

FADE IN

EXT. - COUNTRY ROAD, DAY

Three MEN walk on a dirt road. They are dressed poorly for the spring chill. Their pace suggests no urgency.

In the far distance of the background, wisps of dark SMOKE waft towards the clouds. VULTURES circle ominously.

The men all wear some kind of military uniform. Two have old, weathered rifles.

The insignias and styles of their uniforms are not recognizable, but they all wear the same. Their faces and uniforms are dirty and they all have scraggly beards.

The trio are MIKAH, PASHE and TEODORO. Mikah, 30's, is confident and calm. His face suggests a good nature, but there are scars that show the wear he has endured.

Pashe is older and taller than Mikah, a strong build and harsh facial features accented by a pair of spectacles with cracked lenses.

Teodoro is young, heavy-set, dopey and smiling. He has no weapon, and his uniform doesn't fit well.

EXT. MOUNTAIN STREAM - DAY

The trio crosses on large STONES jutting out of the water.

Teodoro stops and sees a FISH resting in a small eddy. He stares as his friends walk on.

Pashe stops when he notices Teodoro is not keeping up. He turns.

PASHE

Teodoro, no time for games. Let's go.

Teodoro licks his lips, looks up to see where Pashe and Mikah are, then back down at the fish.

MIKAH

Leave him be, he'll catch up.

Pashe gives Mikaha quick look.

PASHE

We stick together, remember? I won't leave him behind, not even for a minute.

Mikah shrugs slightly as Pashe heads back toward Teodoro, whose gaze is still attached to the fish.

TEODORO
I could catch you.

EXT. ROLLING HILLS – DAY

Pashe and Mikah look off into the distance as they walk.

Teodoro is dripping wet just behind them, his bottom lip sticking out in a huge POUT.

TEODORO
Stupid fish.

PASHE
We've told you Teodoro, don't try to be clever; you're not good at it.

TEODORO
I would have caught it, Pashe. If the rocks weren't so slippery. And if the water wasn't so deep. And if...

Pashe and Mikah stop dead and stare ahead.

Teodoro has his head DOWN and doesn't see them stop; he RUNS INTO Pashe. He looks up to see what they are staring at.

Tendrils of SMOKE come into view over a low hill. The three climb the small hill toward the haze.

Upon reaching the top of the rise, they see the REMAINS of a small village at the bottom of the other side of the hill, burned to the ground.

TEODORO
Have they left any village untouched?

The scene seems to affect Pashe somewhat more than his companions. Mikah steals a sideways peak at Pashe, then gently PATS his shoulder.

They stare for a moment longer at the charred pieces of buildings, wagons and tools, then start walking again.

Pashe tears his eyes from the scene and spots SOMETHING on the ground a step or so away.

PASHE

Look.

Pashe steps over, kneels and picks up something SHINY and shows it to Mikah.

INSERT – METAL BUCKLE

A square, heavy BUCKLE with a black DRAGON etched into it. A shred of purple material hangs from it.

Mikah squints at the buckle, then the three exchange glances.

PASHE

Yes. The same ones.

MIKAH

Hmm.

PASHE

Over there.

Pashe points at the ground a few yards away and walks over, then kneels. Mikah and Teodoro follow. Pashe examines the disturbed earth.

PASHE

These are not the same tracks. Looks like many more, but lighter, moving faster.

MIKAH

Dangerous?

PASHE

Hard to say. I would have to guess no. They don't move the same.

TEODORO

Well, some good news anyway.

Mikah and Pashe look at him quizzically.

TEODORO

At least we know one of them can't keep his pants up anymore.

PASHE

Teodoro, what would we do without you?

Mikah and Pashe smile and pat Teodoro on the shoulder. They turn and slowly start on again, walking out of sight.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

At the edge of a small village, a young boy, ANTOLIN - 10, shaggy hair, torn clothing - watches the trio of Mikah, Pashe and Teodoro as they approach.

His sister, RIFKA - 15, pretty but hard looking - comes up from behind him and pulls him away.

RIFKA

Antolin, come, father wants...

She notices the three men, then shoots a frightened glance behind her. She hurries off with Antolin.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY

Mikah, Pashe and Teodoro walk into the village, glancing around at the modest, practical buildings. This village has not been cared for in recent years.

PEOPLE - men, women, children - rush into their houses. A few MEN stay outside, trying not to act afraid, but not really looking very brave, either.

Mikah, Pashe and Teodoro stop in the middle of the street and look around them.

It is a small village, little bigger than the one that was burned from the look of it. Trash piles dot the area, broken equipment sits unattended in a smithy; the well is boarded up.

Their eyes stop for a moment on a small sward where GRAVE-MARKERS stand as a grim reminder of the recent war. Mikah scans the names on the markers; his gaze rests on one particular marker that has a SYMBOL above the name.

Insert: grave marker: "Elana - Faith Keeper"

Mikah looks up to the villagers.

MIKAH

Hello. Hello!

The villagers who remain in the street shuffle nervously.

MIKAH

Hello?

One observer starts to SAY something, he is NUDGED by HENRIK – a sturdy, fussy lump of a man – and shuts up.

MIKAH

We mean you no harm. We just need a place to rest for the night.

PASHE

It would help us out greatly, friends, if we could camp...

Henrik hesitantly speaks.

HENRIK

You are not welcome here. Leave.

PASHE

That is not very friendly.

TEODORO

We will be gone by morning.

HENRIK

Better you are gone now.

The three look at each other in mock surprise.

PASHE

You hear that, Teodoro? How these sheep do speak.

(to Henrik)

We are going home from the war.

Henrik gets agitated, waving his hand absent-mindedly.

HENRIK

If you are going to burn us out, do it now. Get it over with.

TEODORO

You want us to burn you out?

VILLAGER 2

(indicating Henrik)

I don't know him.

Villager 2 hurries away from the other man, finds his house and disappears inside.

HENRIK

We saw smoke from over the hill, that village was destroyed. Now you are here. Just coincidence?

Teodor, Pashe and Mikah look at themselves again, all nod.

TEODORO/PASHE

Yes.

VILLAGER 3

You have guns, you look like all the others.

HENRIK

So get it over with already.

MIKAH

They've got us.

PASHE

Yes, they must have had spies in that other village. Now we'll have to proceed with our plan.

TEODORO

And they won't even fight back. How easy.

Mikah pulls an old LIGHTER from his pocket, stares right at Henrick. He raises it, flips it open.

Teodoro and Pashe laugh evilly and start to un-sling their gear.

Henrik and the other mens' faces show surprise and fear, they back off, bump into each other, and finally RUN for their houses and SLAM doors behind them.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Mikah, Pashe and Teodoro continue into the village square. Mikah points to a spot and they start to set up a camp.

Pashe starts to gather up fluffy MOSS clumps to make bedding for their blankets.

PASHE

I have never seen so much of this. It grows well here.

They continue to set up camp, oblivious to the village around them.

INT. ANTOLIN'S HOUSE - SAME

Rifka peers through a CRACK in the window shutter. She watches the three men work.

RIFKA

They are setting up camp. Who would sleep where he plans to burn?

INT. ANTOLIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Rifka is asleep at the window. She raises her head with a start. The sun is up and shining through the window. She opens the shutter a crack and peers out at Mikah's camp.

Mikah sets up a cooking area. Teodoro and Pashe lounge lazily, doing some busy work or other. They show no signs of leaving.

RIFKA

Liars. We should have run them off. Antolin, fetch father... Antolin?

She spies about the small dwelling for her brother, but does not find him.

She stares back out the window, and sees Antolin approaching the men unafraid.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

Mikah looks up from his work and sees Antolin approaching cautiously. Mikah SMILES faintly.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A half dozen HORSEMEN and about a dozen more men on foot are stopped in the middle of the road. On a shield is visible the black dragon emblem from the belt buckle.

GURKIN, a fat, dumpy walrus of a soldier in black leather and thick glasses, seems to hold his PURPLE BELT SASH proudly as he stares into the distance.

The VOICE of Drakko booms behind Gurkin OC.

DRAKKO

Well, Gurkin?

GURKIN

The prisoners have come this way, Oh Biceptuous One. But the trail is muddled here.

DRAKKO

They have covered their tracks?

GURKIN

I think they split up. No matter. I am wily, fearless, and untiring. They will be found.

He abruptly turns and thrusts his clenched fists over his head.

GURKIN

Our vengeance will be swift and terrible.

His belt sash FALLS apart where he was holding it and his pants DROP around his ankles, showing dingy, lacey BOXERS.

His fellow soldiers laugh out loud. Gurkin quickly tries to pull his trousers up.

A tall, hulking man in black chain armor steps past Gurkin to observe the countryside. His back to us.

This is DRAKKO, 40's, a cruel and hateful behemoth. He has slung on his back a huge sturdy CLUB with the pointy end of a spike protruding from it.

He turns, and a large, fresh SCAR/WOUND is revealed on his face, diagonally bisecting his visage.

DRAKKO

Forgive me if I am less than confident.
Find the man who did this to me.

