

CURSED

"Nimue"

Episode 101

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EXT. UNDER THE LAKE - DAY

Underwater. Peaceful. Beams of sunlight through blue.

Words appear over the shimmering stillness:

*"But there was heard among the holy hymns,
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells
Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms
May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,
Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord."*

- Idylls of the King, Alfred Lord Tennyson

Then a VOICE:

NIMUE (V.O.)
Where to begin?

There is an implosion as a BODY impacts the still waters.
Blood and bubbles churn.

THE BODY OF A GIRL turns toward us. Eyes closed. Mouth open.
Two longbow arrows protrude from her shoulder and lower ribs.
She clutches an ancient sword to her breast.

NIMUE (V.O.)
With water?

As she sinks deeper, the blue water turns dark and cold.

NIMUE (V.O.)
Or with fire?

SLAM CUT TO:

EXT. DRUID VILLAGE - DAY

The sound of CRACKLING WOOD. A pilgrim priest - FATHER CARDEN (60s) - wears the simple red robes of a Christian monk. He sits with a PEASANT BOY (8) on a wagon. The boy breathes like he's been running. There is soot on his cheeks. Father Carden pats the boy's knee. He speaks in a conspiratorial whisper.

FATHER CARDEN
God is love. It is a love that
purifies, sanctifies and unites us.
And God sees. And today he smiles.
Because we have done his work
today.

The boy nods.

FATHER CARDEN (CONT'D)
You see, God made most of us in His
image. This is His garden. We are
only His shepherds. And we must
tend His garden.

Father Carden holds up a wide Maple leaf. Smiles at the boy.
He brings the leaf down and holds it next to the boy's hand.

The boy's hand turns the color and texture of the Maple leaf.

The boy looks up, worried, at Carden, who sighs.

FATHER CARDEN (CONT'D)
We have to wash the garden clean.
Pull the weeds. Expel the blackened
humours of Demonism. Yes?

The boy doesn't know if he should nod or not.

FATHER CARDEN (CONT'D)
Demons wear many faces, you see.
Scary ones. Shy ones.
(touches the boy's chin)
Young ones.

He pats the boy again on the knee as he stands up.

FATHER CARDEN (CONT'D)
We do His work today.

Father Carden turns to a tonsured monk in red robes and with
a small gesture the boy is carried away.

Blackening smoke and red chunks of ash plume about Father
Carden's robes as...

...WE SWING AROUND TO:

A VILLAGE IN FLAMES. A mob of mothers, elderly and children
howl and plead to Carden who looks down - tenderly - upon the
suffering from his perch on the wagon.

Carden's army - THE RED PALADINS - tonsured monks on
horseback and on foot, with scythes and swords, swarm the
village, cutting down some, capturing and dragging others to
the pyre as Father Carden mounts his horse and RIDES...

...followed by his RED PALADIN HORSEMEN...

...far in the distance behind them BODIES burn on flaming crosses. Screams RISE and become...

CUT TO:

EXT. THE IRON WOOD - DAY

...the CHATTERING of cicadas.

Sunlight dapples through a high canopy of green leaves as NIMUE (17, restless and curious) and SQUIRREL (10, a handful) climb through their forest, which long ago devoured a vast Druidic city. The only remnants of that city are the vine-covered-rock-slabs that give the forest its uneven floor.

SQUIRREL

But why do you have to leave?

NIMUE

I'm not going yet.

SQUIRREL

But why do you *want* to leave?

NIMUE

(thinks about this)

I don't know. Don't you want to see things you haven't seen before?

SQUIRREL

Like a Moon Wing?

NIMUE

Yes. Or the ocean?

SQUIRREL

Are you going to leave and never come back like Gawain?

This name obviously means something to Nimue.

NIMUE

He might still come back.

SQUIRREL

Is that who you're going looking for?

NIMUE

What? No, don't be ridiculous.

Nimue pinches Squirrel's arm.

SQUIRREL

Ow!

NIMUE

Now pay attention: I'm tired of saving your little butt during lessons.

Nimue holds up a slender root. Squirrel rolls her eyes.

SQUIRREL

Osha. It protects us from the Dark Gods.

NIMUE

And?

SQUIRREL

Good for sore throats?

Nimue points at another plant growing under the rocks.

SQUIRREL (CONT'D)

Bloodwort. For hexes.

(beat)

And for hangovers.

NIMUE

What do you know about hangovers?

Nimue pushes Squirrel over. Squirrel gives chase, overtaking Nimue. They climb atop a 20-foot-tall, carved stone face. From their perch they look out over the rolling green hills and homes of DEWDENN.

SQUIRREL

I'll miss you.

NIMUE

You will?

Nimue gives her a gentle hip check.

NIMUE (CONT'D)

I'll miss you too.

SQUIRREL

Does your mother know you're leaving?

A HUM from somewhere in the woods behind them draws Nimue's attention. Nimue sees something MOVE around the trees.

NIMUE

Head on back, Squirrel. I still
need to collect a few things.

SQUIRREL

Yay! No more learning!

Squirrel is off like a shot. Nimue turns back to the woods.

She walks towards the trees.

She touches the moss on the stones and listens to the forest.
To the breeze through the branches. The whistles of birds.
The rattle of leaves on the ground.

Nimue concentrates and she can barely pick up TINY WHISPERING
VOICES inside the sounds. Barely perceptible words in a
language not our own. The whispering builds in excitement.
The chatter intensifies. And then...

...ends abruptly.

Clouds pass over the sun. A chill ripples through the forest.

Nimue turns to a FAWN standing next to her, staring at her
with fathomless black eyes. Its mind reaches out to her.

FAWN VOICES

Nimue--

FAWN VOICES

Afraid--

FAWN VOICES (CONT'D)

She's afraid--

FAWN VOICES (CONT'D)

Death--

FAWN VOICES (CONT'D)

Death is not the end--

FAWN VOICES (CONT'D)

Don't be afraid--

FAWN VOICES (CONT'D)

Death--

FAWN VOICES (CONT'D)

Nimue--

FAWN VOICES (CONT'D)

Is not the end--

The HUM intensifies. Nimue stares into the fawn's ancient
eyes. A hesitant question forms on her lips.

NIMUE

Who will...?

Then a TWANG of a catgut string and an arrow THUDS into the
neck of the fawn. Nimue GASPS and turns, enraged...

...to JOSSE (16, heavyset), a villager who pumps his fist in
victory. He approaches.

NIMUE (CONT'D)

What did you do?!

Nimue turns back to the fawn, dead in the leaves.

JOSSE

Shot supper.

Josse walks over and grabs the fawn by the legs but Nimue grabs his longbow and SNAPS it in two over her knee.

JOSSE (CONT'D)

What'd you do, you crazy hag!?!
That's my Dad's!

Josse shoves Nimue hard against the tree and salvages what's left of the bow.

NIMUE

Get out of my forest!

JOSSE

Your forest? They're right about
you, you're cracked!

Josse throws the dead fawn around his shoulders. Nimue rears back to punch Josse's face in when...

LENORE (O.S.)

(cold)

Nimue.

Josse and Nimue turn to Nimue's elegant and imposing mother, LENORE (50s), standing in the wood. Josse stomps away.

JOSSE

You'll hear about this, you hag!

NIMUE

Fool!

Nimue glances back at Lenore's disapproving gaze.

EXT. FOREST - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Lenore walks through the tall grasses three steps ahead of Nimue who hurries to catch up. A BELL sounds in the distance.

LENORE

You'll fix the bow.

NIMUE

Josse is a halfwit.

LENORE

And you will apologize to the father.

NIMUE

Another halfwit. I don't suppose you'd care to hear my side? Of course you don't.

LENORE

That fawn will feed many hungry mouths.

NIMUE

It was more than a fawn.

LENORE

Of course it was and the proper rituals will be offered.

NIMUE

You're not listening--!

LENORE

(turns to her)

I know you see them. I know you hear them. Even in ways I'll never understand.

Her mother's honesty disarms Nimue.

LENORE (CONT'D)

But such a gift is a privilege, not a right. To be received with grace and humility.

The bell sounds again. Lenore sighs as she holds up the muddy torn hem of Nimue's dress.

LENORE (CONT'D)

You couldn't climb in something else?

NIMUE

Why do I even have to attend this at all?

LENORE

We choose a Summoner once a generation. You're my daughter and should stand by my side.

Lenore steps through a veil of vines and into...

INT. SUNKEN TEMPLE - DEWDENN - DAY

...a vast sunken temple. Nimue and Lenore walk a narrow pathway that winds along the enormous sculpted walls. The eroding images speak to hundreds of centuries of worship.

One hundred feet below, a wide shaft of sunlight shines on a SACRED ALTAR. VILLAGE ELDERS assemble there, awaiting Lenore.

