclusion: that there is a monster in the lake, but any

attempts to approach it will lead to our drowning.

Sir Angelo is... frustrated by this information.

ANGELO:

Well even if it would kill us, I don't see why we shouldn't just swim out there and grab the hound by the throat.

CAROLINE:

Do you feel like drowning today, Sir Angelo?

ANGELO:

Is my drowning a part of your cunning plan?

CAROLINE:

Not currently.

ANGELO:

Then I'm afraid I must pass on drowning for the moment. The Queen has commanded I do precisely as you say, and that I must do. Why, I'm really very lucky, I think! On two quests simultaneously! One from the Queen, and one from my very best rival! I find I'm never so happy as when I'm counting my blessings, Sir-

CAROLINE:

Sir Angelo. Please. Would you mind giving me just a moment of quiet? I'm trying to do some research.

ANGELO:

Oh, of course! Just as you say, Sir Caroline. Silence will be my sworn quest.

SOUND: SIR CAROLINE FLIPPING PAGES.

(PAUSE. HE HUMS, CATCHES HIMSELF, MUTTERS, "MY APOLOGIES," ANOTHER PAUSE.)

What are you... ehm, researching?

CAROLINE:

(SIGH)

I am attempting to determine what sort of monster we might be dealing with.

ANGELO:

Well, we've a wealth of evidence, haven't we? How many

monsters could there possibly be who howl, generate sleeping serum, and live underwater?

CAROLINE:

Look here.

SOUND: BOOK THUMPS ON TABLE.

ANGELO:

My, that's quite a tome. Is there... a chapter on howling sleep-inducing water creatures?

CAROLINE:

Sir Angelo, this is a *book* about howling, sleep-inducing water creatures.

ANGELO:

Oh. Well.

(PAUSE)

Perhaps... we should gather more evidence?

CAROLINE:

Yes. Perhaps we should.

ANGELO:

Ha HA, excellent! I'll go get Sir Damien!

SOUND: HE WALKS AWAY.

CAROLINE (VO):

The majority of this morning's investigation was done in the precious half-hour that followed, after Sir Angelo left and before he could find me again. I was given a tour of Ballast Village by Sister Horsa and Brother Hengist, who finally explained the curse's nature to me.

SISTER HORSA:

There's been a curse for years, of course.

BROTHER HENGIST:

It's sort of a tradition, you could say. We said a century but really that's just how far back the records go.

SISTER HORSA:

A few fish have always come up looking strange. Limp.

BROTHER HENGIST:

Pale.

SISTER HORSA:

Chewed-on. Bites taken out of them, you know.

BROTHER HENGIST:

But it's always what you'd expect from a scavenger, really, and the rest of the fish were perfectly fine to eat. Until... mm, how long would you say, Sister Horsa?

SISTER HORSA:

Two months ago.

BROTHER HENGIST:

I think three.

CAROLINE:

And how did the curse change then?

SISTER HORSA:

Well, then it was all the fish, of course.

CAROLINE:

All the fish... what?

BROTHER HENGIST:

All the fish are cursed now. Pale, limp, chewed-on.

SISTER HORSA:

Etcetera and so forth.

CAROLINE (VO):

They brought me by the nets to show me, and it was true. Every single eel, crab, sturgeon, and cuttlefish was pale and withered, with huge bites missing from it.

SISTER HORSA:

We can cut off the pale parts... but more and more of them come up cursed each day.

CAROLINE:

You said this has always happened?

BROTHER HENGIST:

As long as there has been a Ballast Village.

SISTER HORSA:

Though not to this degree.

CAROLINE (VO):

This was another thread to follow, at the very least. A sudden spike in the curselike phenomena could have suggested an increase in the monster population... but if until now the rate had stayed both stable and slow, why would it spike so suddenly? And why would it never have wavered before?

On the other hand: say this creature comes from the same magical family as the ash-dragon, of which there can only be one living member at any given time. This would explain the relative consistency... if not the recent increase.

So I returned to the library and found this:

ANGELO:

A "crocodile-hound?" What sort of nonsense is this?

CAROLINE:

Read it.

SOUND: BOOK WHUMPS TO THE DESK.

DAMIEN:

(SNORING, MUTTERING)

My heart, I must speak my...

(SNORING)

SOUND: ANGELO FLIPS PAGES.

ANGELO:

Hmm... "aquatic," yes, that's good... "exudes bio..." ehem, "bee-oh-loo-mi-ness-kent and hypnotic muck-oo-us," whatever that means...

"A loud and echoing howl!" This I can follow!

CAROLINE:

We can't be certain this is it, but... it at least gives us something to look for. The only other creature I can find which fits this description is the Venompore Axolotl, but...

ANGELO:

... but your innate senses as an investigator tell you otherwise. I see!

CAROLINE:

Regardless, there's one quick way to tell both what it is we hunt as well as where to hunt it: its nest. Crocodile-hounds nest on shore; Venompores nest underwater. If we can find the nest...