GURKIN

WHOA! That looks like it might be getting a bit puss-y...

Drakko glares at Gurkin.

GURKIN

...Which only improves your darn-near perfect looks anyway. A Regal Nastiness to be sure, my Elephant-Sized Warlord.

A BIRD alights on a small downed TREE near the roadside and chirps happily.

In one motion, Drakko whips the club off his back and smashes the tree into kindling. Bird FEATHERS float up from the road.

DRAKKO

Find the trail, Gurkin, before I feel like hitting something again.

GURKIN

Yes, Most Offensive One.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Antolin stops and stares at Mikah, who takes out a small POT to hang on a cooking TRIPOD - made from the rifles and a sturdy stick - and sets it over a small pile of sticks.

Mikah pats the stump next to him. Antolin accepts the invitation and sits, smiling.

Teodoro and Pashe see what is happening and smile to each other.

PASHE

It starts already.

TEODORO

He gets better every day. He should be king.

PASHE

Bah. He would be wasted as king.

They watch for a few moments as Mikah talks quietly with Antolin while readying his cooking area. He shows Antolin the different utensils he has.

Suddenly, Rifka appears behind Antolin. She brandishes a piece of FIREWOOD.

RIFKA

What are you doing with my brother?

Antolin is startled.

ANTOLIN

Rifka! This man is showing me how to cook a great feast.

RIFKA

He is, is he? Planning to steal what
little food we have to gorge themselves?

Rifka yanks Antolin to his feet and pulls him behind her,
holding the cudgel in front.

Mikah rises slowly to a standing position.

MIKAH

I did not mean to upset you. I was just
showing your brother here...

RIFKA

...How to bully your way through life,
taking what you want, no matter how you
harm others?

MIKAH

Have I taken anything I shouldn't have,
other than your brother's attention for a
few minutes?

RIFKA

N... no.

MIKAH

I do not plan to take any of your food.
We have more than what we need, anyway.

RIFKA

Good, because there isn't any. You said
you would go. Go.

TEODORO

Why are you so hostile?

Rifka thinks a moment.

RIFKA

Soldiers come and take and take and take.
We have nothing left.

PASHE

How do you feed yourselves, then?

RIFKA

We do not eat.

Pashe and Teodoro laugh.

PASHE

You do not eat? Did you hear that,
Teodoro? This is the village where they
get the models for next year's fashions.

They laugh some more.

MIKAH

We will use only what we have. You and
your brother are welcome to share.

He motions for them to sit, Rifka ignores him and backs up.

RIFKA

So, you plan to torture us by making us
watch you stuff your fat faces with goods
taken from others? Is that it?

MIKAH

If that is what you want.

He shrugs and bends to his work again, shifting his bulging
pack closer to the pot.

Rifka and Antolin watch as he pours the last water from his
CANTEEN into the pot. It is not much.

He puts out his hand without looking as Teodoro and Pashe
drape their canteen straps across his palm.

Mikah empties the little bit of water from these canteens
into the pot as well.

PASHE

It is not much, Mikah, will it work?

MIKAH

Probably better.

TEODORO

(Smiling)

He makes the best soup.

Rifka and Antolin lick their lips and stare at the pot,
almost willing it to fill with delicious soup.

ANTOLIN

What kind of soup, Rifka? Lentil? Beef?

RIFKA

Don't waste your time dreaming, Antolin.
In the end, they will not share. They
never do.

PASHE

You could always share with your
neighbors instead.

RIFKA

Ha. No one shares.

TEODORO

No one? Why?

RIFKA

There is nothing left to share. We keep
what little we have for ourselves.

MIKAH

I said you are welcome, you are. Sit.
When it is ready, eat.

TEODORO

Yes, join us. You two will eat way
better than the rest of your village
tonight.

Rifka eyes the three warily, then greedily sits, rubbing her
hands and nearly drooling.

Antolin does not sit, he glances back toward his house.

MIKAH

What's the matter, boy? You're not
hungry?

ANTOLIN

No, not now. Thank you, though.

RIFKA

Sit, Antolin! We will have a meal fit for
kings and queens tonight.

ANTOLIN

I would rather have what father is
eating, Rifka.

The three men look quickly to each other. Mikah eyes the boy,
his face reflects a bemused admiration.

RIFKA

Sit. It is better a few of us feed off of these who have been leaching off of us for so long, than for all of us to starve.

MIKAH

They may all join us.

RIFKA

What? Who?

MIKAH

The village. Go and tell your family, Antolin, they may all join us for a meal.

RIFKA

You have barely enough water for broth for the two of us.

PASHE

Five of us.

RIFKA

Whatever... and now you want the whole village to join in? What kind of soup are you making?

Mikah rummages in his backpack and finally finds what he is looking for.

MIKAH

Ahh, here it is.

He unceremoniously drops a large STONE into the pot of water with a dull CLUNK and smiles up at Rifka.

Rifka's face twists in anger and frustration.

RIFKA

You lying...

TEODORO

(Smiling)

He makes the BEST soup.

A thin wisp of steam rises from the pot into the air. A very faint smiling FACE can be seen in the wisp for a second, then is gone.

INT. ANTOLIN'S HOUSE – DAY

Rifka and Henrik argue; it's hard to tell who is the parent and who the child. Antolin stands by, eagerly waiting to jump into the discussion.

HENRIK

What? He makes soup with rocks?

RIFKA

Yes! And then he invites the entire village to eat with them.

HENRIK

You are crazy, daughter. Men do not eat rocks. It must have been a large turnip or something.

ANTOLIN

It was a stone, father. He said it was magic!

RIFKA

Hush, Antolin!

Henrik steals a furtive peek out the window.

HENRIK

Is he the Devil?

ANTOLIN

No, father. He told me an old man gave it to him years ago. It is magic and it makes any kind of food you like, as much as you like!

HENRIK

Bah! You know I do not believe in magic.

Henrik peers out through the crack in the shutters at the men who laugh and joke around the cooking fire.

EXT. VILLAGE – DAY

Eyes peer out through cracks in shutters or from behind curtains in half a dozen houses.

TRESLYN – 30ish, a confident young woman – does not hide herself. She stands and peers out through an open door.

EXT. COOKING FIRE - DAY

Pashe spies Treslyn as he warms his hands over the fire. Treslyn closes the door slowly. Pashe smiles as he steals a glance toward Antolin's house and the shutter SLAPS closed.

MIKAH

They'll be out soon.

PASHE

This village is not like the others. These people have been through much.

MIKAH

All villages are alike, Pashe. Big or small. East or west.

PASHE

This one is different.

Mikah looks up at his friend, who looks about uneasily, nervously.

MIKAH

It reminds you of yours, yes?

PASHE

They have nothing to give, Mikah.

MIKAH

You never know what you have, my friend, until you have what you know.

Pashe relaxes a bit, nods in agreement.

The three sit a moment or two, then Teodoro turns to Pashe; he motions with his hands.

TEODORO

Is that one of those... thinking things?

Pashe nods. Mikah smiles and stirs the pot with a wooden spoon.

Henrik approaches abruptly and the four stare at each other for a beat. Pashe MOTIONS toward the pot, and Henrik leans over and peers into it.

HENRIK

My daughter tells me you cook magic rocks to eat.

MIKAH

It's a stone.

Henrik looks suspiciously at the three, peers into the pot again and sees a hot, wet stone at the bottom of roiling water.

HENRIK

How can that little bit feed so many? If it were edible.

PASHE

My friend here is the magic man. Treat him right and he can do a world of good.

HENRIK

Magic. Hah!

MIKAH

No magic, eh? You must be the Faith Keeper for this village then.

Henrik looks to the ground, then makes a brief motion toward the graveyard, before looking back at the ground.

HENRIK

Our Faith Keeper died years ago. She was...

MIKAH

We understand. (a beat) They do usually work in pairs.

Henrik glares at the men briefly.

HENRIK

He is buried with her.

There is silence between the four men. Then Henrik looks back in the pot.

HENRIK

And what if I treat this Magic Man wrong?

TEODORO

Then you do yourself a world of bad.

HENRIK

Ha. If you can do, I can do better.

Henrik looks around, picks up a ROCK and brandishes it threateningly.

HENRIK

Hah! I will make my own stone soup.

MIKAH

No.

HENRIK

Why? I have a stone. I will make soup too.

MIKAH

That's not a stone. That's a rock.

HENRIK

Eh? No matter.

Henrik tosses it aside and grabs up another.

PASHE

That's a rock too.

Henrik throws it aside and picks up another.

TEODOR

Rock.

Mikah shakes his head.

MIKAH

Rock.

Henrik picks up a number of rocks, to which they all shake their heads.

MIKAH/PASHE/TEODORO

Rock.

TEODORO

Ooh, over there. That is a stone. Right there.

Henrik scurries over and picks it up.

TEODORO

Oops, sorry. That's also a rock.

Henrik angrily HURLS the rock toward the woods. Pashe and Teodoro chuckle.

HENRIK

Bah!