INT. SACRED ALTAR - SUNKEN TEMPLE - MOMENTS LATER

As Nimue self-consciously drifts into the shadows, Lenore joins A YOUNG DRUID - CLOVIS (23) - who kneels by the altar wearing the ritual robes and ornamental beads of the Chief's apprentice. Lenore offers her hand to Clovis. He rises. He beams at his father GUSTAVE (50s) among the Elders.

LENORE

Let us enter the Sacred Circle.

Lenore, Clovis and the Elders enter the circle of sunlight.

LENORE (CONT'D)

As Sky Folk we give thanks to the light that gives life. We are born with the dawn.

ELDERS

And pass in the twilight.

LENORE

(pause)

The Hidden are now present.

At this, slender, silvery vines appear on the necks and cheeks of Lenore and the Elders. A sign of the HIDDEN.

Though Nimue is not in the circle, a silvery vine winds up her neck and cheek also.

LENORE (CONT'D)

Since our dear Agatha passed to the next plane we have been without a Summoner. Clovis, son of Gustave our Healer, has been one of my best students. His aptitude for crafting medicines from the wild herbs of the Iron Wood exceeds even his father's.

There are CHUCKLES from the circle.

LENORE (CONT'D)
I'm very proud of him.

Lenore's smile fades as she turns back to the Elders.

LENORE (CONT'D)
But more than anything the Summoner represents our mortal bridge to the Invisible Realms. It falls to the Summoner to intuit the wishes of the Hidden and to make the offerings that can mean the difference between a bountiful harvest and famine, rain and drought, health and plague.
(beat)
I have knelt at this altar for many hours over this decision. And I am sorry, Clovis, but I have changed my mind. I name Nimue as the new Summoner.

Nimue looks up, stunned. The Elders exchange confused looks. Clovis frowns with confusion.

GUSTAVE (O.S.)
But, Lenore--

Lenore turns to Clovis's father, Gustave.

GUSTAVE (CONT'D)
Clovis is in line.

LENORE
I believe Nimue is best suited to the task.

The Elders' protests grow in anger. FLORENTIN THE MILLER tries reason.

FLORENTIN
Nimue is too young.

LENORE
True, she would be young for a Summoner but her connection to the Fey Invisible is unique.

An older Druid - LUCIEN (70), wearer of a perpetual scowl - steps up.

LUCIEN

Then let us be honest: it is not
only the Hidden that are drawn to
her.

Lucien's boldness makes the Elders nervous. He's touched a
nerve. Lenore's cool demeanor grows noticeably cooler.

LUCIEN (CONT'D)

After all, we know she is marked by
Dark Gods.

Nimue's eyes flash shock, then anger.

LENORE

You forget yourself, Lucien.

Lucien is out on a limb. Either age or envy makes him bold.

LUCIEN

Isn't this why the father left?
Isn't this why Jonah abandoned his
clan rather than live under the
same--?

NIMUE (O.S.)

I don't want it!

Everyone turns to Nimue who steps out of the shadows, livid.

NIMUE (CONT'D)

I don't want to be your Summoner.

Nimue runs up the path.

LENORE

Nimue!

LUCIEN

Why should we trust her?!

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - DEWDENN - MOMENTS LATER

PYM (17), Nimue's tall, innocent and awkward best friend,
lugs her sheaf of wheat as she sees Nimue stomping down the
road. Manual labor is not Pym's strong suit. She tries to lug
the wheat and catch up with Nimue.

PYM

What's wrong?

NIMUE

I'm Summoner.

Nimue keeps stomping along. Pym struggles to keep up.

PYM
You're what? Did Lenore say that?

NIMUE
Who cares? It's all a joke. I'm getting on that ship. Today.

PYM
Slow down, you're not making sense.

NIMUE
I'm leaving. I hate it here.

PYM
Nimue!

INT. NIMUE'S HUT - DEWDENN - CONTINUOUS

Pym follows Nimue into her family's timber hut.

PYM
What's happened?

Nimue retrieves a bag of clothes and personal items from under her cot, fighting back tears.

NIMUE
They don't want me here. And I don't want them. They can all burn in the nine hells. I'm going to Hawksbridge and getting on that ship. I'm leaving.

Now Pym's welling up. She doesn't want this to be goodbye.

PYM
I'll ride with you.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - DEWDENN - MOMENTS LATER

Lenore walks the village road looking for Nimue when...

GUSTAVE (O.S.)
Lenore!

Lenore turns back to see Gustave and another Elder carrying A CHILD. It is a boy, maybe 9 years old, with light bluish skin, yellow eyes, unnaturally long limbs and white hair.

GUSTAVE (CONT'D)
It's a Moon Wing!

There is blood all over the boy. He's barely alive. Lenore hurries after them as we...

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE HEALER'S HUT - DAY - LATER

SQUIRREL huddles just under the shuttered window of the Healer's Hut. Lenore and the Elders are inside.

MOON WING BOY (O.S.)
They came by day as we slept. The men in red robes.

FLASH TO:

EXT. MOON WING CANOPY - DAY - FLASHBACK

Surreal chaos. FIRE and BLACK SMOKE and MOON WINGS leaping from branches, some PLUMMETING past frame as our perspective TILTS wildly to REVEAL...

...we're 150-feet-high in the forest canopy. Below RED ROBES set fire to enormous trees. There are several entirely ENGULFED already.

We are in some kind of BRIDGE-NEST-CITY in the tree canopy. But the bridges are burning. Total panic.

MOON WING BOY
The smoke killed many in their sleep.

We catch up with the MOON WING BOY racing along one of the bridges that is not burning. BODIES ON FIRE fall past him. There are Moon Wings on their backs, asphyxiated from smoke.

MOON WING BOY (CONT'D)
Others burned or fell. The rest fell to the steel of the Grey Monk.

A GIANT WRAITH leaps through the smoke, in a swirl of steel, a spinning, slashing assassin in grey robes.

This is THE WEeping MONK.

Our Moon Wing Boy hides as the Weeping Monk cuts down everything in his path with ruthless, beautiful efficiency.

When he's finished, the firelight falls on the monk's
TATTOOED EYES that resemble streaming tears down his cheeks.

MOON WING BOY (CONT'D)
The one who cries.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE HEALER'S HUT - DAY

Squirrel takes in this incredible tale as the Elders debate.

GUSTAVE (O.S.)
The Red Paladins are moving North.

LENORE (O.S.)
And we're right in their path. We
have to send scouts. Get a sense of
their numbers.

FLORENTIN (O.S.)
How many Fey villages have to burn
before the King lifts a finger?

GUSTAVE (O.S.)
Too many, I fear.

CUT TO:

EXT. PENDRAGON CASTLE - DAY

A sprawling castle fortress of many towers, set on a cliff
above a crashing surf like a black crown.

EXT. BAILEY - PENDRAGON CASTLE - DAY

TWO FOOTMEN - wearing the sigil of three crowns for House
Pendragon - approach a small stone cottage surrounded by a
small hedge inside the vast walls of Pendragon Castle.

As they get within ten feet of the door, Footman #1 stops.

FOOTMAN #1
You knock. I knocked last time.

FOOTMAN #2
I knocked last time.

Thwarted, Footman #1 approaches the door with caution.

FOOTMAN #1
(under his breath)
I hate this.

He knocks lightly.

FOOTMAN #1 (CONT'D)
Oy in there! The King summons you!

Footman #1 takes a step back, unsure of what's about to happen. Then, nothing happens. He knocks louder.

FOOTMAN #1 (CONT'D)
(turns to Footman #2)
He's not here.

There is a SNORT from the hedge. Footman #2 looks over.

FOOTMAN #2
Oh, he's here all right. Just never
made it to the door.

Footman #1 & #2 climb into the hedge and retrieve a growly, hungover Mage (40s, a stew of wild energies) from where he passed out in the hedge.

FOOTMAN #1
Up we go, Merlin!

MERLIN THE MAGICIAN makes inarticulate sounds as his long hair falls in his eyes and the Footmen drag him to the castle and we...

CUT TO:

INT. THRONE ROOM - PENDRAGON CASTLE - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

KING UTHUR PENDRAGON (30s, elegant and paranoid) throws strips of raw meat to his Mastiffs, as he listens half-heartedly to a report from SIR BERIC (50s, detailed).

SIR BERIC
Food riots continue in Ipswich,
Gloucester and London. The drought
and famine are causing wider panic
in your northern French provinces
as well, sire, resulting in the
burning of several Fey Folk
villages, to whom they assign some
of the blame.

KING UTHUR
"Some" of the blame?

SIR BERIC

Well, the rest I'm afraid blame
you, sire.

KING UTHER

Of course they do. And while the
plight of starving French peasants
is quite sad, it is also beside the
point. Tell us about blood and
treasure, Beric. We ordered you to
raise a mercenary force in northern
France.

SIR BERIC

Indeed.

KING UTHER

To seize territory that is legally
ours--

SIR BERIC

No question, your majesty--

KING UTHER

And?

SIR BERIC

Unfortunately sire, we were not
able to recruit enough mercenaries.