ANGELO:

Yes, yes, the alligator-dog it is, then. Sir Damien, look at this! It is the monster we shall slay together! Hup!

SOUND: ANGELO FOISTS THE BOOK AT DAMIEN.

DAMIEN:

(SNORTS AWAKE)  
Scales. Lizard! A lizaaaaaaard!

CAROLINE:

Sir Angelo!

ANGELO:

How was I to know? It hardly even resembles a lizard! More a frog-wolf-turtle-bear...

DAMIEN:

(MUTTERING TO HIMSELF IN THE BACKGROUND)  
Oh, my Rilla, it's that lizard, that fiend, Lord Arum, Swamp of... Ruler...

CAROLINE:

Just quiet him down now!

ANGELO:

Sir Damien, my friend, you must be *quiet!* This is a *library!* My apologies, Sir Caroline, but he insisted he come, and I didn't have the heart--

CAROLINE:

Could you just... read him a book, or something? Keep yourselves busy?

ANGELO:

An excellent idea, Sir Caroline! Here, my friend, curl up to your best rival, now...  
(CLEARS HIS THROAT)  
"Once upon a time, there was a man whose all-consuming love began a war and betrayed a nation..."

DAMIEN:

My heart, my treacherous heart! Rillaaaaaa!  
(SOBS)

CAROLINE (VO):

... Suffice it to say, we were then asked out of the library, and I found nothing else useful during this morning's investigation.

I must say, my Queen... I understand Sir Angelo. As irritating as I find him, I'm certain he'll be useful for tearing this beast in two when the time finally comes. But Sir Damien... I've been searching for nearly two weeks now, and I can find no reason you should keep him as close as you do.

Sir Angelo, myself, and at least half a dozen other knights are stronger fighters than he. When given a research task he collects turns of phrase instead of information. And with him around I can't even use Sir Angelo well, because they spend all of their time either sharing tall tales or tending to that imbecile's "heart." Whatever sentiment causes you to keep him in your guard I cannot fathom.

SOUND: PEN SCRATCHING ON PAPER.

At any rate. This should bring an end to my report. Sir Angelo has informed me that Sir Damien is fully awakening, and I'm certain he'll have to be watered or some such nonsense. I'll write again as the case develops.

Ah, and a final note: your suggestion about my signature has been taken. I hope you find this to be an improvement.

Love and loyalty,  
Sir Caroline of Right Here, Today

SOUND: PIGEON COOING, PEN SCRATCHING ON PAPER.

QUEEN (VO):

Sir Caroline:

Your comment at the beginning of today's report about my taking "pleasure in the latest hours" demonstrates disrespect, and worse, a complete misunderstanding of what authority demands. I have too much relying on me to rest -

and until you settle these monsters with powers of manipulation you had better spend your time working, too.

Your progress on the case so far has been good, but your management skills could use improvement. You are correct that you and Sir Angelo are more capable fighters than Sir Damien, but incorrect that this makes him a poor knight.

His single-mindedness may irritate you, but I suggest you learn to use it. He will fight when injured. He will never rest. When Sir Damien's been convinced the demons of his heart can be quieted with an action he will perform that action to the ends of the earth. In other words: if you want to succeed as a leader, learn to use what those around you excel at instead of wishing they were good at something else.

This is your last chance with your signature. I expect to see your full name on your next missive.

Queen Mira of the Second Citadel

SOUND: PEN SCRATCHING ON PAPER.

SIR CAROLINE (VO):

My Queen,

I received your letter yesterday evening and found the advice contained within very useful. I've taken your guidance on two counts. First: as per your suggestion, I spent the night working. After dinner, a local girl offered me a job and a room, and she and I worked on very important business in there for several hours.

VILLAGE GIRL EMILY:

(GIGGLING)

Oh, Sir Caroline!

(SHE KISSES HER)

SIR CAROLINE (VO):

(LAUGHS, SIGHS)

Sir Damien was a bit of a cold shower after that. He found me outside.

DAMIEN:

The hound! Sir Caroline, where have you been? The hound, I saw the hound out on the water, glowing like a ghoul and

howling, howling!

SIR CAROLINE (VO):

You see, this was the second piece of advice I took from you, my Queen: making use of what you call Sir Damien's singlemindedness, and what I might refer to as his incessant need to think and talk about the same topics for hours, days, and weeks at a time.

Well. Irritating or no, it worked. There. I've admitted it.

After yesterday morning's research we knew we had to watch the lake for the hound tonight. And the standard wisdom among knights in this case may be to break the watch into three shifts and assign each of these to one of us... But then it occurred to me: if Sir Angelo and I had missed the howling on our first night in Ballast, what were the odds we would miss it again? Sir Angelo would need to leave every twenty minutes to use the outhouse; I was exhausted. Our shifts would be a gamble I did not want to account for. And so I didn't.