MIKAH

My friends play a joke on you,

Mikah waves his hand, waits for an answer.

HENRIK

Henrik.

MIKAH

Henrik. Sit. I'll tell you about this stone here.

HENRIK

I do not need stories from you. Where is the food you promised my children?

MIKAH

It's here in the pot.

HENRIK

Bah! I have cared for my children for years and have never had to eat rocks.

PASHE

I think you will be happy with his soup, Henrik. Give him a chance.

Henrik wheels on Pashe, all at once very angry.

HENRIK

Give him a chance? The mother of my children gave soldiers a chance five years ago, and where did it get her? Where did it get us? Don't speak to me of chances, you thieving liar...

Pashe stands up slowly in front of Henrik, a good head or so taller, and much wider than the short, round man. He looks ready to fight.

Henrik's eyes bulge, he swallows nervously but does not back away.

Teodoro looks between Mikah and Pashe, he does not move.

Mikah motions discreetly to Pashe, who then relaxes his stance.

MIKAH

What can a short tale hurt, my friend.
If, when I am done, you still want us to
leave, we will. Agreed?

Henrik fidgets and stares at Pashe, like a deer in
headlights.

Pashe smiles and gestures with both hands.

PASHE

I'm sorry, sir; it has been a long
journey, and my manners are hidden by my
fatigue.

Henrik, visibly relieved, turns as he sits next to Mikah.

HENRIK

Very well, what of your rock?

Mikah taps the pot with his wooden spoon, then FROWNS at the
water.

MIKAH

You see, a long time ago, hmm...

HENRIK

What?

MIKAH

Oh, nothing. Maybe.

HENRIK

What's wrong?

MIKAH

Just looks like the water is a little
low, probably won't matter, but

HENRIK

But what? What?

MIKAH

Might have to give just a tiny bit less
to everyone. No great matter. Now,
Henrik, this stone was given to me by...

HENRIK

If you had more water, could we have more
soup?

MIKAH

Excellent reasoning there, sir; but again, I think it should maybe be enough.

HENRIK

I... may have some water in my house. Just a little, mind you.

MIKAH

No, we couldn't. We said we'd take nothing from you good people.

HENRIK

I don't mind. I shall get it.

He stands to leave.

PASHE

Well then, friend, you shall have an extra little bit then.

Henrik heads toward his house; thinks a moment, then looks back toward Mikah.

HENRIK

It... it is all of us. My family and me. WE have a little water to spare.

Mikah and his friends look to each other.

TEODORO

Then you all shall have a little extra. Thank you.

HENRIK

No problem.

He hurries off toward his house, stealing suspicious glances at the other houses.

EXT. DRAKKO'S ENCAMPMENT - DAY

Drakko's men engage in all manner of foolish GAMES of strength - cheating at every turn. Many get severely injured, to the amusement of the rest.

Drakko sits on his throne, watching the games. Gurkin fusses about him, trying to clean and touch-up the wound on Drakko's face. He has to keep shooing a large FLY away from the wound.

Drakko's face travels back and forth from stupid amusement, to pained anger as Gurkin dabs at the gash.

GURKIN

Please hold still, my Larger-than-is-necessary Master, I can't clean your... uh... Handsomeness Accent.

DRAKKO

My men grow restless to raid, Gurkin. We can't stay here for too long.

Gurkin motions OS to the men and games.

GURKIN

As you wish, Sire. After this round of "Poke My Eye With A Stick," we will be on our way.

A loud, sickening SQUISH is heard. Gurkin and Drakko flinch.

GURKIN

I believe we have a winner.

Gurkin addresses the camp, still trying to shoo the fly.

GURKIN

Make ready to ride, men. We must find the prisoner before nightfall.

The FLY alights on Drakko's nose, Gurkin double-takes, then smashes the fly (and so Drakko's face) with a backhand.

Drakko screams and lunges to his feet, holding his face. Gurkin cringes.

DRAKKO

Aaaah! When I find him, I will destroy him and every living thing nearby!

GURKIN

Your destruction will be legendary, Most Wide and Thick Antagonist. (to the men) You heard Drakko - get ready NOW.

The men quickly start to pack up.

INT. ANTOLIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Henrik pulls small BASINS from hiding places in the house - under floorboards, behind the woodpile, etc.

RIFKA

Father, what are you doing? He mocks us
and taunts us and you give him our water?
We will die.

HENRIK

No, Rifka. We will eat well for a day or
two.

RIFKA

No stranger has ever given us anything
but pain; why do you do this?

HENRIK

Do not question me, child. It is my duty
to take care of you and your brother. I'm
doing that. If we give him our water, he
will give us a little extra soup.

The VOICE of Zola, from behind, startles them.

ZOLA (OC)

Soup? Who has soup? They are going to
give you soup?

Henrik and Rifka turn to see another woman, ZOLA – matronly,
harsh – and her daughter, ANNA – eight, street urchin looks,
in the doorway. They are dressed the same – ragged, wrinkled
clothes.

ZOLA

Why do you get soup while Anna and I
starve?

RIFKA

We get nothing, widow Zola. Mind your
own business.

ZOLA

Do not take that tone with me, child.

HENRIK

Both of you stop. The soldiers said they
will feed us some of their magic soup,
and they ask nothing from us.

ZOLA

Then why are you taking your hidden water
to them?

HENRIK

Hidden water? What hidden water? Who ever heard of 'hidden' water?

Zola looks past Henrik to Rifka, who was putting a jug back under a floor board, then up to

Antolin on a chair. He takes a CORK out of the nostril of a mounted elk's HEAD on the wall and water runs out into a tankard Antolin holds.

Henrik looks down at his basin in shame, then back up.

HENRIK

Umm, we... we...

ZOLA

You told us last week you had no water, Rifka.

RIFKA

We didn't, Zola. We... father?

There is a tense beat between them. Then

HENRIK

We found it.

Henrik hurries out of the room, sloshing water on himself.

EXT. COOKING POT – DAY

Mikah's pot is filled with water now.

MIKAH

Oh, yes. That topped it off nicely, Henrik, thank you very much.

HENRIK

It is nothing compared to your soup, my friend. By the way, uh...

MIKAH

Yes?

HENRIK

When will, um, it be...

TEODORO

Finished?

PASHE
Ready to eat?

HENRIK
Yes.

MIKAH
A little longer yet.

Mikah looks over Henrik's shoulder and sees some other VILAGERS approaching angrily.

Henrik follows his gaze and sees Zola heading up a small group.

HENRIK
Blast! Lousy gossip. A thousand curses on her.

Zola and her platoon stop as their SHADOWS cover Henrik and Mikah.

ZOLA
Why do you feed his family and not ours?

MIKAH
Pardon me?

ZOLA
You plan to feed only them. My family is hungry also. Why do you not feed us as well?

PASHE
We extended the invitation to the entire village.

Zola peers into the pot.

ZOLA
There is not enough there to even feed yourselves.

TEODORO
It's magic.

ZOLA
Magic. Hah! There is no way you can feed the village from that small pot.

MIKAH
We can't?

ZOLA
No.

Mikah looks to Henrik, then back to Zola.

MIKAH
Are you sure?

ZOLA
Are you deaf as well as stupid?

MIKAH
What do we do?

EXT. ZOLA'S COTTAGE - DAY

Zola directs as LOTHAR - 40s - 50s, a stoic mountain - drags a heavy iron CAULDRON out of the house and sets it on a cart. The cart is pulled away by an old gray DONKEY.

EXT. COOKING POT - DAY

The donkey cart pulls up to Mikah. Zola gestures proudly.

ZOLA
You see? Put your magic soup in there,
then it will feed enough.

MIKAH
How do you know?

ZOLA
Because I am a cook. Ask my brother.
Right Lothar?

LOTHAR
She cooks.

ZOLA
In good years I fed the whole village
from that.

PASHE
You are a cook? What do you cook?

ZOLA
I was a cook. But I could cook anything!
Ask Lothar. Lothar?

LOTHAR
Anything.

ZOLA
I could cook anything.

MIKAH
Ah, then you must have made stone soup
before.

Some of the other skeptical villagers stare at Zola, she
fidgets nervously. She sweats it.

ZOLA
Only once...

"Ahhhs" go up from the crowd.

MIKAH
Great, then perhaps you would like to
help, eh?

Zola fidgets and looks at the faces of her neighbors,
silently challenging her.

ZOLA
It is your soup; good cooks never
interfere with

TEODORO
We don't mind.

MIKAH
A good cook welcomes knowledgeable help.
But if you don't want to.

ZOLA
I really can't, because I... Lothar?

LOTHAR
Help.

ZOLA
Shut up Lothar.

Lothar shrugs and sits on the edge of the donkey cart. Mikah
stands.

MIKAH
Terrific. Pashe, Teodoro, help me get
this cauldron set up over our fire.

A man moves forward.

MAN

That small fire will never heat that pot.
You need a bigger one.

MIKAH

Oh, I don't think so; we have plenty of
wood, see?

He motions to the small pile of STICKS they have set by the
fire. Most of it looks wet.