KING UTHER

We thought the point of hiring
mercenaries was the very fact that
one can always hire mercenaries.

SIR BERIC

It seems most of the able-bodied
young men in the provinces have
already signed up with Father
Carden and his Red Paladins, sire.

KING UTHER

The monks outbid us?

SIR BERIC

They join for free, sire. Given the
drought and resulting famine,
Carden's campaign of violence
against the Fey Folk has aroused
old prejudices.

At this the doors open and Merlin is half-escorted, half-
dragged into the Throne Room.

KING UTHER

Merlin! Perfect timing.

Merlin rips his arms free of the Footmen, who beat a hasty retreat. Merlin sways a beat, then takes an orange from a bowl before leaning against a column for support.

MERLIN

That is debateable, your Majesty.

KING UTHER

You promised us rain, Merlin. And, per usual, your words have proven hollow.

MERLIN

Weather is fickle, my liege.

KING UTHER

The Red Paladins are not fickle. They are quite reliable. How many Fey villages have burned, Sir Beric?

SIR BERIC

Ah, approximately ten, your majesty.

KING UTHER

Merlin is a conflicted creature you see, Beric. These are his kind being put to the torch. Yet he seems rather unmoved.

(looks over at Merlin,
back to Sir Beric)

Not that he's ever been confused for a man of the people. He's not fond of the mud of the southern villages. No, he prefers the trappings of our castle, our plum wine, our Portuguese oranges.

(looks over)

Don't you, Merlin?

Merlin bites a piece of orange.

MERLIN

The Fey Kind are, quite frankly, better farmers. So, in times of want, the mob finds reason to steal their food. Father Carden and his Paladins are dull vessels for these old hatreds, nothing more.

(beat)

(MORE)

MERLIN (CONT'D)

However, if his Majesty would allow it, the Shadow Lords may be able to offer some service here.

AN AIDE enters with a tray for the King.

AIDE

Supper, Your Majesty.

King Uther steps off the throne and walks to the table. He takes the lid from his plate. Steak medallions.

KING UTHER

We asked for doves.

AIDE

Deepest apologies, Your Majesty, but we seem to have an issue with the dovecots. Some, ah, dead birds were found.

Merlin perks up. It's the first time he's seemed engaged.

MERLIN

How many birds?

AIDE

(unnerved by Merlin)
Um, nine sir.

Merlin takes this in, frowning in concentration.

KING UTHER

How appetizing. Go.

AIDE

Yes, Your Majesty.

The Aide exits. Uther sits for supper.

KING UTHER

(returns to the topic)
"Shadow Lords." A bit late for your enchanters to help us now.

MERLIN

Not necessarily. There are Shadow Lords operating in secret at every level of society, your majesty, and they wield a good deal of influence. With the right encouragement, they could--

Uther SLAMS his hand on the table.

KING UTHER
We want rain, Merlin!

Sir Beric shudders.

KING UTHER (CONT'D)
(growls)
To hell with your Shadow Lords.

MERLIN
I will re-double my efforts, your
majesty.

KING UTHER
Yes do.

Merlin glances at Sir Beric, who shrinks away from the wizard
as he strides down the hall in a swirl of blue robes.

INT. CASTLE CORRIDOR - DAY

Moments later, Merlin pauses at a corridor intersection. He
hears a SCRAPING and FLUTTERING.

He removes a torch from its sconce and enters a dark passage.
The SCRAPING and FLUTTERING grow louder.

After a few steps, the light shines on a MAGPIE flopping
about on the ground. Merlin looks up at the ceiling.

INT. CURVING STAIRWELL - PENDRAGON CASTLE - DAY

Merlin climbs a long tower stairwell and reaches...

INT. TURRET - CASTLE TOWER - DAY

...a large turret at the top of the tower. We are at the
castle's apex where dozens of magpies nest.

But all Merlin finds are DEAD BIRDS. Some of the magpies are
still twitching. The floor is littered with them.

Merlin is not sickened, not shocked, only intrigued. It is
not the numbers of dead that interest him...

...but their arrangement.

AS WE RISE ABOVE MERLIN we see the Magpies have died in ten
neat piles in impossibly precise arrangements of three.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAWKSBRIDGE - DAY

Nimue and Pym ride Nimue's horse, Dusk Lady, into the moving line of merchants, farmers and tradesmen waiting to enter the gates of HAWKSBRIDGE, a medium-sized-city of three thousand.

PYM

I'm not even dressed for town. I look like I've been doing chores. I smell.

NIMUE

You don't smell. You look beautiful.

PYM

Oh, shut up. This is madness.

NIMUE

It's why you love me.

PYM

I don't love you. I don't even like you. And I'm mad you're doing this.

NIMUE

I bring adventure to your life.

PYM

You bring stress and punishment to my life.

Nimue and Pym look up at executed prisoners hanging from the high wall. As they approach the gate, the FOOT SOLDIERS eye them darkly but wave them on without interruption.

EXT. PORT - HAWKSBRIDGE - DAY

Nimue and Pym walk Dusk Lady down to the busy docks. Gulls SCREAM and circle the hulks and Cogs filling the small port of SCARCROFT BAY. Nimue pulls her cape and hood up. Pym is a bundle of nerves.

PYM

How do you even know they'll take you on?

NIMUE

Gawain said the Brass Shield takes on a few dozen pilgrims every journey. It's the only ship that crosses the sea to the Desert Kingdoms.

PYM

It's the only ship because no one wants to go to the Desert Kingdoms. Which should tell you something. Honestly, what is the fuss about? Being named Summoner is a huge honor. Plus the robes are glorious. You get to wear amazing jewelry.

NIMUE

She only did it to keep me at home. Because she knows I want to leave.

PYM

At least your Mother wants you home. Mine keeps trying to marry me off to the Fishmonger.

NIMUE

Stinky Aaron.

PYM

It's not funny.

Nimue stops, turns to Pym, serious.

NIMUE

The Elders won't accept me.

PYM

Who cares what those shrivelled onions think?

NIMUE

But what if they're right not to?

PYM

Why? Because you're touched by Dark Gods? That's rubbish. It's not like you're Mad Martha throwing her chewed food at people.

NIMUE

You know what I mean.

PYM

So, you have visions.

NIMUE

And the scars.

PYM

It gives you character?

(beat)

(MORE)

PYM (CONT'D)

I mean, don't push it. I'm doing my best to help you here.

Nimue laughs and hugs Pym.

NIMUE

What will I do without you?

PYM

Then stay, you idiot.

But Nimue's eyes are set. She soldiers on to the docks.

PYM (CONT'D)

What if they find out you're a girl?

NIMUE

I'm cutting my hair.

PYM

What if they find out you're Fey Kind?

NIMUE

They won't. You'll look after Dusk Lady?

PYM

Yes. What about money?

NIMUE

I've 20 silver.

PYM

What if they rob you?

NIMUE

Pym. Stop.

Nimue approaches the stall of the PORT MASTER (50s, harried), who manages the comings and goings of dozens of vessels.

NIMUE (CONT'D)

Excuse me, sir, which is the merchant ship The Brass Shield?

PORT MASTER

Brass Shield left yesterday.

Nimue is stunned. For a moment she can't find the words.

NIMUE

But--it's--it's not supposed to
leave for a week.

PORT MASTER

Tell that to the Easterly winds.

NIMUE

When does it return?

PORT MASTER

Six months. Now, do you mind?
(sees sailors stacking
crates on the dock)
Oy! Those can't stay there!

The Port Master grabs his lists and storms off.

Nimue turns around, eyes brimming with tears.

NIMUE

What do I do now?

PYM

I'm sorry, Nimue.
(hopeful)
At least I get to keep you a bit
longer.

Nimue turns to the water. Her eyes search the horizon. It's
like she's been handed a prison sentence. Pym puts her head
on her shoulder.

NIMUE

Six months.

PYM

You make peace with your Mum.
(beat)
And today we have fun.

Pym drags Nimue back into the main town.

NIMUE

I don't want to--

PYM

No, no more whining. Wait, I know,
I'll be Summoner and you marry
Stinky Aaron.

Nimue hesitates. They both laugh.

PYM (CONT'D)

Ah! See?! Your life's not so
horrible after all.

Nimue allows herself to be pulled along, resigning herself.

EXT. MARKETPLACE - HAWKSBRIDGE - DAY

The city square explodes with color and activity. Pym and Nimue salivate as a BAKER'S WIFE sets out a table of fresh King's Loaves and Ginger Brie Tarts.

The dye factory is open to the square and the girls wrap themselves in wide hanging strips of crimson silk and night blue cotton until the DYE MISTRESS shoos them off.

A crowd gathers around a JUGGLER as PLAYERS erect a stage. Pym drags Nimue over to see.

PYM

We're in time for the play!
(to Nimue)
I may reconsider liking you a
little bit.

Nimue kicks Pym in the ass.

PYM (CONT'D)

Ow! Right on the bony part!