ANGELO:

You expect him to stand watch over the lake all night?!

CAROLINE:

Not all night. Just until he sees the hound.

ANGELO:

Which he may not! Sir Caroline, I trust you as much as I might the Queen, but—

DAMIEN:

No, Sir Angelo. Please. I shall stand guard through the darkest, most solitary hours. It is to be my penance.

CAROLINE:

See? He wants to. Will you really deprive your rival of a challenge?

ANGELO:

(GASP)

Touche, Sir Caroline.

(CHUCKLE)

... but more than one member of this platoon can show some cunning.

CAROLINE:

And if I see you attempting to relieve him I'll make him stand watch every night for a month.

ANGELO:

Curses!

CAROLINE (VO):

And so Sir Damien stood watch all night, and just as you assured me, he did not rest. A few hours past midnight he spotted the hound. And better yet: he spotted its nest.

DAMIEN:

That hut in the distance, a few miles down shore. It is there I saw the beast retreat.

My bow is at the ready, Sir Caroline. I recommend we leave immediately. The beast should not be allowed to live another second.

ANGELO:

Ha ha, at last! A real fight!

CAROLINE:

No. We wait until morning, at least.

ANGELO:

For shame, Sir Damien! Such impatience!

DAMIEN:

Wait? Why should we wait! The beast lives there, now! We could be crossing this lake by boat within the hour!

CAROLINE:

Or we could be carting your corpse across the water within the hour. We don't know anything yet - about who lives in that hut, about what the hound might want from them.

DAMIEN:

But Rilla--!

CAROLINE:

And do you want some innocent's life taken because you couldn't wait one day to see your fiancée?

DAMIEN:

I...! No, of course, but...!

CAROLINE:

Then we'll ask Brother Hengist and Sister Horsa what they know come morning. For now, you rest. I prepare.

ANGELO:

An excellent plan! Come, Sir Damien. I'll bet I can fall asleep faster than you! Hup hup hup hup!

SOUND: ANGELO RUNNING.

DAMIEN:

As my ruler, I trust my Queen absolutely. But you, Sir Caroline... you may be her only mistake.

CAROLINE:

Go tuck Sir Angelo in, Sir Damien.

DAMIEN:

I won't stand for this. You just-

CAROLINE:

Unless you want to be removed from this investigation, you will go.

DAMIEN:

(PAUSE)

As you command, Investigator-General.

SOUND: HE WALKS OFF.

SIR CAROLINE (VO):

Come morning I spoke with Brother Hengist and Sister Horsa. I intended to do so alone, but found Sir Damien already waiting by their door when I arrived. I let him join our conversation and did not let him explain why he'd chosen to do so.

He was not to be my only frustration for the morning.

BROTHER HENGIST:

Ah, yes, the witch's hut!

SISTER HORSA:

We thought it would come to the witch eventually.

BROTHER HENGIST:

I did, too.

DAMIEN:

You... you did?!

CAROLINE:

If you were so certain, why didn't you say something earlier? Nobody's even mentioned a witch!

SISTER HORSA:

Well, we weren't sure, were we?

BROTHER HENGIST:

Didn't want to bring it up for nothing. Every home has its quirks.

SISTER HORSA:

Creaky floorboards.

BROTHER HENGIST:

An unusually cold basement.

SISTER HORSA:

A witch across the lake. And besides, it creates such an unnecessary risk.

BROTHER HENGIST:

His power comes from language. Words, that sort of thing. He controls people with them. Written, spoken... any sort at all.

SISTER HORSA:

(WHISPERED)

Even speaking of him now, we must be careful.

DAMIEN:

A creature that controls people with words? Sir Caroline...

CAROLINE:

Yes. The manipulative monsters.

Well. What do you feel safe telling us about this... witch?

BROTHER HENGIST AND SISTER HORSA:

(RELUCTANT SOUNDS)

SISTER HORSA:

Come into the basement.

BROTHER HENGIST:

Quickly. We think he finds it more difficult to reach us down there.

SOUND: KEYS UNLOCKING DOOR, DOOR OPENING.

SIR CAROLINE (VO):

We followed them downstairs.

SOUND: SEVERAL SETS OF FOOTSTEPS DOWNSTAIRS.

Brother Hengist gestured towards a crate in the back of the room, and Sister Horsa opened it to reveal... letters. Envelope after sealed envelope piled in stacks, each with the witch's name written on it. The twin seers have advised me not to speak or copy down that name - it carries power, they say.

SISTER HORSA:

They appear in the morning at our doorstep. They have come periodically through the years, but...

BROTHER HENGIST:

Most of these have come from the past few months.

SISTER HORSA:

Not every day, and not always our door, but... there they are.

DAMIEN:

All those letters... What on earth do they say?

BROTHER HENGIST:

No idea. I hope we never know.

SISTER HORSA:

The last man to open one drowned himself in the lake.

CAROLINE:

Could you... hold on. From the start, please. Who is this witch?