MAN

Hah! You couldn't burn your thumb with
that pile of twigs.

Teodoro fiddles with the fire, then abruptly pulls his singed
THUMB away and sticks it in his mouth.

MAN

I will get you some better wood.

PASHE

Please, we don't want to take anything
from you kind people. The pot is one
thing, but...

MAN

If you do it your way, none of us will
eat.

He turns and leaves among NODS and WHISPERS from the throng.

Mikah, Pashe and Teodoro start the task of unloading the
cauldron.

EXT. COOK FIRE - DAY

The cauldron sits atop a huge fire and Mikah empties his tiny
pot into it, the stone falls with a deep, resonating clang.

MIKAH

Ahh! Smell that.

TEODOR

Is there enough water, Mikah?

MIKAH

Ssshh, Teodoro.

HENRIK

What? Why do you whisper? Is there not enough, we have no more.

MIKAH

We did not ask, Henrik. This... will have to do.

Some of the other villagers pay close attention.

MIKAH

We will have to make this work. Do not worry, if it comes down to it, we, ourselves - and maybe just one or two more - will do without.

The villagers shuffle nervously. Treslyn furtively raises her HAND.

TRESLYN

Uh, there may be some water left at the bottom of the well.

Everyone looks toward the boarded up WELL.

PASHE

It looks dry to me.

HENRIK

After the last soldiers came through, they took all the water they could carry. Then they told us that the well was dry, and boarded it up.

MIKAH

Terrible. To look down into your own well and see no water at the bottom.

The villagers stare at each other for a moment, embarrassed at the obvious question.

HENRIK

They... they told me it was dry.

EXT. WELL - FOLLOWING

BOARDS BEND and BREAK as Teodoro pries them with his bayoneted rifle as a lever. They all look into it.

WOMAN

Water! There is water down there. They lied to us.

MAN

We have been dying for months, Henrik and we had water all along.

ZOLA

It has refilled for us. Little miracles happen all the time.

Henrik makes a face and silently mocks Zola. Lothar catches Henrik's gaze. Lothar is not happy. Henrik licks his lips and stops his mocking.

ZOLA

Things may be starting to get better.

The crowd's tired faces smile a little and nod.

TEODORO

Maybe they poisoned it.

Everyone stops dead for a few seconds and stares daggers at Teodoro.

TEODORO

I'm just saying, is all. They could have dropped a dead goat down there. Or a bale of Sickweed... or half a goat and three handfulls of sickweed, or...

Pashe WHAPS him upside his head.

PASHE

Whose side are you on?

ZOLA

Someone should test it.

They all stare at Teodoro, who smiles weakly, panics, then points.

They follow his direction and look toward the old, gray donkey, who flicks his ear at a fly and utters what would pass for a "HUH?"

EXT. WELL - DAY

The villagers pour WATER from a bucket into a PAN, sit it in front of the donkey and FORCE its head down into it.

The donkey DRINKS greedily then comes up for air. The villagers all pause breathlessly. The donkey starts to make noises and staggers a little. The villagers wince.

DONKEY
BBBBUUUUURP.

EXT. CAULDRON OVER THE FIRE - LATER

The cauldron now BRIMS with water, and steam rolls off in voluminous wisps.

All the villagers gather around, smiling, watching the soup boil.

Mikah, Teodoro and Pashe sit a little way off. Mikah CARVES a small TOY out of wood. The toy looks like a cross between a Russian Matreshka doll and a "Weeble."

Mikah rubs some charcoal across the doll's face, then blows off the excess dust. The black highlights the carved features. He hands it to Anna, and she joins her friends in play.

Henrik wanders by, craning to look into the cauldron.

MIKAH
How's it doing, Zola?

HENRIK
Ha, Lothar's donkey knows more about cooking than her.

Mikah ignores the comment. Zola feints a blow with the spoon, Henrik backs off. Zola stirs the soup.

ZOLA
It is doing, um, fine. It looks rather plain... and thin, still.

MIKAH
Perfect.

ZOLA
Don't you have anything else to liven it up just a bit?

PASHE

Nope. Doesn't need it.

ZOLA

Potatoes, beets... anything?

TEODORO

Nope. Doesn't need it.

HENRIK

Lentils? You have lentils?

MIKAH/PASHE/TEODORO

Doesn't need it.

The three start to wander away from the fire. The folks around the pot look at each other and at the thin soup.

ZOLA

I don't care what he says. It looks plain. We should check their packs. They hold out on us I bet.

Treslyn stands near the cauldron, watching.

TRESLYN

No. We shouldn't repay their generosity with greed and mistrust.

ZOLA

You eat hot water, I am getting some of their food.

Zola looks to Mikah and the other two as they PLAY with the KIDS and talk to each other; then she sneaks over to their BED ROLLS.

She pokes around for a few moments, then finds Mikah's bulging PACK. Just as she reaches inside, Mikah is over her, and he snatches up the pack in one hand.

MIKAH

Okay, okay. I will add more. But I warn you, it may ruin the whole thing.

ZOLA

Aha! I told you so.

She gestures toward the others around the cauldron, they lower their gazes as Mikah steps over to the pot. He reaches into his pack, making faces as he fishes around.

MIKAH

I hope you are all satisfied. This may very well destroy the soup for everyone.

He sighs heavily and closes his eyes. Quickly, he pulls out another STONE and plops it into the cauldron.

MIKAH

There. Fancy enough for you now?

He angrily tosses his pack on the ground and stalks away. The rest of the villagers scowl at Zola.

An older man, JON, timidly motions with his hand.

JON

I... I think I may have a potato or two at my house.

ZOLA

Jon? You have potatoes, Jon? You said you had no potatoes, Jon.

JON

Actually, my son found them in our old garden from last season.

MIKAH

Absolutely not. We want nothing...

ZOLA

Quiet, thin soup maker.

She moves closer to Jon as she eyes Mikah.

ZOLA

I guess your potatoes would liven it up a bit, Jon.

TEODORO

Ahh, you are an unselfish saint, my friend. An extra big portion for you.

JON

No, I will take what everyone else has. I only have one or two potatoes.

EXT. COOKING FIRE - LATER

Jon puts down a huge SACK of potatoes by the cauldron. Zola looks at the sack, then up at Jon.

ZOLA
Just a few, eh?

JON
I... I have no knife to cut them with,
though.

MIKAH
Use mine.

He sticks his bayonet into the sack.

MIKAH
I would do it, but they are your
potatoes, and I strongly protest the use
of any of your food in this soup.

He walks away and the others whisper behind his back.

ZOLA
"I strongly protest the use of any of our
food..." Who does he think he is?

RIFKA
Come, we will help you, Jon, we are not
lazy like he is.

EXT. COOKING SITE – DAY

On a make-shift table, the women help get the potatoes out
and clean them.

Jon cuts them up with the bayonet, then the women and kids
help pour them into the cauldron.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE – DAY

Pashe, Teodoro and Henrik sit on logs near each other. There
is awkward silence as Henrik tries to concentrate on the
cauldron.

Pashe clears his throat.

PASHE
So, who were these soldiers that stole
all your food?

Henrik only barely takes his eyes off the cauldron and speaks
quickly.

HENRIK

Just soldiers, they are all alike.

Pashe and Teodoro look down at their uniforms and back up.

Henrik catches this, smiles weakly, and tears his eyes off the soup, paying more attention to his comrades.

HENRIK

Some months ago, toward the end of the war, a group of deserters came through. They took what they wanted, burned the rest.

He motions toward a field covered by dark, scraggly grass.

HENRIK

Then they left. We had a bad year with the crops, so there was not a lot to begin with.

TEODORO

Didn't you get help from surrounding villages?

HENRIK

No, we do not truck with others.

TEODORO

Why?

MAN

Why should we believe others have it any different?

PASHE

Are there other villages still nearby?

WOMAN

Just a few. But they have their own problems. Children from those villages come here to beg for food.

PASHE

It is very kind of you to feed the neighboring children.

Henrik looks away, he half-mumbles.

HENRIK

I did not say we fed them.

Pashe and Teodoro look at each other, Pashe shakes his head slowly.

TEODORO

Well, at least you don't chase them off with rocks and switches.

Henrik glances at Teodoro guiltily and hangs his head, staring at the ground.

EXT. - VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Mikah plays with the kids. Each of the children has some kind of wooden toy.

ANTOLIN

Thank you so much for the gift.

MIKAH

You are very welcome, Antolin. It isn't much.

ANTOLIN

It is more than I had before you came.

MIKAH

It was here before, you just didn't see it. Look there is another, and another.

He points at other pieces of wood lying about.

MIKAH

See?

ANTOLIN

That one looks like a pig.

MIKAH

Then we'll make it a pig.

He picks up the piece of wood and takes out his knife and starts to carve as the other kids gather around.

A sharp CRY of pain is heard from Jon.

JON

Angel of Mercy, I have cut off my hand!

Mikah, Teodoro and Pashe hurry over to Jon and the others. Jon is bleeding, but his fingers are all there.