NIMUE

It's all bony.

PYM

That's not kind.

As Pym and Nimue watch the juggler, there is a disruption near the stage and SHOUTING.

The audience hurries away as TWO RED PALADINS kick down the stage. One of them punches one of the players who resists.

All eyes look to the ground as the Red Paladins scowl at the crowd. Neither appears older than Nimue and Pym. They could be ugly twins, but for one of the monks being a foot taller than his friend. Both wear a tonsure.

TALL PALADIN

(to the crowd)
Repent or burn!

Pym pulls Nimue into the shelter of the crowd.

Nimue fights off Pym's efforts to pull her back. She moves through the crowd, slowly, not wanting to draw attention.

As the terrified players pile their goods back onto the wagons to the disappointment of all...

...the Red Paladins climb back onto their horses and stroll around the opposite side of the square, along a row of stalls. Nimue follows.

PYM
(whispers)
Who are they?

NIMUE
Red Paladins.

The Red Paladins stop at a table of SWORDS.

Nimue and Pym watch them from three stalls behind.

A BLACKSMITH engages the Paladins. One of the paladins points out a dagger. The Blacksmith selects it and hands it to the monk still on horseback. The paladin admires the blade and slides it into the fold of one of his saddle bags. He then nudges his horse and moves along. His friend follows.

The Blacksmith calls out.

BLACKSMITH
Oy! You need to pay! That's three
silver!

The Red Paladins turn back around. The one without the dagger rides forward and - from his saddle - KICKS the Blacksmith in the chest sprawling him across his table of swords.

The Paladin with the dagger smiles. His friend turns in a circle, daring any in the crowd to challenge him. None does. None looks them in the eye. Satisfied, the Red Paladins resume their walk of the stalls.

NIMUE
He just stole that dagger.

PYM
And?

Pym ducks down behind Nimue, concerned her height will give her away. Nimue continues to follow the Red Paladins from thirty feet back, using locals as a shield until...

...they turn off from the market square and onto a narrow side street.

NIMUE

Come on.

Nimue pulls Pym under an open arcade and continues to follow the bobbing, bald pates of the paladins in-between the columns of the arcade as they walk up the road.

EXT. NARROW STREET - HAWKSBRIDGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Nimue slips into a doorway and watches as the paladins navigate around a pack horse before joining ANOTHER pair of Red Paladins, also on horseback.

Pym scrambles from the arcade, over the cobblestones and into the doorway to join Nimue. Her ungainly limbs belie her efforts at stalking.

PYM

(whispers)

Why are we doing this?

NIMUE

Not yet.

Nimue slips away from Pym again, walking closer to the gathering before taking shelter in another doorway. She's only ten feet away from them. Pym squats against the wall, freaking out.

ON NIMUE: She studies the Red Paladins as...

...a Mason steers his cart of stones onto the narrow street. His wagon is too wide to pass around the Red Paladins clustered together.

MASON

Apologies, lords!

The monks glare at him as they are forced to back-step and maneuver around him. During this crowding and confusion...

...Nimue steps out of the doorway and slides alongside the mason's cart. She walks right up next to the distracted Red Paladin's horse and...

...removes the dagger from its fold in the saddle bag, sheathing it in her long sleeve.

When one of the Red Paladins turns to look down the street all he sees is the edge of a skirt darting around the corner.

ON PYM: she is pale as a ghost. She scrambles back to the arcade and the safety of the crowd. She thuds against a column and clutches her beating heart as...

...THE SAME DAGGER appears at her throat.

NIMUE
(hisses in her ear)
Give me all your coins!

PYM
You crazy--!

Pym whirls on Nimue and slaps her silly. Nimue laughs and covers her head for the blows.

PYM (CONT'D)
Raving loon! Witch!

NIMUE
Stop!

PYM
I won't stop, crazy woman! What the hell is wrong with you?!

NIMUE
(gasps)
Oh my God they're coming!

Pym whirls around in terror as Nimue LAUGHS and runs into the crowd. Pym's nerves are shot.

PYM
(calls after Nimue)
I hate you!

EXT. MARKETPLACE - HAWKSBRIDGE - DAY

As they blend back into the crowd, Nimue shoves Pym into a lady carrying carrots, drawing a glare.

PYM
(to carrot lady)
So sorry! I'm sorry!
(to Nimue)
Seriously, enough! You've worn me out.

NIMUE
No fun.

The girls pass the Blacksmith's stall and Nimue - unnoticed - casually returns the dagger to its spot.

PYM

You are aware there is something
terribly wrong with you?

NIMUE

I don't know, perhaps I'm the only
sane one and the rest of you are
mad.

They approach a SMALL CROWD and hear a SINGER.

SINGER (O.S.)

*With meadows green and skies a
blue, My mistress struck her arrow
true, We kissed and danced 'neath
Virgo's eye, As the waxing moon
fled from July...*

Nimue and Pym curl around the group and put eyes on the SINGER (17) who looks about their age, lean and broad-shouldered, with longish hair that flashes copper in the sun and striking grey eyes that are equal parts lamb and wolf.

SINGER (CONT'D)

*Sing High-Lolly-lo say my fair
Summer Lady, Sing High-Lolly-li-
Summer-hi-lolly-lo...*

The Singer's LUMPY FRIEND plays an able *ruen*.

A HUM rings in Nimue's ears, not unlike her experience with the fawn in the Iron Wood. She is captivated and unnerved by the singer. Pym notes Nimue's expression and clucks her tongue, elbowing Nimue who shoves her back, smiling.

SINGER (CONT'D)

*But Autumn gusts do blow cold
Summer Lady, The swallows fly south
from their nests in the bailey, And
the warm wine...*

The singer's eyes fall upon Nimue and the verse fades on his lips. Nimue's cheeks flush. The lumpy *ruen* player notes the connection and nudges his approval to the singer, who improvises a new verse...

SINGER (CONT'D)

*But along came a maid with eyes
like the ice on the sea, Sing High-
Lolly-lo say my fair Winter Lady...*

The Singer smiles at Nimue and she looks away.

PYM
He fancies you.

Nimue laughs but loses her courage and pulls Pym back into the crowd. They reunite with the JUGGLER who is brave enough to entertain a ring of pushing children. One of them collides with the juggler who fumbles one of the balls and it rolls between Nimue's feet and into the hands...

...of the handsome SINGER. He plucks it up.

SINGER
You dropped this, milady.

NIMUE
Do I look like a juggler to you?

The singer rests a hand on the pommel of his sword and studies her.

SINGER
Not quite yet, no.

He turns to the juggler, searching for his ball, plucks off his hat and places it on Nimue's head. Pym snorts.

SINGER (CONT'D)
Perfect.

NIMUE
I only juggle fire.

SINGER
Oh, I believe that.

Ignoring the protests of the juggler, the Singer takes the hat from Nimue's head and plops it on his own.

SINGER (CONT'D)
No more charade. In truth, I am the great juggling master Giuseppe Fuzzini Fuzzini - two Fuzzinis - and so forth! And I am looking for a juggling apprentice to follow in my footsteps!

Clouds pass over Nimue's eyes at mention of an 'apprentice.' Her thoughts go to that morning's humiliation.

But the singer doesn't yet notice because he's taken a few turnips from a vegetable barrel and tries to juggle them as the short Juggler leaps for his hat.

Pym enjoys the whole show as the Singer tries to click his heels and ends up TOPPLING into the barrel of turnips.

This shakes Nimue from her reverie. Pym helps pull the Singer away from A SHOUTING FARMER.

SINGER (CONT'D)
(to Nimue and Pym)
Fancy an ale?

NIMUE
We don't drink with strange men.

SINGER
What's your name?

NIMUE
Nimue. This is Pym.

SINGER
Well, now we're not strangers.
(beat)
I'm Arthur.

CUT TO:

INT. THE RAVEN'S WING - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Nimue and Pym sit alone at a table in a CROWDED TAVERN, drawing more than a few looks of suspicion and scorn.

PYM
This is a mistake.

NIMUE
Relax. One drink.

PYM
It's late. We shouldn't be here. As
it is we'll be riding in the dark.

NIMUE
Then no point worrying about it, is
there?

The Singer returns with three mugs of ale.

ARTHUR
Do you live in Hawksbridge?

NIMUE
Near enough.

A ROAR OF LAUGHTER draws their attention to a nearby table where some ROUGH FELLOWS fleece locals at bone dice.

The head man, large and bald, with many battle dents in his skull and wearing a chain-mail shirt, keeps looking over at Arthur and the girls with glowering eyes.

Nimue and Pym turn back to Arthur.

NIMUE (CONT'D)
(sips her beer)
And you?

ARTHUR
Just passing through really.

NIMUE
A sword for hire?

ARTHUR
A knight, milady.

Nimue chuckles. Pym nervously swigs her beer.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
What? You don't believe me?

NIMUE
You just seem a bit young and scruffy for a knight.

ARTHUR
Well, we're between lords at the moment.