SISTER HORSA:

It started a long time ago...

BROTHER HENGIST:

Before we were ever born.

CAROLINE (VO):

He was an abomination, they said: a man taken over by monstrous magic who behaved like a giant child and devoured the souls of those he spoke to. For years he could be seen rowing his boat into that cursed lake each day, swimming in the scum each night.

Words were his weapon, and people feared to approach him. Men had died from his letters. He must have manipulated them, Hengist and Horsa said. Twisted their minds with his words.

How does the hound fit into this? I am not yet sure. A familiar, perhaps, or a transformation. They say the hound has appeared more and more the less that the witch has been seen swimming in the lake.

We took our leave of them then, but not before one last warning:

BROTHER HENGIST:

You must not let him speak to you.

SISTER HORSA:

Listen to one word, just one... and you might drown yourself.

SOUND: DOOR CLOSES.

DAMIEN:

Yet more monsters of manipulation... is there no stopper to the fount of Hell...?

CAROLINE:

I believe that's what we are, Sir Damien. We leave at nightfall, once the hound is out on the lake. Then we'll only have one monster to contend with.

DAMIEN:

Your strategy is... sound, Sir Caroline. Tonight, then.

CAROLINE (VO):

Sir Angelo has been informed, and preparations are on their way. Ballast's witch problem ends tonight.

Don't bother writing back, my Queen - we are leaving now,

and I am perfectly happy to tell you if we are dead.

Yours,  
Sir Caroline

SOUND: PEN SCRATCHING ON PAPER.

CAROLINE (VO):

My Queen,

We have returned from our mission. And as I predicted, the Witch is dead... but I am less certain than ever before that there are no monsters in Ballast Village.

(SIGH)

Where to begin? This was one of those nights, my Queen, when it seems the whole world is happening at once. But then I suppose you must know that feeling, with the world ever on your shoulders. A long, long night...

(SIGH)

I think I shall start with the pigeon. Yes, the pigeon - then I may keep you in some suspense, at least.

SOUND: WEAK FLAPPING, PIGEON NOISES.

You may have noticed the old bird currently moldering on your windowsill is not the aquamarine-and-gold-speckled dove your correspondence usually rides with. This balding, gray thing looks at best sick, and more likely cursed. It has a right to the latter: after all, it belonged to the witch of Ballast.

SOUND: MANY PIGEON NOISES.

One of many, you should understand. That was the first thing we heard, on approaching the witch's hut: pigeons. An endless fluttering of wings, a cacophony of cooing. Dozens of pigeons, perhaps hundreds, nesting on the hut's roof, in the windows, cracks in the walls - absolutely everywhere. The haphazard way they'd built their nests and pulled at the roof's thatch made them appear closer to an infestation than invited pets. But it is, of course, the way of monsters to infest, and overrun that which attempts order - and so Sir Damien drew his bow.

SOUND: BOWSTRING DRAWN.

DAMIEN:

This must be the place. The witch's dwelling... All the people he's killed...! I should have patrolled here sooner! Why didn't I come sooner?

CAROLINE (VO):

We stepped closer, and heard a wooden creak - familiar to me, but strangely alien in this lakeside village.

SOUND: WOODEN CREAKS, WATER LAPPING.

ANGELO:

Do you hear that? The beast! It strikes from the shore! Have at thee, monster!

SOUND: HE RUNS TO IT.

CAROLINE (VO):

But when we pushed through the reeds to find it we saw that it was merely a wooden boat: a one-man canoe creaking on the water, as we hadn't heard since our arrival in Ballast.

But this, at least, was enough to assure Sir Angelo that the leaders of Ballast had told the truth... and so he drew his sword.

SOUND: BOAT CREAKING, SIR ANGELO DRAWS HIS SWORD.

ANGELO:

Now is the time. Before the hound returns, Sir Caroline.

CAROLINE (VO):

And so we entered the witch's hut.

SOUND: DOOR LOUDLY CREAKS OPEN. THEN FLIES BUZZING.

ANGELO:

Oh! Oh... oh my...

MUSIC: BEGINS.

DAMIEN:

W-what in the...? What hellish hovel...?

CAROLINE (VO):

Meat, my Queen.

Rotting meat on every surface. Small and delicate bones

sticking from the pulp. The husks of fish, otters, crabs...  
The stench was unbearable. The blood clung to my boot.

And at last, I drew my sword.

SOUND: SIR CAROLINE DRAWS HER SWORD.

ANGELO:

Sir Caroline...?

CAROLINE:

I hear breathing in that room just ahead. Follow.

SOUND: THEIR FOOTSTEPS, FLIES BUZZING.

CAROLINE (VO):

The next room was, if possible, worse than the first. The piles of meat grew higher; here and there the weak flopping of a tail could give an entire mound of rot the illusion of life. Pigeons pecked at the mass and roosted in the rafters. And at the center of it all, beneath the sheets of a sodden bed, lay the witch.