RIFKA

Oh, it's just a little cut, Jon, stop carrying on so.

JON

On the last potato, too. Ooh, it hurts.

MIKAH

Here, brother, take a bandage.

He pulls a rolled BANDAGE from his pocket and offers it to Jon.

JON

No! It was your cursed blade that cut me.

MIKAH

I know, so it should be my bandage that mends you. Take it. Please.

Jon takes the bandage and Anna and Zola help wrap his finger.

Another villager looks at the blood and makes a face.

VILLAGER

He got blood on the potatoes. I will not eat them.

Mikah sees a few others make a face at the potatoes.

MIKAH

Every day my friends, every day we all eat our own blood. And sweat, and tears. If you eat something that is completely clean, it will not fill your stomach.

The people ruminate on that for a minute. Teodoro starts to say something, Pashe stops him with a curt gesture.

Jon looks up at Pashe.

JON

What did he mean?

Pashe shrugs "don't look at me." Jon scrunches up his face in thought.

JON

Now my head hurts, too.

TEODORO

The pain goes away eventually.

Mikah wipes his hands on his pants as he looks into the pot and frowns.

MIKAH

Really should not have added all those potatoes without some carrots or something to break up the color, give it some texture.

RIFKA

What color? What's wrong?

MIKAH

Well, I haven't seen it too often. But sometimes when there are too many potatoes in this soup it can... Ah, my survival instinct runs away with me.

The villagers stare at him like he just said they were all going to die.

MAN

We have beets!

WOMAN

Will celery help? I have celery.

People begin to rush off in different directions. Mikah speaks barely loud enough to be heard.

MIKAH

Nonsense. I forbid you. Stop.

Treslyn eyes Mikah through the group of rushing villagers. Their eyes meet. Mikah smiles at her. She watches the villagers scurry about.

INT. COTTAGE – DAY

A woman scoops up a small pile of beets from under a mattress and rushes out of the room.

INT. ANOTHER HOUSE – DAY

A man KNOCKS on a spot on the wall twice and a SACK with greens hanging out FALLS from the ceiling.

INT. YET ANOTHER HOUSE — DAY

A woman pulls out VEGETABLES that looked like they were part of a PAINTING hanging on the wall.

EXT. ANTOLIN'S HOUSE — DAY

Henrik pulls a SACK from his doorway and throws it on a WHEELBARROW.

EXT. ANTOLIN'S NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE — DAY

The neighbor lifts a larger BUNDLE onto his wheelbarrow and shoots Henrik a look.

THE TWO SCENES ARE INTER-CUT

Henrik reaches under his porch and pulls out three EGGPLANTS and puts them on his barrow and smiles wryly at his neighbor.

The neighbor yanks a flower out of a POT on his porch, then pulls a good size PUMPKIN out from underneath. He sneers over at Henrik and gestures "what else you got?"

Henrik thinks a moment, then reaches down the front of his baggy TROUSERS and pulls out a large ZUCCHINI.

He makes a cocky head-nod and tosses the zucchini onto his barrow and looks over to his neighbor.

The neighbor STARES at Henrik with a raised eyebrow and disturbed look, then pushes his wheelbarrow away.

Henrik looks down at the zucchini, sneaks embarrassed glances around, then smiles meekly and wheels his food away as well.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE — DAY

A large TABLE has been set up near the fire, and people work at preparing the vegetables and dumping them into the pot.

Mikah, Teodoro and Pashe breathe in the aroma and smile.

TEODORO

This will be a great soup.

PASHE

The best.

HENRIK

I can not wait. I want to test it, it smells so good.

TEODORO

Yeah! Let's just get a little...

Teodoro grabs a LADLE as Henrik approaches with a SPOON to taste it. Pashe slaps the ladle out of Teodoro's hand, and stops Henrik by standing in his path.

PASHE

No.

HENRIK

What will it hurt, I just want a taste.

TEODORO

Yeah, what can it hurt...?

Pashe makes a face at teodoro as he speaks, trying to give hime the high sign.

PASHE

One of the conditions with stone soup: you cannot eat it until it's finished.

MAN

Bah, what rubbish. Let us taste it.

Villagers all push forward, nodding.

ALL

Yes! Let us taste. What will it hurt?

Mikah looks at the villagers faces as they converge on the cooking pot. He tenses up as they approach.

TEODORO

I'm sorry. What do we do? We can't stop them all.

MIKAH

Alright. Then we won't.

HENRIK

Ha! I knew it. They are going to take it all for... what did you say?

Mikah resumes a relaxed demeanor and turns to his friends, his back to the cauldron and villagers.

MIKAH

Pashe, Teodoro, let them taste. I will work on the markers. Now, how many will we need.

He turns and starts to COUNT heads as the villagers push toward the soup. They STOP when they see what Mikah is doing.

HENRIK

Markers? For what, markers?

MIKAH

So your children and grandchildren will know which grave to visit each week, of course. Now I've lost count. Okay, One... two... three...

WOMAN

Graves? The soup is poisoned?

TEODORO

No. Just... uh, not ready.

PASHE

You should have seen what happened last time, eh, Teodoro!

He pats Mikah on the back and starts to help him count.

WOMAN

What happened?

MAN

Yes, what?

MIKAH

Oh, it was a long time ago. Go ahead and eat.

HENRIK

No, don't force us to do things we don't want to do. Tell us the story.

PASHE

I think you should tell them.

TEODORO

Yeah, tell us; I mean them.

MIKAH

As you wish. Many years ago, when I was given this stone, the old man who gave it to me also gave me this warning.

Steam from the cauldron obscures Mikah somewhat from the rest of the group.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE — NIGHT

A young MAN makes a soup over a fire in a very run-down village. Many people gather about him as he works.

MIKAH (VO)

When the old man was a young man and was making this soup for the first time, the people he made it for could not wait to taste it.

Some villagers pick up broken bowls and cups and move toward the pot. The man pleads emphatically with them to stop.

MIKAH (VO)

He tried to get them to hold off just a little longer, but they would not listen. Finally, a few of the people took a sip.

A woman sips from a cracked bowl and smiles. A man sloppily drinks from a tankard.

MIKAH (VO)

They smiled at first, they went "ooh" and "mmm" and "my, this is rather tasty."

Many smiling people drink from bowls and rub their stomachs in appreciation.

MIKAH (VO)

Soon their smiles broadened and their toes left the earth as they floated on the wisps of steam that carried the scent of the magical soup. They could not stop smiling and licking their lips, they were in rapture.

People drift about the campsite with exaggerated smiles on their faces, they dance with bowls and mugs. A man snuggles his wooden spoon.

EXT. MIKAH'S COOKING SITE – DAY

The villagers don't move a muscle, many are poised to take a dip of the soup.

MIKAH

Their mouths watered for more, watered so much for just one more taste of the divine broth, that they drowned; the lot of them. Drowned in their own saliva.

Teodoro gawks, completely lost in the story. Pashe watches the crowd.

MIKAH

You see, this magical soup is at its most potent from the start, and the flavor spreads as it cooks.

WISPS of steam that look like beets and potatoes and celery appear faintly, then curl back and vanish into the cauldron.

MIKAH

So that by the time it is finished, everybody gets exactly what they need.

The townspeople stare at Mikah, fixed on his every word. When he is done, they sigh and pull back, then sit and stare forlornly at the cauldron again.

Teodoro fidgets, then leans in and whispers to Mikah.

TEODORO

Did that really happen?

MIKAH

Do you believe it, Teodoro?

TEODORO

I have not heard that story before. It sounded good.

MIKAH

Then it was a good story.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – DAY

Gurkin crouches on the road, studying tracks. He looks off in a few directions, then stands.

A horse trots up to him with Drakko astride.

DRAKKO
Which way, Gurkin?

GURKIN
Hard to say my Lord...

DRAKKO
It will be even more harder to say when I
remove your sound-maker from atop your
shoulders, Gurkin.

GURKIN
He seems to have headed due west, oh
Mighty Body-Part Remover. But his tracks
have been muddled by some other group on
foot.

DRAKKO
Soldiers?

GURKIN
Could be, not many, though. Maybe three.

Drakko surveys the countryside.

DRAKKO
How long?

GURKIN
Most of the feet are average. There's
this one print, looks like a size 12, if
I'm not mistaken...

Drakko closes his eyes and sighs.

DRAKKO
How long - ago?

GURKIN
Oh. Less than a day, Snarling Ruler Over
All.

Drakko grunts and trots his horse away. Gurkin wipes his
brow and follows.

EXT. EDGE OF TOWN - DAY

A RAGGEDY MAN shuffles furtively toward the village. He
frequently looks behind him, but sees no one following.

He lifts his nose into the air, sniffing intently, then shoots glances around as he shimmies along the edge of a building.

A DOOR opens, and a WOMAN exits the building carrying a BASKET with BREAD loaves in it. She does not notice the raggedy man.

The man licks his lips and follows at safe distance.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE – DAY

Teodoro stands in a small circle of children showing them the patches and insignias on his uniform. Pashe stands nearby chuckling. He is fiddling with a handful of spongy moss.