Arthur indicates the rowdy bone dice players and their menacing Captain in the chain-mail shirt.

ARTHUR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Bors over there commanded Lord
Eldard's host before the poor
bastard's heart gave out.

Another player loses. He thrusts a finger in Bors's face.

PLAYER
You're cheats!

Bors laughs as two of his men stand up, hands on their swords. They SHOVE the player away.

PYM (V.O.)
Nimue?

Nimue turns back to Pym and Arthur. She takes another swig of ale, loosening up.

PYM
We really have to go.

Arthur puts his hand on Nimue's arm.

ARTHUR
Stay awhile.

Nimue looks pleadingly at Pym.

NIMUE
Pleeeeeease?

Pym kicks her under the table.

BORS (O.S.)
Arthur!

Arthur, Pym and Nimue turn to Bors at the dice table.

BORS (CONT'D)
Why're you keeping those fine maids
to yourself? Bring them over.

ARTHUR
A bit rich for our blood over
there.

BORS
(growls)
Bring them over.

Arthur chuckles, a bit uncomfortable.

ARTHUR
Ladies?

Nimue takes another swig, wipes the ale from her lips.

NIMUE
Why not?

PYM
(whispers)
What? No!

NIMUE
(whispers back)
Stop it.

Arthur, Nimue and Pym rise and walk over to Bors's table.

ARTHUR

Gents.

BORS

Lads, Arthur's found himself some
Fairy Folk.

His men LAUGH and mutter comments.

Nimue's cheeks flush. Pym just stares at her shoes.

Bors leers at them.

BORS (CONT'D)

See, I can tell by the dresses and
that lovely hair.

Arthur clears his throat, a bit stuck. There are more
CHUCKLES at Pym's and Nimue's expense.

BORS (CONT'D)

Do you girls dance?

NIMUE

Sorry?

BORS

(to the boys)

They dance in their fairy circles
with only the moonlight for their
clothes.

This really gets the table LAUGHING.

BORS (CONT'D)

Will you maids dance for us?

ARTHUR

Carry on, boys--

Arthur tries to lead the girls away.

BORS

I asked a question.

ARTHUR

(cajoling)

Come on, Bors--

NIMUE

(indicates the dice)

May I have a go?

ARTHUR
(whispers)
No, bad idea--

BORS
(chuckles)
But of course, milady.

The other mercenaries WHISTLE their approval.

BORS (CONT'D)
Do you have five silver?

NIMUE
I don't, I'm afraid.

BORS
No matter, we allow different
wagers.
(looks her over)
How 'bout we roll for a kiss?

Pym takes Nimue's shoulders.

PYM
We were just leaving.

NIMUE
(to Bors)
Fine.

The mercenaries LAUGH and APPLAUD. Bors smiles ear-to-ear.

NIMUE (CONT'D)
But if I win I get ten silver.

Arthur leans into Nimue.

ARTHUR
(whispers)
The dice are weighted.

Nimue hears Arthur but does not react.

BORS
Arthur, shut your mouth.
(to Nimue)
Ten? A heavy price indeed.

Bors gathers up the bone dice in his large hand. Pym and Arthur share a concerned look.

PYM
(whispers to Arthur)
Stop this.

Arthur shrugs, apologetic.

BORS
(to Nimue)
Does milady know how to play?

NIMUE
Pick a number?

BORS
Very close. Just roll a seven in
any combination. Two and five.
Three and four. Six and one. You
see? The odds favor you. I've just
had a rush of dumb luck.

Bors slides the dice across the table. Nimue takes them in
her hand. Feels them. Closes her eyes.

There is a powerful HUM in her ears.

FLASH TO:

A vision of the dice turning up three and four.

FLASHBACK TO:

Nimue opens her eyes and drops the dice on the table...

...as the slender, silvery, vine climbs up her neck...

...and the dice come up three and four. The table is quiet.
The sell swords sit up, shocked. They look at Bors who stares
at the dice, looks up at Nimue. Pushes them at her.

BORS (CONT'D)
Roll them again.

NIMUE
Why? I won.

Pym adjusts Nimue's cape around her throat to safeguard
anyone seeing the Mark of the Hidden.

PYM
(whispers)
Nimue, your neck.

Arthur leans forward, pulls the dice toward Nimue.

ARTHUR

Best two out of three, boys? Seems fair.

NIMUE

Those weren't the rules.

PYM

(hisses)
Roll again, don't be daft.

NIMUE

Then it's twenty silver if I win.

Bors sits back in his chair. It CREAKS under his weight.

BORS

Can you believe this little maid?
(laughs)
You want twenty silver? Then I'll want my money's worth as well.

NIMUE

Deal.

PYM

(grabs her arm)
Enough.

Nimue shakes her off. She picks up the dice again. She hears nothing but the powerful HUM in her ears.

FLASH TO:

A vision of the dice coming up six and one.

FLASHBACK TO:

Nimue throws down the dice again...

...as once more the silvery vine threads up her neck and...

...the dice come up six and one.

The sell swords ROAR WITH LAUGHTER and WHOOP but when they see Bors's face they quiet down quickly. The table, indeed most of the tavern is silent.

BORS

(pause)
Are you witching me?

NIMUE

Why? Are you afraid of witches?

With that, Bors's chair BREAKS out from under him and he CRASHES to the floor, desperately grabbing the table and coins which TOPPLE after him. The sell swords jump as they're splashed with ale.

Arthur pulls Pym and Nimue away as the BARTENDER (40s, red-faced) shout at them.

BARTENDER

You girls!

Pym and Nimue turn to him.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)

Off you go! We don't want your kind here!

ARTHUR

(to Nimue and Pym)

Go on, I'll deal with them.

Bors's men pull him - sputtering - to his feet.

Suddenly aware of the spectacle she's made, Nimue hurries Pym towards the door, avoiding the gaze of the scowling patrons of the Raven's Wing but she THUDS into someone just entering. Nimue looks up...

...at the RED PALADIN from earlier. The one who stole the dagger. He looks at her with dead eyes. He looks through her.

Nimue quickly looks away and lunges out the door as we...

CUT TO:

INT. MEDICAL CHAMBERS - DAY

SIR DELLUM (40s, greasy) studies TWO CORPSES on two stone slabs in these grim medical chambers. He prepares to make an incision with a large knife as...

MERLIN (O.S.)

You are Dellum the Physician?

Sir Dellum SCREAMS as he looks up to find MERLIN standing, arms folded, only a few feet away.

SIR DELLUM

(looks from the door, to Merlin and back to the door)

How did--? What're you--?

MERLIN

You haven't answered my question.

Sir Dellum backs up and tries to casually cover one of the dead bodies with a sheet.

SIR DELLUM

I--I am. And I suppose you are Mer--
Merlin?

MERLIN

I'm told you are a collector of
sorts.

SIR DELLUM

Ah, no, sir. I was told to stop
doing that so, everything here is
quite above board. Sanctioned and
all of that.

MERLIN

Pity, I was willing to pay
handsomely for a chance to see your
more obscure items.

SIR DELLUM

Oh, um, was there anything in
particular you were looking for?

MERLIN

I'm looking for the number three.

Sir Dellum frowns for a moment, confused, then a thought occurs. He looks up, smiles.

SIR DELLUM

Right this way.

INT. THE COLLECTION - MEDICAL CHAMBER - DAY

Sir Dellum lights a candle, Merlin winces at the odor. There are many objects on many tables. Thankfully, most are covered. There are curious objects: organs, fluids, small creatures and other unmentionables preserved on many shelves.

SIR DELLUM

It arrived three days ago. Born to
a peasant family in *Shorne*.

Sir Dellum sets the candle beside a small object covered by a cloth. Merlin steps forward and removes the cloth.

It is a newborn with two faces on its misshapen head.

Merlin raises an eyebrow to Dellum as if to say 'well?'

SIR DELLUM (CONT'D)

Allow me.

Sir Dellum turns the baby over and Merlin winces at a third face pressing out of the newborn's back, like a creature screaming between worlds.

MERLIN

That will do.

Sir Dellum sets down the body and re-covers it as Merlin turns away, lost in thought. Dellum follows.

SIR DELLUM

Might I inquire as to the, ah, interest in the number three?

MERLIN

You may not. For I was never here.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD FROM HAWSKBRIDGE - NIGHT

Hawksbridge looms in the distance behind them as Pym and Nimue ride Dusk Lady into the night.

PYM

Nimue, what was that? What in the name of the gods was that? I've never seen you do magic like that before. That was magic, wasn't it?

NIMUE

I don't know, Pym. I don't feel well.

PYM

Why didn't you tell me? Is this why Lenore chose you?

NIMUE

I didn't--I don't know--it wasn't planned, I just--the Hidden were there.

PYM

I saw the Mark. But I only thought that could happen in the temple. What else can you do?

NIMUE

Pym, you're shouting in my ear.

PYM

(whispers)

What else can you do?