DAMIEN:

There he is...! One shot, before he wakes...!

SOUND: HIS BOW DRAWS, AN ARROW IS FIRED AND PINGS OFF SIR ANGELO'S ARMOR.

Sir Angelo! Step aside.

ANGELO:

I... may. In a moment. I only need a moment.

DAMIEN:

Get out of my way.

VIVIAN:

(RASPY BREATH)

DAMIEN:

Do you hear? He draws breath! Quickly, before he speaks!

ANGELO:

No.

DAMIEN:

But Angelo—

ANGELO:

Look at him, Sir Damien. He's... he's just an old man.

VIVIAN:

(RASPY BREATHING)

CAROLINE (VO):

He certainly looked like one. An old, sick man, lying beneath... ehm, rotting meat.

I tried as best I could to take stock of the information available to us. It was difficult with Sir Damien and Sir Angelo's bickering.

DAMIEN:

An old man...?

He's already corrupted your mind, hasn't he? His words... we must have missed some words he wrote. Something carved into the doorframe, perhaps, or his accursed canoe...

ANGELO:

My friend, you are very tired—

DAMIEN:

Please, Sir Angelo, please! Cast out this curse and let me kill him! I can't lose you too, not my best rival, not like Rilla, not like—

ANGELO:

I cannot kill this man!

VIVIAN:

Hello? Who's there? Is that... Nimue?

DAMIEN:

He speaks. Oh Saints, Sir Angelo, quickly, before he spreads his curse!

CAROLINE (VO):

Cursed words, a crate of unopened letters, a boat on the boatless river, a hound with sudden appetite, a room full of rotting meat, a sick old man. And now two knights, fighting over whether he should live or die... without allowing him a single word in his defense.

SOUND: SHE WALKS TOWARDS VIVIAN.

DAMIEN:

Sir Caroline? Sir Caroline, what are you doing? Back away from him! Please, protect yourself, don't let him speak!

VIVIAN:

Who... who are you? My Nimue... did she...?  
(COUGHING FIT)

MUSIC: FADES OUT.

CAROLINE (VO):

The witch's eyes were cloudy as marble, and stared somewhere far, far past me. His lips were cracked and dry and bleeding. I opened my canteen and gave him a drink.

SOUND: HE DRINKS.

VIVIAN:

Thank you. You are... who are you...?

DAMIEN:

Don't!

CAROLINE:

My name is Caroline.

DAMIEN:

No, no, no, no, no, no...

VIVIAN:

Caroline...  
(HE COUGHS, LAUGHS QUIETLY)  
Visitors, at this late hour... I never would have thought...

SOUND: FLIES BUZZING, THE HOUND HOWLS OUTSIDE.

DAMIEN:

That's it! That's the sound I heard! The hound!

SOUND: THE HOUND HOWLS CLOSER.

ANGELO:

The beast approaches.

CAROLINE (VO):

There was a terrible crashing at the window.

SOUND: SHATTERING GLASS. PIGEONS FLUTTERING AWAY.

And then, standing in the room with us... the crocodile-hound.

SOUND: GROWLING AND PANTING, DRIPPING.

There passed the single moment that always comes before a fight, no matter how prepared the combatants. Even an ambush has a breath before it starts - never long enough to think, my Queen. Only act.

The hound growled. Sir Angelo and Sir Damien drew their weapons.

SOUND: GROWLING, WEAPONS DRAWN.

CAROLINE:

(AT THE SAME TIME AS VIVIAN)

Stop!

VIVIAN:

(AT THE SAME TIME AS CAROLINE)

Stop, Nimue!

ANGELO:

Sir Caroline, to let a man live is one thing, but a *monster-*

DAMIEN:

I know how it is to let affairs of the heart interrupt one's duty, Sir Caroline, and please, whatever sympathy you feel-

CAROLINE:

Put down your weapons.

ANGELO:

But why?

CAROLINE:

Because as long as I hold the authority of the Queen you will do exactly as I say. Now put down your weapons.

ANGELO:  
Of... course.

SOUND: HE SHEATHES HIS SWORD.

CAROLINE:  
Sir Damien.

DAMIEN:  
I will not fire. But if it means protecting my fellow knights I will keep my bow drawn.

SOUND: THE HOUND GROWLS, BARKS.

VIVIAN:  
Nimue, stop... Nimue, please...

CAROLINE:  
Keeping your bow drawn may be what endangers us, Sir Damien.

SOUND: MORE GROWLING.

DAMIEN:  
(DEEP BREATH)  
Your Tranquility, your Tranquility...

SOUND: GROWLING QUIETS.

VIVIAN:  
Yes, that's it... Shh, my Nimue, shh, milady...