TEODORO

And this one here, the one with the Badger on it... I'm not quite sure what that one is for either. I think it's for digging holes and snarling at people.

The children laugh and touch the hash marks on Teodoro's sleeve.

TEODORO

Those are called hash marks. You get one every time you eat breakfast.

PASHE

Teodor, please, where do you come up with this stuff?

Pashe looks away and sees Treslyn watching them, smiling. Their gazes meet, then she shies away.

Pashe half-smiles and waves too late.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Mikah sits with Antolin on stumps a short distance from Teodoro. Mikah sharpens his knife as Antolin watches.

MIKAH

Do you like the knife?

ANTOLIN

Yes, it is very nice. Where did you get it?

MIKAH

I got it in the war.

ANTOLIN

Did you take it from a dead soldier?

MIKAH

No. He gave it to me before he died.

ANTOLIN

Was he your friend?

MIKAH

He could have been. At the time, he was my enemy.

Mikah adjusts on his stump and shows the knife to Antolin.

MIKAH

He attacked me one night with this. I took it from him and cut him first. With his dying breath he asked me to keep it.

ANTOLIN

Why?

MIKAH

I'm not really sure. I think he wanted to remind me that... We do things sometimes without thinking, because we're told to.

Mikah looks at the shiny blade of the knife and sees his reflection. Behind him, the IMAGE of another MAN in uniform appears in the reflection.

MIKAH

Without thinking, yet always remembering. He wanted to forget, I think. He let me take his weapon too easily.

The man's reflection FADES, and only Mikah's is left.

ANTOLIN

Did you kill anyone else with it?

Mikah comes out of his reverie and continues to sharpen the blade.

MIKAH

I have not killed anyone else since that day.

Mikah displays the knife.

MIKAH

It is a tool. You can destroy with it, or you can create with it. Your heart will tell you when each has its time, eh?

ANTOLIN

I guess.

Antolin holds up a doll Mikah had carved.

ANTOLIN

Thank you for the doll for my sister.

MIKAH

She may not want it.

ANTOLIN

I think she will want it some day. She doesn't trust strangers since...

MIKAH

I understand.

ANTOLIN

Thank you.

Antolin skips away with the doll.

Rifka approaches Mikah.

RIFKA

You tell a lot of stories. How is it a soldier learns to tell stories?

MIKAH

I have learned many things in the last seven years, sister.

Rifka softens a bit and smiles.

RIFKA

Rifka. You may call me Rifka.

MIKAH

Rifka. One of the biggest things I learned is that sometimes a good story is all you need.

RIFKA

A story can not feed your family.

MIKAH

You may be right.

Rifka looks at him for a moment, then turns her gaze toward the villagers, all talking and laughing together.

RIFKA

I haven't seen these people together for a long time. I've forgotten most of their names already.

MIKAH

Then go and get to know them again. I'm sure you all have stories to share now.

Rifka sees Zola and Anna walk past. She hesitates, then gets up and heads toward them.

RIFKA

Widow Zola, Anna... wait a moment.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Treslyn walks over to Pasha and Teodoro, who are talking by the cauldron. Pashe has fashioned a garland from the moss clumps. She stares for a minute or so until Pashe and Teodoro look at her.

PASHE

May we help you?

TRESLYN

I was wondering... could you help me at the Inn?

TEODORO

Pashe and I are a team, we will help you together. What do you need?

INT. DINING HALL - DAY

Treslyn opens two large double doors from the outside. P Ashe, Teodoro and she enter the large, dusty HALL full of tables and chairs covered with sheets and webs.

TRESLYN

In better times we used this hall for special gatherings and events.

PASHE

It looks like you haven't used it in a while.

TRESLYN

We've had nothing to celebrate.

TEODORO

You're alive. That's a celebration.

TRESLYN

We are not alive.

TEODORO

What?

TRESLYN

We've learned to hate and fear. Learned to hide. We've gotten very good at it after all these years. We don't take to strangers at all. We even hide from ourselves, hate and fear each other.

PASHE

The war is over.

TRESLYN

Damage is done.

PASHE

Why did you ask us here?

TRESLYN

I don't know. Maybe, do you think we could clean this up?

Teodoro makes a face and shakes his head.

TEODORO

You tell us that story, then you expect us to do your cleaning for you?

Treslyn and Pashe stare at each other, oblivious of everything but themselves while Teodoro rants.

TEODORO

Well I don't think so. I used to clean the bathrooms in an Inn, and if you don't think that people leave a mess when they leave a rented room, let me tell you something. This one guy left a bag of boiled nuts. The room was filled with bugs. And don't even get me started on the linens... oh my gosh, they're stained with...

Pashe comes out of his trance, waves him silent.

PASHE

Teodor. I think she means to start cleaning the wounds.

She nods and half smiles.

TEODOR

And now we're doctors? Who do you think we are? Of course I did have to help deliver a baby during the war. Yes, it was a baby cow, and it did bite me, but when you look at it...

PASHE

Teodoro. Shut up and help.

They begin to take chairs off of tables. Teodoro is handed a broom.

EXT. DINING HALL - DAY

Mikah watches Treslyn, Pashe and Teodoro through a window at the side of the building. Pashe and Treslyn seem to be hitting it off well.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY

The raggedy man slinks along an alley, staying as close to the wall as possible.

He stops and rolls up one sleeve enough to show a rusty MANACLE with two links of chain still attached.

He rubs his wrist and TUGS in vain at the iron RING.

He draws a KNIFE from his belt, starts to position it to cut his manacled hand off. He sees a piece of PURPLE CLOTH stuck on the blade. He pulls the cloth off and puts the knife away.

He starts to slump, but then his nose goes up to the air again and he inhales deeply.

He starts down the alley again with renewed vigor.

EXT. - VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Henrik, Lothar and some other men sit around, watching the goings-on and not really relating to each other.

HENRIK

I hate this waiting. All I can think of is the food.

MAN

Take your mind off it, Henrik. Your Rifka and Zola seem to have.

He motions toward where Rifka and Zola talk at a table, they laugh and talk quickly.

Henrik screws up his face and turns towards Lothar.

HENRIK

Do they just not understand that we can't change the way things are? Why do they insist?

Lothar juts out his lower lip and shrugs.

Henrik appeals to the other men sitting nearby,

HENRIK

We have survived the way things are, have we not?

Some of the men nod kind of non-committally and murmur vague answers.

HENRIK

It is bad that we try to change the way things are, nothing good will come from it. We can not expect things to get better, and we can not change.

The men stare blankly at Henrik. Lothar glances around at the circle.

LOTHAR
Soldiers.

MAN
What?

LOTHAR
Soldiers.

HENRIK
What are you going on about, Lothar? You
and your convoluted notions.

MAN
I think...

HENRIK
Oh, so you're taking his side now? Why
would you listen to him and not me?

MAN
Henrik, I think all Lothar means is that,
well, the soldiers changed the way things
were. Didn't they?

The other men all nod affirmatively.

MAN
And if they could change things, then why
can't we?

LOTHAR
Change.

Henrik scowls at the man, as the rest of the men nod more
enthusiastically.

MAN 2
That would take a lot, but... We would
not need to hide in our houses anymore,
we could get out and...

Henrik cuts him off sharply.

HENRIK
You keep throwing that word in my face
night and day. There is no such thing as
faith. What are we supposed to have faith
in, I ask you? That we can change the
path of our future?

That we can put aside our petty differences and help one another - rebuild and endure? Don't try to speak to me of faith... any of you.

There is a brief silence. One man shakes his head as if to clear it.

MAN

No one has mentioned that word, Henrik. Except you.

LOTHAR

You.

Henrik boils, he spits his words at Lothar.

HENRIK

You and your big mouth.

Henrik gets up and storms away. The other men all start to talk excitedly.

INT. DINING HALL - DAY

Treslyn and Pashe set a table with goblets, cloth napkins and utensils.

Teodoro struggles with a centerpiece, a huge vase of flowers with carved birds on sticks.

TEODOR

No no no, the birdie needs to stay on the log. Put the flowers on the other side, move the moss.

The children all giggle as they make a mess of things. One little child SMILES up at Teodor, who grimaces and gives up.

TEODOR

Perfect.

TRESLYN

Your friend is good with children.

PASHE

That's because he is one himself.

TRESLYN

He fought in the war?

Pashe stares at Teodoro.

PASHE

He's no soldier. He was in prison for refusing to fight. When they stormed the city, the prison was destroyed. We found him wandering, dazed.

TRESLYN

Why wouldn't he fight?

PASHE

His family was on the other side.

Treslyn blinks, she looks over at Teodoro, then back at Pashe.

TRESLYN

He... he doesn't look...

PASHE

Up close, they almost never do.

Treslyn looks away and busies herself with folding napkins.

TRESLYN

And what of your family.

PASHE

My village was completely wiped out at the beginning of the war. My wife... I don't even know where I am going home to.

TRESLYN

You will find a home.