NIMUE

I don't know. My head is pounding.

PYM

You're mad for doing that outside the village. What if they realized?

NIMUE

Realized what?

PYM

I--I don't know. What you are. What you can do. I know they say Old Franz can summon rain but I never believed it. And they say your mother is a true healer. But Nimue, that was real magic.

NIMUE

Just try to sleep on me. I'll get us home. I'm sorry.

PYM

Sleep? I'm too charged up.

Pym thumps her head on Nimue's back.

PYM (CONT'D)

But I'm so confused.

Within seconds, Pym SNORES on her. Good thing because the road ahead of them is dark and menacing.

Dusk Lady's hoofbeats resound in the quiet. Nimue glances to the dark woods on either side. She reaches into her bag and pulls out a cheese knife, small comfort.

She rides in silence for a beat when another set of HOOFBEATS rises in the distance. Coming up behind them. Coming fast.

NIMUE

(digs her heels)

Come on, Dusk Lady.

But Dusk Lady's grown stubborn. Instead, they end up standing there in the middle of the road.

NIMUE (CONT'D)
(nudges her)
Pym, wake up.

PYM
Whu--what is it?

NIMUE
Someone's coming.

The rider slows down on approach.

NIMUE (CONT'D)
(brandishes cheese knife)
Come no closer!

ARTHUR (O.S.)
I surrender.

Arthur's black courser strides out of the gloom and into the moonlight. He holds up Nimue's cape.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Does this belong to one of you?

Nimue and Pym noticeably relax.

NIMUE
You came all this way just to
return a cape?

ARTHUR
It's a nice cape.
(beat)
I'm sorry about back there.

NIMUE
You mean your friends? The
"knights?"

ARTHUR
I'm not like Bors.

NIMUE
But you didn't stand up to him.

ARTHUR
Those who do, have a way of dying.

NIMUE
I'm still here.

ARTHUR
Something tells me you're the
exception to many things.

NIMUE
What does that mean?

ARTHUR
Nothing. But you should be more
careful.

A HUM fills Nimue's ears. Something about Arthur. She regards
him with suspicion, which Arthur takes for scorn.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Well, anyway...
(offers the cape)

Pym climbs down from Dusk Lady, exasperated.

PYM
What she means to say though she's
mentally incapable at the moment,
is 'thank you very much,' that's
very nice of you.

Pym takes the cape from Arthur.

ARTHUR
You're welcome.
(beat)
I haven't met your kind before.

NIMUE
You mean 'Fairy Folk?'

Arthur shrugs, he doesn't know what to call them.

NIMUE (CONT'D)
We're not so different.

ARTHUR
You're different all right.
(beat)
But I wouldn't advise witching men
like Bors in broad daylight. Not
these days.

NIMUE
We're not witches.

ARTHUR
Whatever you want to call it. Bors
is one thing.
(MORE)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

The Red Brothers - these Paladins -
they're quite another. I've seen
the burning fields, have you?

NIMUE

We've seen plenty.

ARTHUR

You don't forget the smell, I'll
tell you that. The South Lords keep
inside their castles and give the
Red Pala--

Arthur hesitates. His ears prick. Nimue turns to the sound of
RIDERS headed towards them.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

(whispers)

By the way, there's a fellow goes
by the name of Ring Nose likes to
set ambushes past the hook turn up
the road.

NIMUE

And let me guess: you know this
because he works for you.

ARTHUR

For Bors, on occasion. But it
sounds like he's not alone.

Nimue slips from Dusk Lady, takes her reins and leads Pym and
the horse down an embankment off the road. Arthur follows.

She leads them through the grasses about 50 feet from the
road to the shelter of a tree. Dusk Lady SNORTS and Nimue
tries to shush him. They wait...

...as FOUR RIDERS enter the moonlight. One holds out a
lantern and looks around. Rough types. Lots of steel.

Nimue sees Arthur's hand slip down to the pommel of his
sword. He tenses. Again, the HUM rises in her ears.

After a few moments, they ride on.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Come on, follow me.

Arthur turns his horse toward the forest.

NIMUE

Where are you going?

ARTHUR

Making camp. It's too dangerous to ride tonight. I've got fire and good wine. Decent wine at least. Any objections?

Nimue and Pym exchange looks as we...

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NEAR HAWSKBRIDGE - NIGHT

Pym snores by the campfire, her arm draped around Arthur's wineskin. To the sound of clashing swords WE SWING AROUND...

...to Arthur and Nimue, a bit breathless, sparring with blades. She has his sword and he uses his dagger. Arthur feints a few times and Nimue lunges at him.

ARTHUR

What are you doing?

NIMUE

Stalking.

ARTHUR

Have you held a sword before?

NIMUE

I've killed hundreds.

ARTHUR

I think I can get closer.

Arthur steps into range.

NIMUE

Be careful.

She swings a few times, dangerously close. Arthur dodges.

ARTHUR

To the death is it?

NIMUE

If you're careless.

Arthur feints and Nimue cuts the air.

ARTHUR

You're just fighting with the blade. That's a waste of a good sword.

NIMUE

You talk too much.

Arthur maneuvers.

ARTHUR

A sword is more than a blade.

Arthur steps between Nimue's legs as she cuts but he catches her blade in his cross guard. They struggle.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

It's the cross guard.

With their swords locked and pointed to the ground, Arthur mimes striking Nimue under the chin with his pommel.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

It's the pommel.

He puts a knee in the back of her knee.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Legs.

And he puts an elbow against her chin.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Body weight.

Arthur smirks at her...

...as Nimue head butts him right in the nose.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Agh!

NIMUE

Head.

ARTHUR

(rubs his head)

Tavern brawler, eh?

Nimue swings wildly at him, Arthur barely gets his guard up in time. She has more enthusiasm than skill, but Arthur definitely has to focus.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

You're very dangerous.

NIMUE
(thrusting)
First intelligent thing you've said
all night.

Arthur locks her into another grapple. She fights hard. Tries stomping on his toes. They're nose to nose. She tries to unlock her sword. Instead...

...Arthur roughly FLINGS it from her hands, disarming her. She rubs her injured wrist. He points his dagger at her.

ARTHUR
Yield?

NIMUE
You cheated.

ARTHUR
Did I hurt you?

NIMUE
It's fine.

ARTHUR
Here.

Arthur sheathes his dagger. Takes her hand in his.

NIMUE
What're you doing?

Arthur rubs her wrist.

ARTHUR
Does this bother you?

NIMUE
You've lowered your guard.

ARTHUR
Your sword is in the grass. I won.

Nimue produces the cheese knife and pokes it against his throat.

NIMUE
Have you?

ARTHUR
Is that a cheese knife?

NIMUE
It's sharp enough.

She presses it against his flesh.

NIMUE (CONT'D)

Yield?

ARTHUR

To you? Gladly.

Arthur's eyes linger on Nimue's. She slowly lowers the knife. She doesn't move away.

His grey eyes are flecked with blue, like sapphires.

His fingers clasp around hers.

THE HUM in Nimue's ears GROWS. A painful vibration. It is loud. Overwhelming.

Nimue GASPS as a VISION overtakes her:

A hand covered in leprous boils reaches for her...

A woman with long, flaming red curls wears a dragon helm...

Torchlight flickers on a cave with carved demonic faces...

ON ARTHUR: He doesn't know what to do as Nimue shudders and her eyes roll back in her head. She falls stiffly to the ground. Arthur hovers, unsure of what to do.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Nimue?!

IN VISION: *A white owl flops on the ground with an arrow through it...*

A ghost ship with tattered sails pushes through a fog...

Nimue submerged in water, clawing, swallowing, drowning...

CUT TO:

INT. MERLIN'S COTTAGE - PENDRAGON CASTLE - NIGHT

Merlin GASPS awake and in AGONY. His eyes are black as opals as he writhes in his sheets, clutching his side.

The shutters KL-CLACK as a fierce wind blows.

He staggers out of bed, barely able to stand. With shaking hands he pours a goblet of wine and slurps it before collapsing onto his side, contorted by pain as we...

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NEAR HAWKSBRIDGE - MORNING

Nimue BOLTS up from her nightmares, GASPING for air. Her clothes are wet with dew. The campfire smokes. Nimue turns to Arthur, asleep on his saddle bag. Nimue rouses Pym.

NIMUE

Pym, it's morning. We have to go.

Pym rouses.

PYM

My head.

NIMUE

It's the wine. Come quietly. Don't wake him.

Nimue pulls Pym to her feet. They unloop Dusk Lady from a nearby tree and leads her toward the road.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

The girls ride in cold quiet as the mist grips the road.

PYM

Why are we sneaking? Now what?

NIMUE

Nothing.

PYM

Did you kiss?

NIMUE

No.

PYM

Why not? He's gorgeous.

NIMUE

Can we not talk about it?

PYM

No, we are talking about it. Is this about Gawain?

NIMUE

I'm not in love with Gawain. And that was five years ago.