CAROLINE (VO):  
The witch reached out a hand and the hound nuzzled it with a slime-covered snout. It then put its forepaws on the side of the bed, opened its maw, and onto the witch's stomach poured fish - some alive, some dead; some chewed, some swallowed whole, some reduced to pieces and pulp. The hound nudged a few of the fresher-looking pieces toward the witch, who dutifully pretended to eat them; then it padded to the side of the room, curled up on the floor, and watched us with three wary yellow eyes.

VIVIAN:  
I apologize for the... ehm, mess.  
(CHUCKLE-COUGH)  
I would offer you something, but I'm certain you would not

take it.

CAROLINE:  
Likely not.

SOUND: SHE SITS ON THE BEDSIDE. SQUELCHING.

So *that*... is Nimue.

VIVIAN:  
Indeed.

CAROLINE:  
And you are?

VIVIAN:  
Vivian.  
(RASPY BREATH)

CAROLINE (VO):  
He had been a fisherman of the old style, with boats instead of piers, as his mother had been before him and her father before her. His family had always been disliked and distrusted for this - but the name "witch" had not come until his lifetime.

DAMIEN:  
The seers of Ballast say that your letters have... killed men before.

VIVIAN:  
And is that a question or an accusation?

CAROLINE:  
You tell us.

VIVIAN:  
Not "men."  
(COUGHING)  
Just one.

CAROLINE (VO):  
And long enough ago that they had been boys, really - the both of them.

In Vivian's youth the son of a carpenter had made the long trek along the shore to come to this hut in the night,

again and again, for months. The relationship was, in Vivian's words, "tolerated" - as you've informed me, such closeness, however intimate, is considered a natural behavior in children in this kingdom, so long as childish things are soon put away. But the carpenter's son and Vivian would not put it away.

And after one such late-night visit the boy left Vivian in tears, and could not be persuaded to leave his bedroom. His parents asked Vivian to help them and after months of this he sent what he called,

VIVIAN:

One final letter. To make everything clear.

CAROLINE:

And sure enough, the boy's tears stopped. If he seemed no happier, his parents thought, perhaps he was just tired - and so they let him go to bed.

The next morning the boy was found dead in the lake.

Vivian still kept a carving of this boy by his bedside, rough-cut wood worn smooth by decades of touch. I handed it to him and he ran his fingers over it, brow, cheeks, chin, and was silent. Of this relationship Sir Damien and Sir Angelo asked no more, for I did not let them.

ANGELO:

But... it's our duty, isn't it?

DAMIEN:

To gather the facts, determine whether this man is a monster, and-

CAROLINE:

Some stories do not have to be told.

CAROLINE (VO):

The people of Ballast would have nothing to do with him after that, though they never explained why. First they chased him away; then they carved "WITCH" into stones with which they broke his windows; and then... they feared him.

His solitude continued for three years - fixing his home, fishing, sending letters to see if anyone would respond - until the day his rod caught something he had never seen

before.

VIVIAN:

Nimue.

She was so small then. My mother had told me tales of a crocodile-hound, but nothing like what I saw - what she described was a great, hoary thing, with tusks covered in algae. But this was a hatchling with a broken fin, injured, too small to care for itself. And so I took it in.

CAROLINE (VO):

For years, Vivian was the hound's mother. He taught her which fish had the most meat, where the snails lived, how to swim without her broken fin. He fed her, cared for her... and in so doing taught her how to care for another.

VIVIAN:

And then I grew sick. It was terrible. I couldn't move, let alone fish. Days passed. We starved. I tried to pull myself into the boat to feed us and couldn't even make it to the door. And then, one day... Fish. In my home. Brought to me by Nimue.

(COUGH)

Of course, I got my energy back after that. For a while. And when I'd grow tired Nimue would fish for me, and I would improve for a while, and then I'd be sick again. Until one day I just... didn't improve.

CAROLINE (VO):

I suspected, as Vivian did, that the hound understood feeding, but not much else. If he improved when fed, feed more; and if feeding didn't work... keep feeding.

VIVIAN:

Most of this mess is from within the last few months. I just can't get out of bed to clean it anymore. Haven't been able to shoo the pigeons out for years - my first pair laid eggs decades ago and now... this.

ANGELO:

You... must have called for help, though? You couldn't possibly be expected to do all this alone... to suffer, alone...

VIVIAN:

I sent letters, of course. But none were ever answered.

DAMIEN:

Saints, that crate...

VIVIAN:

I don't care what happens to me. But I can't imagine what kind of trouble she must be causing to get all this, and...  
(COUGHS)

To tell you the truth, Knights, I want her to be free. But I know she won't leave me until I die.

(PAUSE)

And really I want her to be free much sooner than my body will let me.

ANGELO:

We can't...what? We could never do such a thing!

VIVIAN:

Knights slay monsters, don't they? Seems convenient. There's a witch right in front of you.

ANGELO:

Well... Saints' sake, my good witch, there must be another way! Don't become disheartened! Let's see, now... Ha ha, I have it! I will bring you home with me, you and your loyal hound! You shall have all the fish you like, I will bring it to you, and the softest bed in all the land-

VIVIAN:

No. Thank you. This is my home. It's always been my family's home. And I don't want to leave it. Besides... we know what Nimue is.