PASHE

I had hoped, once. No more.

Treslyn glances at him quickly.

TRESLYN

There is always hope, Pashe. Always. I believe that. Your other friend knows that.

PASHE

Yes, he has great hopes, great beliefs. I wish I were more like him.

TRESLYN

There is nothing wrong with you as you are.

Pashe smiles nervously, Treslyn blushes slightly.

A howl breaks up the awkward silence.

Pashe and Treslyn look up at Teodoro, who has gotten his HAND jammed between two tables that the children are pushing together.

TEODOR

Back, pull it back!

The children quickly pull the table back and Teodoro FALLS backward, his backside meeting quickly with

A handful of FORKS, tines out, that another child brings to set on the table.

Teodoro wails and dances about madly, holding his butt.

TEODORO

That was me. My fault entirely.

Teodoro pulls a huge serving fork out from behind him and hands it to another child.

TEODORO

You may want to re-wash that one.

EXT. - VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

There is a festival-like atmosphere. People laugh and help each other with simple chores – stacking wood, cleaning plates, repairing chairs, etc.

Antolin and his friends play nearby. Mikah and some other people are in a circle watching another villager juggle flaming sticks.

MIKAH

You are truly gifted, my friend. It must be very rewarding to hear people laugh and cheer your skills.

JUGGLER

Ah, it has been quite some time since I have heard laughter in this town, or seen smiles on their faces. I thank you.

MIKAH

Me? I've done nothing.

JUGGLER

I manipulate burning wood and sand-filled bags. You pull the shroud of death and gloom from an entire village.

The juggler finishes the routine to the applause of all watching, and takes a bow. He winks at Mikah, who takes a tiny bow at the waist.

A villager, NARGEZ, addresses the juggler

NARGEZ

I had no idea you could do such tricks, where have you been all these years?

MIKAH

I live two houses down from you, Nargez.

NARGEZ

You do?

Nargez' daughter tugs at his sleeve

DAUGHTER

He's the shiftless buffoon you told me to stay away from, daddy.

Nargez blushes all the way to his soul.

NARGEZ

I... I... was talking about that other man who lives the other way, honey.

The juggler chuckles.

JUGGLER

No harm, friend.

A woman scowls good-naturedly at Nargez.

WOMAN

Do you mean my husband, Nargez? What is wrong with him? Are you too good to mingle with a carpenter?

JON

Garret is a carpenter? Since when?

WOMAN

Who do you think made the tables at the Inn?

NARGEZ

I... I...

MAN

How about me, Nargez, I'm a tailor.

JON

You're a tailor? Why do we not have decent clothes then?

MAN

Nobody asks. Nobody has any material.

WOMAN

I have material. Can you make shoes?

WOMAN

I can make shoes.

MAN 2

You can make shoes?

MAN 3

I can make buckles.

WOMAN 3

I fix farm tools.

MAN 4

My wife and I prepare crops for storage.

WOMAN 4

I can cut hair, and cure coughs, as well.

The villagers all start to talk noisily about what they can do. Mikah turns to the juggler.

MIKAH

Another nice trick my friend. It seems there was a village here after all.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Mikah carves a doll while sitting on a stump near the cauldron.

Some adult villagers sit and watch. Children play with other dolls nearby.

In the far background, the Raggedy Man can be seen wandering about.

WOMAN

Why do you carve so many dolls?

MIKAH

Because there are so many children.

WOMAN

Why do you make that kind of doll?

Mikah looks up from his work and cocks his head at the woman.

MIKAH

Do you really want to know? The story is a bit difficult to understand.

The woman nods. The other adults follow suit slowly.

MIKAH

Well then. There is a story I heard from a man during the war. There once were a people, called the Rolly-Polly, who were held in siege by a fierce tribe a long, long time ago.

Antolin and some children come and sit closer to Mikah.

ANTOLIN

What did the Rolly-Polly people do?

As Mikah begins to talk, the WISPS of steam from the cauldron TWIST and bend and take the shape of WARRIORS on horseback, and foot soldiers with axes and spears.

MIKAH

The People never gave up, never surrendered. Every time the great Warlord attacked and beat back the Rolly-Polly's forces...

The wisps of steam blend into a REAL SCENE of

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

A battle rages between large, fierce warriors in animal skins, and plain-looking people in leather armor.

The hoard of warriors attacks viciously, driving the plain people back.

MIKAH (VO)

... the People bounced back, fought hard,
and held their ground.

The People PUSH BACK from against the wall of mountains
behind them.

MAN

So what happened?

MIKAH

The Warlord managed to trap the leader of
the Rolly-Polly. The Warlord gave this
leader one chance to save his people.

INT. WARLORD'S TENT - DAY

The Leader, tied with ropes, is brought before the Warlord,
who sits on a wooden throne. The Leader is pushed to the
floor at the throne's feet.

The Warlord growls and shakes his fist at the Rolly Polly,
who only listens with a calm face.

MIKAH (VO)

The Warlord told him that if he could
bring great treasure, then his people
would be put to death quickly. If not,
then they would be tortured slowly.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

ZOLA

That is not much of a choice.

MIKAH

Sometimes you have very little choice in
life. What matters is how you deal with
it.

ANNA

What did the Rolly-Polly Leader do?

Henrik waves at Anna quickly.

HENRIK

Hush, girl. Do not try to understand —
this is adult conversation.

Henrik turns back to Mikah, very attentive.

HENRIK

What did the Rolly-Polly Leader do?

MIKAH

The next day, the Rolly Polly leader brought the warrior a small, plain box containing one of these dolls.

INT. WARLORD'S TENT - DAY

The Rolly-Polly Leader opens the box and takes out a doll that looks much like the one Mikah is carving, only more ornate.

MIKAH (VO)

The Warlord sneered and threw it to the floor and laughed at the Leader. "Is this the best you can do?" the warlord shouted through peels of laughter.

The Warlord throws the doll to the floor and shouts at the Rolly Polly leader.

MIKAH (VO)

But the Leader smiled as the doll rolled a short distance and righted itself.

The Warlord grabs the doll, tosses it down again and laughs. The doll wobbles and comes back up. The Warlord is vexed.

MIKAH (VO)

The warrior grew angry and kicked the doll, pushed it down. Always it wobbled and stood upright. The Rolly-Polly Leader told the Warlord that this was the greatest treasure his people had, and no army could ever take it away.

The Warlord struggles to keep the doll down, but it pops back up each time. Finally the doll gets away from the Warlord's hands, rolls out the door and is lost down the hill that the tent is perched on.

The Warlord is furious.

He wheels on the Rolly-Polly leader a STRIKES him down to the floor. The Rolly-Polly leader slowly gets up, and smiles.

MIKAH (VO)

Eventually, the great Warlord tired. He could not break the spirit of these people who would not stay down when trod upon. His troops grew weary, his supplies dwindled.

EXT. RAINY BATTLEFIELD - NIGHT

The warlord SLUMPS in his saddle as he leads his small, ragged army away in the rain. A wagon drives over the Rolly-Polly doll and pushes it into the mud.

The doll sits a bit, then rights itself.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Mikah glances around at the adults. Some have quizzical looks on their faces. They each look at the others not wanting to register confusion or lack of understanding.

MIKAH

The Warlord was never heard from again.

RIFKA

How did these people do it? Soldiers are strong, they have many weapons.

MIKAH

Where there is a common goal among a people, faith and inner strength, anything is possible.

He puts down the doll he was carving and pushes it over. It falls to the ground, then bounces back up. The children start to knock their dolls down as well. The adults sit and watch.

MIKAH

Understand?

They all nod very unconvincingly.

HENRIK

Oh yes, I see. Very good story.

Henrik tries to lean inconspicuously toward Anna and whispers.

HENRIK

What does "dwindled" mean?

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

The Raggedy man snoops around the cauldron, sniffing deeply at the wafting steam. Henrik, who is tending the pot, eyes the man suspiciously.

HENRIK

I do not know you, friend. Are you from here?

The man almost jumps at Henrik's voice. He stares at the pot and licks his lips.

HENRIK

Are... are you hungry? Do you want to eat?

Henrik motions at the pot. The man seems to understand. He nods slowly.

Another villager approaches and looks at the man.

VILLAGER

Hey, hey you.

He approaches the raggedy man and touches his sleeve.

VILLAGER

What are you doing here? That soup isn't ready yet, are you trying to kill us all?

The strange man shrinks away from the hand and draws a knife from his cloak, he brandishes it at Henrik and the other villager.

The raggedy man shouts in another language. Henrik gasps and stares.

HENRIK

Taburki. He's from Taburk.

VILLAGER

Lousy thieves. Hey, over here, Taburki!

The villager shouts to some nearby people and waves them over.

VILLAGER

We have a thief among us, over here.

A small crowd gathers around the strange man, who gets very agitated and nervous.

HENRIK
Easy there, Taburki. Don't make us go
Rolly-Polly on you.

The Taburki shouts again in his language.

INT. DINING HALL - DAY

Teodoro, a number of fingers bandaged now, holds a small child up to put a candle in a chandelier. A loud din is heard outside. He puts the child down.