PYM

Then what was wrong with him? Bad breath?

NIMUE

I had a vision, all right?

PYM

Oh.
(thinks about this,
grimaces)
Oh. That's unfortunate.

NIMUE

Thank you.

PYM

Full deal? Eyes rolled back? The lot?

NIMUE

(utter humiliation)
I don't know.

Up ahead they see an OLDER MAN picking up broken items and placing them back on his small wagon. He wears a bloody smock and appears to be a Dentist.

NIMUE (CONT'D)

Everything all right?

DENTIST

Cut purses, milady. Took my day's earnings. Shouldn't have been out so late, I know. My wife tells me as much.

NIMUE

(to Pym)
Ring Nose.
(to Dentist)
Here you go, sir.

Nimue hands him a few pieces of her silver.

DENTIST

Aren't you a dear? That is a kindness.

The Dentist sees animal totems on Nimue's wrist jewelry. He flinches and takes a step back. He fingers the small, iron cross around his neck.

DENTIST (CONT'D)

You're, um, Fairy Folk, then?

NIMUE

And if we are?

DENTIST

To each his gods, I suppose.

(a thought)

Have you any rotten teeth? I'd gladly pull one free of charge.

NIMUE

I think we're good. Pym? Good?

Pym nods. They keep on riding.

DENTIST (O.S.)

Girls!

They turn to the Dentist. His eyes are full of worry. He wants to say something.

NIMUE

Yes?

DENTIST

There's...

The words die on his lips. A moment of moral courage passes.

DENTIST (CONT'D)

God be with you.

With that, the Dentist turns away, snaps his reins and off he goes down the road. Nimue and Pym look at each other, unnerved by the Dentist's strange behavior.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD TO DEWDENN - DAY - AN HOUR LATER

Despite the dense forest on both sides of the village road, the sun pushes through the canopy in gleaming shafts. The girls are laughing.

PYM

If they make me shovel the stables
you're doing it with me.

NIMUE

(pure)

I have to do my medicine walks.

PYM

If Clovis doesn't kill you in your sleep.

An OX clammers out of the woods, clearly panicked, dragging the wooden arm of a plough beside it.

Nimue steers Dusk Lady onto the side of the road as the frightened beast lumbers past, lips full of foam.

PYM (CONT'D)

What do you think that's about?

Nimue says nothing, her brow knitted with concern. She watches the beast lope into the distance then turns back to the road ahead.

Nimue feels an anxiety she cannot put her finger on.

NIMUE

(softly)

Let's go, Dusk Lady.

They continue down the road.

After a few moments, flakes like snow begin to swirl above the road. Some of them glint in the sun. Beautiful.

Pym holds out her hand as a flake lands in her palm. She smears it with her fingers and it turns to brown ash.

PYM

(fearful)

Nimue?

Nimue's eyes flash. She spurs Dusk Lady into a gallop.

The SCREAMS hit them first as they clear the tree line and the road opens up to Dewdenn in FLAMES.

RED PALADINS are everywhere, on foot and on horseback, chasing down villagers with swords and scythes.

Wooden crosses are going up in the fields.

A horse - ON FIRE - covered in some kind of tar, SHRIEKS as it bucks and clammers past Nimue and Pym.

Several structures are completely engulfed.

PYM (CONT'D)
Nimue! Go back! Go back!

Nimue hesitates as Dusk Lady fights the reins, panicking. She doesn't see the Red Paladin GALLOPING up on her right.

He STRIKES Dusk Lady in the flank and she WHEELS...

...THROWING Pym and Nimue to the ground.

White, dazzling stars fill Nimue's eyes. Her ears RING.

PYM (O.S.) (CONT'D)
No! Stop! Nimue! Help me!

Through a blur, Nimue sees Pym being DRAGGED on her back by a Red Paladin. Nimue tries to crawl after her.

NIMUE
(weakly)
Pym...Pym...

Dusk Lady kicks on the ground, struggling to rise.

SEVERAL RED PALADINS charge up the road toward her.

Nimue wills herself to her feet, clutching her ribs, and runs onto the opposite field, arms pumping as the riders split off, two pursue her.

The paladins bear down on her as Nimue runs for the center of the fiery village, not thinking, only reacting, only running for her life.

Their swords come out. They raise them, kicking up mud only ten feet behind her, ready to cut her down when...

...a PITCHFORK whistles through the air and THUDS into one of the Paladins' chests, KNOCKING him clean off his horse.

Nimue races by JOSSE - the hunter boy - as he ROARS and engages the other pursuing paladin with his broad sword.

Nimue does not look back. She scrambles behind the stables, which are not yet burning and writhes into a mound of straw.

Her eyes dart about wildly through a veil of hay.

WIDE AS: Into this bedlam rides a Reaper-like-figure. Even the Red Paladins part for him as he emerges from the black smoke of the burning fields like a wraith atop a black horse. His robes are grey, shoulders broad and his cheeks lean beneath his cowl.

CLOSE ON: The blue eyes in the straw dart from Father Carden to the mob to the rider on horseback. We hear her furtive breathing.

WIDE AS: Father Carden walks over to meet the Grey Rider who has strange blotted black birthmarks around his eyes that run down his face like streaming tears. This is THE WEEPING MONK. Carden embraces the monk like a father, puts his hand on his shoulder. Whispers to him.

CLOSE ON: The blue eyes turn to the heart of the village where Squirrel stumbles between burning huts, dragging a sword too big for her. The blue eyes swing back to Red Paladins on horseback searching for more villagers.

WIDE AS: Nimue erupts from her hiding place in the straw pile and races across the road, muddied by horse hooves and blood. She grabs Squirrel by the arm and pulls her behind a smouldering hut as...

...the Red Paladins turn the corner. They see an empty road.

EXT. BEHIND THE BURNING HUT - DEWDENN - DAY

Nimue checks Squirrel for injuries. She's clearly in shock.

NIMUE

Are you hurt?

SQUIRREL

I can't find Papa.

NIMUE

Squirrel, listen to me.

Squirrel tries to pull away.

SQUIRREL

Papa--

NIMUE

Squirrel! Go to the Iron Wood. Hide in the Hollow in the Ash Tree until it's night. Do you understand? Run now. As fast as you can. Are you listening?!

Squirrel nods, becoming more alert.

NIMUE (CONT'D)

Run like you do in our fox races. No one can ever catch you.

SQUIRREL
(whispers)
No one.

NIMUE
You're the fastest of us all.

SQUIRREL
You'll come for me?

Nimue fights back tears. She nods.

NIMUE
I will. After I find Mother and Pym
and your father.

SQUIRREL
I saw--I saw your mother near the
temple. They were chasing her.

Nimue struggles to stay calm. She takes the sword from
Squirrel and throws it in the mud.

NIMUE
You'll be faster without it.
(hugs her, whispers)
Fast as the fox.

SQUIRREL
(whispers back)
Fast as the fox.

Nimue shoves Squirrel back into the road and she's off like a
shot, whipping across the road and into the tall grass toward
a dense forest in the distance. She watches Squirrel for a
beat, takes a deep breath and then...

EXT. ROAD - DEWDENN - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...launches into the road. She slips in the mud as bloody
hands grab her.

NIMUE
Wh-what? No--no--!

Nimue is pulled by her hair and cape, dragging on her butt.
She passes dead animals and dead villagers.

NIMUE (CONT'D)
Let me go! Let me go!

Suddenly, she is lifted and THROWN onto her stomach. Her eyes land on muddy feet and sandals.

Someone YANKS her hair back and her eyes blink at the hazy sun as FATHER CARDEN looks down at her, smiling, kindly.

FATHER CARDEN
See this, brothers!

Red Paladins gather around him, their breathing labored, their hands and faces smeared with Druid blood.

FATHER CARDEN (CONT'D)
This is why we must be strong.
Look.

Father Carden tries to hold Nimue's face but she shakes him off. She gets a KICK in the ribs for it.

FATHER CARDEN (CONT'D)
He will take forms that pull at our hearts. Look at her. Such eyes.
(beat)
Yet infected all the same. Give thanks, brothers, for this opportunity to show our resolve and steadfastness in the wake of such treachery.
(rises)
Give her to the fire. Reveal its true form.

Two Red Paladins drag Nimue away from Father Carden and into the burning field to join other villagers awaiting the same fate. But events are delayed as monks chop away at half-built-crosses, demand currently exceeding supply.

They are bare-chested and sweating from the labor.

One of Nimue's captors walks to the brothers building the crosses. Nimue stares at the ground at her captor's feet.

A silvery vine climbs up Nimue's neck and cheek as...

...the grasses pull on the toe of her captor's boot and he TRIPS and COLLIDES with the Paladins building the crosses.

The bare-chested-monk gets up and SHOVES the other one. Two more Red Paladins guard the WAILING prisoners and rush over to separate the two.

From where she cowers on all fours, Nimue notices the Red Paladin's discarded robe only a few feet away. With furtive glances to the bickering paladins, Nimue...