CAROLINE:

A monster.

VIVIAN:

A monster. She is my monster, but... she is difficult to control. Around so many people, who knows...

DAMIEN:

It is our sworn duty to kill monsters. "To cleanse the monsters' blight upon this land."

CAROLINE:

The hound is the only thing keeping this man alive, Sir Damien. To kill it would be a killing twice over.

DAMIEN:

I... I did not mean to say we should, only to remind us of...

My apologies, my apologies.

VIVIAN:

I am nearly out of strength for the day, Knights. I would like an answer. I would like to be awake for this.

DAMIEN:

Investigator-General. We await your command.

CAROLINE:

Oh, so now that the decision's become distasteful it's on me to make it. Is that right?

DAMIEN:

No, no, not at all, only-

CAROLINE:

Only what?

ANGELO:

Sir Caroline, I really don't think this is necessary-

CAROLINE:

Only what, Sir Damien?

DAMIEN:

A true Knight of the Crown understands that Unity entails trust. I trust Sir Angelo's strength, and his loyalty. I trust the Queen's leadership absolutely. And that means I must trust you completely, as my Investigator-General.

I am sorry if I have implied otherwise. My heart has betrayed me this day, and I have betrayed my Citadel.

CAROLINE:

(GRUNT. PAUSE.)

Sir Angelo, I believe I have made up my mind.

ANGELO:

Until we return to the Citadel the Queen's authority is your own, Sir Caroline.

CAROLINE:

I would like you to restrain the hound and bring her outside, please. Do not hurt her any more than necessary, and take care only to touch her with your armor.

ANGELO:

(DEEP BREATH)

Yes, Sir Caroline.

(A PAUSE, THEN GRUNTING AS HE PULLS NIMUE OUT)

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS. NIMUE GROWLING, BARKING AND SNAPPING. A LONG HOWL AS SHE'S DRAGGED OUT.

DAMIEN:

Such loyalty... and from a monster...

(PAUSE)

Do you really think they can feel such things, Sir Caroline?

CAROLINE:

I think it is far too easy to think someone else doesn't feel, Sir Damien. Now go help Angelo.

DAMIEN:

As you command, Investigator-General.

SOUND: DAMIEN'S FOOTSTEPS, DOOR CLOSES.

VIVIAN:

It has been a long time since I've spoken with anyone.

CAROLINE:

Did you miss it?

VIVIAN:

Not really.

(CHUCKLE-COUGH)

Do you think that strange, Caroline? To be alone all this time and not be lonely? Perhaps I am a witch after all.

CAROLINE:

I have known witches, and I do not think you are one. But I do think you're strange.

VIVIAN:

Do you think I've made a mistake, then? Choosing to live my life this way?

CAROLINE:

I think the only way I could know that is to have lived it myself, Vivian, and that I do not plan to do. I don't much care for rotting meat.

VIVIAN:

(CHUCKLE)

Perhaps that is wisest.

CAROLINE (VO):

(PAUSE)

After my business was done, Sir Angelo deposited the hound deep in the forest, and Sir Damien helped me bury Vivian nearby. When we returned to the village, Brother Hengist and Sister Horsa seemed neither surprised nor particularly concerned by what we told them. "An understandable mistake," they said.

We still await the boat you send us. They have shown us the one they've promised and it has nearly rotted away to nothing.

Your faithful servant,  
S.C.

SOUND: PEN SCRATCHING ON PAPER.

QUEEN (VO):

Sir Caroline,

Thank you for your report. Hengist and Horsa's actions are unfortunate, and do not embody the unified ideal of our Second Citadel. They will be spoken to. It will be made clear that this will not happen again.

It is very late as I write, and the moon seems especially bold. Perhaps exhaustion pushes me to say this but your story makes me think of an old tutor of mine, who once had me research all of the historical associations with the moon to determine whether it is a source of human power or monstrous power. After a month of poring over books I finally admitted I couldn't find the answer: that I couldn't decide whether to weigh the chaos of nature over the perfect order of the sphere, or the danger of night over the power of light. And at the end of all this he told me, finally... that I was exactly correct. My confusion was the answer, and this was why we must fear and revere the

moon in equal measure.

I never liked that tutor very much, come to think of it. But when he died I thought it proper to attend his funeral, as he had spent five years teaching me... and I was horrified to find that I was the only person who came.

The story of this Vivian makes me think of that tutor, who spent his life with books and riddles instead of people and died alone. And it makes me think of you. It makes me think of your girl in Ballast, and what it says about your life, Sir Caroline.

I will refrain from commenting upon the appropriateness of such a juvenile encounter while on official duty. The common wisdom may be that most grow past such encounters with members of the same sex when they are children - but as I said to you before, I have learned slowly over my years in this position that it does one no good to wish one's subordinates be anyone other than who they are, and I do not know how things are done in your land. And so if you are capable of having feelings for this woman... you should pursue them. And if not, I hope you will find someone with whom you could pursue something deeper. As we say in the Second Citadel: two in unity. Simple. Strong.

Because I worry that the surface-level kinds of connections you take such glee in flaunting now aren't going to last you forever. You may delight in forgetting this girl's name now, but take it from someone who has had isolation forced upon her: what shortens your nights now may not shorten them forever, and a life of long nights can be very, very long.

Vivian had a choice, once, as did my tutor, but their times have passed. I never had one. But you, Caroline - there is still time for you. If you found peace with this Ballast girl, or if you've found peace in others like her... I hope you will grab hold of it before it slips away.

You will forgive me if this is overly personal. As I've said, it is very late, and several days since I've slept. If this man's story has affected me this much perhaps I do need rest after all.

Ever her subjects' servant,  
Queen Mira of the Second Citadel

SOUND: PEN SCRATCHING ON PAPER.

CAROLINE (VO):

My Queen,

You'll refrain from telling me what to do in my personal business. As a commander you are unparalleled; but in personal life you are, if I may be so blunt, tragic.

"Delight in forgetting her name?" Of course I remember her name. What I don't remember is the part of my Vows of Knighthood which state that I must breach the privacy of everyone I share time with for the sake of your curiosity. For one night, I fit into this girl's life well, and she fit into mine, and that is all you need know because it is all I've decided to say.

MUSIC: BEGINS.

In the case of the Ballast witch I cannot guess what he wanted in life, nor do I care to. The only thing I know for sure that he wanted is that which I gave him, in the end. This moment, as I sit outside his hut early in the morning and tally the evidence that has appeared since we left, I cannot tell how even the crocodile-hound felt. There are claw marks in the door; a few of the pigeons have been devoured; and now it has gone. It found its way home, raged, and left. Whether this is loyalty, as Sir Damien asked, or something more bestial, I cannot say.

All I know is this: Vivian lived in the way he chose. That you and everyone feel the need to give your pronouncement on it should answer why I don't speak of my life: so that you may neither feel you can comment on how I live it, nor feel that by living it I am commenting on anyone else's. I am only myself. I can only want what I want.

Right now there are two things I want. First: Vivian's canoe. It is in good repair, and large enough for one person. I think I'll take it.

And the second thing I want is to be rid of these wretched status reports. They take entirely too much of my time. I will be hunting the manipulative monsters on my own, from here; send your pigeon again and it will be my dinner.

Good night, my Queen. Sleep well,  
Sir Caroline of the Southern Frosts

MUSIC: ENDS.

SOUND: MUSIC, TROLLEY NOISES FADE IN.

CONDUCTOR:

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If you support us on Patreon at the \$10 level or higher, you will receive access to commentary tracks like this one, from actors Kate Jones and Leslie Drescher, and co-creator Kevin Vibert.

SOUND: TROLLEY DOOR OPENS.

LESLIE:

I just love it so much!

KEVIN:

Angelo and Rita make me think about the fact that there's like a certain kind of... there's a certain kind of obliviousness that's actually a really good character trait. You know?

KATE:

Yeah.

KEVIN:

There's like a...

KATE:

They don't notice the hate--

LESLIE:

Right!

KEVIN:

Right!

KATE:

--radiating towards them, so they, or the hate in the world

in general.

KEVIN:

Right.

LESLIE:

Or just like, it bounces off them. Who else can, can a person- Sir Caroline, maybe- spew all that hate at and he's like "Fantastic! I LOVE it!"

SOUND: TROLLEY DOOR CLOSES.

CONDUCTOR:

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We would like to give special thanks to all who support us on Patreon, but especially to Francie Liana, Charlie Spiegel, Minchowski, Jamie Gunter, and The Princess and the Scrivener for their incredibly generous contributions per episode. Thank you.

This tale - "Lady of the Lake" - was told by the following people:

Leslie Drescher as Sir Caroline;  
 Kat Buckingham as The Queen;  
 M. Sutherland as Sir Angelo;  
 Matthew Zahnzinger as Sir Damien;  
 Simon Moody as Vivian;  
 and Kate Jones as Brother Hengist and Sister Horsa.

On staff at the Penumbra:

Kevin Vibert is our lead writer and recording engineer.  
 Sophie Kaner is our director and sound designer.  
 Grahame Turner is our script editor.  
 Noah Simes is our production manager.  
 Alice Chuang is our designer and financial manager.  
 Kat Buckingham is our publicity director.  
 Original music by Ryan Vibert.

Promotional art by Mikaela Buckley.

The Penumbra is created and produced by Sophie Kaner and Kevin Vibert.

I'm afraid this is the end of the line for today, dear Traveler. We hope you will ride with the Penumbra again soon.

SOUND: FADE.

(Transcript by Avi Meehan and edited by Kevin Vibert.)