...shuffles over to the robe and quickly pulls it over her shoulders like a blanket, stands and walks calmly away from the scene, fingers flicking up her hood after a few steps.

The ARGUING continues behind her so she quickens her stride, passing within five feet of Father Carden as he takes notice of the squabbling.

FATHER CARDEN (CONT'D)
Break that up! Someone break that
up!

Nimue breaks into an all-out-run as she splashes through the mud and toward the Iron Wood.

INT. SUNKEN TEMPLE - DEWDENN - DAY

Nimue stumbles down the path into the cool and quiet temple, such a jarring difference from the bedlam of the village.

NIMUE
(hoarse)
Moth--mother?

Nimue's voice echoes off the vast walls of the temple. When she reaches the stone floor her eyes go to a trail of blood spatters to Lenore's muddied bare feet and skirts fallen behind the altar.

NIMUE (CONT'D)
Mother!

Nimue races across the circle and falls to her knees at her mother's side. Lenore is semi-conscious. Her right side is covered in blood. Nimue is overcome.

NIMUE (CONT'D)
Mother, I'm sorry--I'm sorry--

LENORE
Nimue, listen--

NIMUE
I shouldn't have gone--I shouldn't
have gone, I'm sorry--

Lenore sits up, lucid, urgent.

LENORE
Listen to me!

For the first time, Nimue notices a BUNDLE - about four feet long, lean, wrapped in sackcloth and tied with a rope - laying beside Lenore. It appears to have been hidden beneath the altar stone. Obviously, it's something of enormous value.

LENORE (CONT'D)

There is something you must do.

Weak but determined, Lenore puts the bundle into Nimue's arms and wraps Nimue's arms around it.

LENORE (CONT'D)

Take this to Merlin.

CUT TO:

EXT. PENDRAGON CASTLE - DAY

A peal of thunder RIPS the sky open as sheets of HAIL and RAIN panic horses and force castle workers and peasants to seek shelter.

INT. TOWER - PENDRAGON CASTLE - DAY

Thunder CRACKS again!

In the highest tower of King Uther's castle, Merlin arranges instruments with manic urgency. He's littered the tower with thick, ancient manuals, tables with candles of invocation, large AMULETS and GEM STONES set upon tall, wooden stands. He's set costly mirrors about the tower in strange positions on the walls and floor.

FOOTMAN #1 (O.S.)

It's not safe out here! We're coming inside!

MERLIN

No!

Merlin climbs onto the ledge and out onto the platform...

EXT. SMALL WOODEN PLATFORM - TOWER - PENDRAGON CASTLE - DAY

...where the elements SCREAM: blinding rain, bellowing THUNDER and arcing LIGHTNING.

MERLIN

Out of my way, you fools!

The Footmen from earlier climb back inside as Merlin reaches perilously over a 200 foot plunge to position LONG IRON POLES, etched with magical runes and tied with various magical components, high into the air.

As he adjusts the rods, Merlin squints into the rain as lightning PULSES behind low, gargantuan clouds. The lightning PULSES again. There are SHAPES in the clouds. Merlin tries to wipe the rain from his eyes. The lightning PULSES again.

MERLIN (CONT'D)

Wait!!

Merlin reaches back and SNATCHES one of the Footmen...

FOOTMAN #1

I don't want to die!

...and THROWS him against the wall. Merlin presses his hand to the Footman's chest. The Footman wears the crest of House Pendragon: THREE CROWNS against a yellow background.

Merlin looks back into the sky as the lightning PULSES behind the clouds illuminating THREE RED CROWNS.

MERLIN

(awed)

Gods.

CUT TO:

INT. SACRED ALTAR - SUNKEN TEMPLE - DEWDENN - DAY

Nimue tries to give the bundle back but Lenore insists.

NIMUE

We have to run!

LENORE

This is your charge. It's all that matters now. Bring this to Merlin.

There is a scrape of steel on stone and Nimue turns to a RED PALADIN descending the stone path. His sword drags lazily on the floor. When he sees her, he smiles with bloody teeth.

Lenore pulls herself to her feet to face the Red Paladin.

LENORE (CONT'D)

Run, Nimue.

Nimue stands by the altar, clutching the bundle.

NIMUE

I won't leave you.

LENORE

(eyes on the Red Paladin)

Go to Merlin. Run!

Tortured by this decision, Nimue hesitates and the Red Paladin steps in her path.

Lenore rips a dagger from her skirts and staggers toward the Paladin, who turns to intercept her.

NIMUE

Mother!

With all her strength, Lenore wraps herself around the Red Paladin. She looks Nimue in the eyes.

LENORE

I love you more than anything.

NIMUE

Mother, no--!

The Red Paladin clubs Lenore to her knees. She claws at him and fights with a mother's ferocity. She sinks the dagger into the Paladin's leg. He ROARS and cuts Lenore down.

Eyes blurred with tears, Nimue forces herself to turn away and run up the path to the sunlight.

EXT. SUNKEN TEMPLE - DEWDENN - DAY

Nimue stumbles into the sunlight, hazy with smoke. Her eyes go to Dewdenn where Red Paladins unleash...

...HUGE, BLACK, HUNTER WOLVES from their chains. They claw over the mud and race up the hill.

CUT TO:

INT. THE IRON WOOD - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Furious breathing. Nimue runs down a dirt path, one she's known since childhood.

Something SNARLS to her right. She shoots a glance and sees a FLASH of black fur between the trees.

Another SNARL to her left. She glances left. Again, something HUGE and BLACK darts between the trees.

They're closing in.

One chance.

Nimue breaks to her right down another path and stumbles into a clearing.

EXT. TABLE TOP ROCK - IRON WOOD - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Nimue lunges into a clearing littered with the blocks of a long-crumbled-henge. The Table Top Rock is a wide and flat boulder where the village children used to stage theatricals.

Now it is Nimue's last stand.

She leaps along the rocks of the henge, throws her bundle onto the top of the Table Top and climbs on herself as...

...FIVE HUNTER WOLVES surge into the clearing, jaws slavering, surrounding the rock on all sides.

Nimue is on her hands and knees. She looks furtively to all angles of the wood. There is no escape.

A wolf leaps and gets its head and paws over the edge, snatching her sleeve, tearing it. Nimue tears away.

Another wolf SCRAMBLES up around the side, SNAPPING at her boot. She KICKS it in the nose, scurrying it backwards.

But the wolves feel bold. They close in.

Nimue looks at her bundle, given to her by Lenore and notices a tear in the cloth exposing a knot of steel the size of Nimue's fist carved with a rune of four circles connecting to a center circle inlaid with platinum.

CUT TO:

INT. THRONE ROOM - PENDRAGON CASTLE - DAY

ROYAL AIDES carrying full buckets of rainwater hurry them to a TABLE OF LORDS headed by KING UTHER. The table is loaded with meat pies and pheasants, quails and mutton.

KING UTHER
The drought is ended!

LORDS
Uther! The drought is ended! To the king!

King Uther picks up one of the buckets.

KING UTHER
We do not drink to the rain! We
drink it!!

LORDS
Hail Uther!

King Uther lifts the pail to his lips as...

...WARM BLOOD dribbles down his cheeks and beard.

The lords mutter and remark as Uther lowers the pail,
frowning. He wipes his lips and sees the blood.

KING UTHER
(to his aides)
What--what is this?

Uther wipes his beard and sees the blood.

KING UTHER (CONT'D)
What trick is this?

ROYAL AIDE
(aghast, terrified)
No trick, your majesty.

King Uther tips over one of the pails and a RIVER OF BLOOD
washes over the table. The lords LEAP to their feet.

ROYAL AIDE (CONT'D)
(terrified)
That is the rain that fell upon the
castle!

KING UTHER
Merlin?!

King Uther tips over another bucket and another as MORE and
MORE BLOOD spills over the floor.

KING UTHER (CONT'D)
(panicking)
Merlin!!

CUT TO:

EXT. TABLE TOP ROCK - IRON WOOD - DAY

Nimue wraps her fist around a worn, leather grip, lifts and
yanks off the wrapped cloth freeing...

...an ANCIENT GREAT SWORD, its folded blade blackened and nicked from centuries of combat.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWER - PENDRAGON CASTLE - DAY

A lightning bolt STRIKES the rods on the rickety platform and that energy SHOOTs through Merlin like a spear of fire, launching him violently backwards.

Merlin ROARS as FLAMES consume his robes. Smoke fills the air as he tears off his robes until he is naked, writhing in pain as WE REVEAL...

...A HORRIFIC BURN that stretches down Merlin's naked back. The sizzling burn is in the shape of a GREAT SWORD as we...

CUT TO:

EXT. TABLE TOP ROCK - IRON WOOD - DAY

Eyes filled with terror and rage, Nimue turns and faces the hunting wolves snapping and snarling at her feet. She tightens her grip on the mysterious sword as we...

END PILOT