Teodor, Pashe and Treslyn turn toward the door.

PASHE
What is that?

TRESLYN
I heard the name Taburk.

TEODOR
What's a Taburk?

TRESLYN
Trouble. Maybe.

She runs toward the door, Pashe follows, motioning to Teodoro.

PASHE
Watch the children, Teodor.

Teodoro pulls the other children toward him.

TEODOR
Come here, let's play a game... that
doesn't involve squishing, poking,
crushing or burning any part of Uncle
Teodoro.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Drakko and his band travel at a slow pace. Gurkin and Drakko squint at the road as they ride.

DRAKKO
What say you, Gurkin?

GURKIN

We will catch up quickly, most Angry Destroyer of Property. They seem to head for that small village we occupied a few months ago.

DRAKKO

Which one? The one we pillaged, burned and spat on?

GURKIN

No, Drakko. That was back east. This is the one we sacked, bullied and demoralized.

DRAKKO

We didn't spit on it?

GURKIN

We might have, we get pretty sloppy when we're bullying. Yes, we more than probably spat on them. With a great quantity of moisture.

Drakko smiles broadly, rubs his chin and stares ahead, down the road.

DRAKKO

This will be funner the second time around.

Gurkin stops and looks to the ground.

GURKIN

Those other tracks again, Drakko. The large fast-moving group. Very fresh, probably nearby. Do you wish to pursue?

Drakko thinks a moment, scratches his face stubble.

DRAKKO

You say there are more than us?

GURKIN

Yes, more than double our size, but lightly equipped. If we surprise them, we might win. If not, they will sing of our crushing defeat for years to come. We will die in a glorious battle. Our entrails strewn from tree to boulder to furry creature. Our heads mounted on...

DRAKKO

We continue to the village as planned.
There will be no resistance at all.

Drakko laughs maniacally, Gurkin joins in, relieved.

GURKIN

Yes, Big Bulging Scurrilous Leader, no
resistance at all.

EXT. - VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

A CROWD has gathered around the Taburki. Someone makes a
grab for the man, but is stopped by the SLASH of the knife.

A huge HAND grabs the Taburki's knife hand firmly. It is
Lothar, from behind the assailant.

Mikah appears next to Lothar. He spies the manacle on the
Taburki's wrist.

MIKAH

What's the problem?

LOTHAR

Taburki.

Mikah looks to Antolin for answers.

ANTOLIN

Taburk is a village a few days away from
here.

RIFKA

They are not like us.

MIKAH

How?

HENRIK

They are different.

MIKAH

How?

ZOLA

They're bad.

MIKAH

How?

ZOLA

Look, he has been a prisoner.

She gestures at the manacle.

MIKAH

For what reason?

ZOLA

What does it matter? We have heard stories, and now this criminal appears and proves it.

WOMAN

They always have been trouble. We have always been warned about them, since we were children.

MIKAH

They steal from you? They hurt you? They part their hair differently?

ANTOLIN

There are a lot of stories about the dangers of the Taburki.

WOMAN

He has a knife!

Mikah nonchalantly pulls out his own and waves it.

MIKAH

Me too.

The Taburki stares at Mikah and his knife, he shifts toward Mikah.

Mikah scrutinizes the other knife.

MIKAH

His is not a good knife. It must be hard to work with. Would you like mine?

Mikah holds his knife out, handle first. The Taburki glares uncertainly. The villagers stare.

Mikah walks closer.

MIKAH

Take it. It's a good knife.

Mikah approaches with the knife on his open palm. The Taburki fidgets.

Antolin and his sister watch frightened.

Amid gasps, the Taburki lunges forward and grabs the knife from Mikah's hand, and brandishes both.

Lothar makes a move, Mikah waves him back.

The Taburki weighs the two knives in his hands and makes a face. Then he nods a "not bad" face. He looks Mikah's knife up and down, then holds out his own knife to Mikah.

The Taburki then takes out a small medallion he wears, and offers it as well.

MIKAH

You know good workmanship. An excellent trade.

Mikah takes both the offerings and nods.

The Taburki sheathes Mikah's knife and eyes Mikah warily.

Mikah sheathes the Taburk's knife, and hangs the medallion and chain around his own neck.

MIKAH

Thank you.

He looks at Henrik.

MIKAH

He's a thief?

Henrik mutters.

HENRIK

I didn't make up the stories.

MIKAH

There is a name for stories like those.

HENRIK

What is it?

MIKAH

I forget.

Mikah motions for the Taburki to sit, which he does.

EXT. COOKING AREA – DAY

Zola bites her lip as she looks into the swirling soup.

RIFKA

What is wrong, Zola?

ZOLA

Nothing really. Just thought how well some meat would go in this stew.

RIFKA

I was thinking the same thing. Do you have any?

ZOLA

No, I would bring it if I did, but we had the last of a rabbit months ago.

Jon approaches with Lothar.

JON

We have Rabbit?

RIFKA

No, we were just thinking about meat.

LOTHAR

Venison.

ZOLA

How I wish I had some venison; what I could do with that.

HENRIK

I remember your venison, Zola, from a festival five years ago. You worked magic with that stag, so tender and juicy and...

Henrik's mind wanders, Zola looks at him and blushes.

ZOLA

Why Henrik, you've never mentioned that to me before. Thank you.

Now it is Henrik's turn to blush. He shuffles his feet and mutters.

JON

How did we get that stag?

They stare at each other unable to answer.

HENRIK
Come with me.

EXT. STREET AT EDGE OF TOWN - DAY

Pashe, the Taburki, and Henrik walk to a workshop. The workshop is boarded up, but a door has been removed. Many tools and weapons lean in piles on the walls.

HENRIK
All our weapons and tools were destroyed.
No one knows how to fix bows, or

The Taburki looks a bow up and down. He nods and says something in his language and motions toward the bow.

PASHE
It looks like someone does now.

HENRIK
This bow was designed by our village ages ago. Its secret died with the craftsman who made it. I doubt anyone can fix it, let alone hunt with it again.

INT. WORKSHOP - DAY

Henrik and the Taburki stand by the workbench near the open doors. Mikah, Zola, Pashe and Jon stand outside watching in.

The Taburki holds up the bow and gives it a few test twangs.

HENRIK
Amazing.

The Taburki walks outside with the bow, admiring it and the arrows in a quiver at his side.

He looks up suddenly toward Mikah. Quickly and nimbly, he grabs up an arrow, nocks it and aims.

PASHE
Look out!

HENRIK
I knew it, he deceived us.

MIKAH
Nobody move.

A tense moment passes, gazes move about the small gathering from face to face, but mostly between Mikah and the Taburki.

Finally Zola, who is closest, makes a move toward the Taburki.

ZOLA

Run!

HENRIK

Zola, no!

Before she reaches him, the Taburki lets the arrow fly. It sails past Mikah, missing him easily.

Zola can not stop her assault in time, her fist connects with the Taburki's face and he goes down hard.

Mikah looks at the Taburki on the ground with Zola crouching above.

MIKAH

Impressive.

HENRIK

Yeah. G... good shot.

He stares at Zola, then smiles proudly around the gathering and gestures toward her.

HENRIK

She's my neighbor.

The Taburki looks past Mikah. Mikah follows the line of site and stares.

MIKAH

Nice shot. That should be enough to feed the whole village.

The Taburki nods, says something in his language.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE – DAY

A group of people, lead by Zola, prepares MEAT for dinner. A large section of an animal is roasting over another fire on a SPIT, slowly turned by Lothar.

Rifka offers a CUP of water to the Taburki, who is having his manacle removed by a villager.

Teodoro, Pashe, Treslyn stand by the cauldron, sniffing.

PASHE

Ahh, I think it is ready. Smell that.

They all take huge lungfulls of the steam through their noses.

TRESLYN

Your magic stone is wonderful. What a delicious aroma.

The Taburki's attention is pulled away abruptly. He SNIFFS the air away from the pot. A look of concern crosses his face.

Teodoro catches this look.

TEODORO

What is it my friend?

The Taburki is agitated, he speaks quickly in his own tongue and frantically starts to scan the edges of the village.

PASHE

He's worried, but about what?

Teodoro makes a GESTURE toward the Taburki, but is STOPPED by a quick halting motion by the Taburki. The Taburki sniffs again and his face changes, he smiles and nods.

The Taburki says something curtly, points away from the square and hurries out, disappearing around a corner.

Henrik passes with a platter of meat to drop in the soup pot and looks toward the Taburki.

HENRIK

Hmmph. Taburki, go figure.

INT. DINING HALL - DAY

Pashe, Teodoro and Mikah stand in the doorway admiring the work done. The hall is beautifully decorated, and well lit by sconces and candles.

Garlands of the moss adorn the beams, window and door frames. The moss seems to sparkle in the candle light.

MIKAH

My friends, I think we are almost ready.

TEODORO

Almost? We've food enough for three villages outside. These people are talking to each other, working together.

PASHE

I hate to agree with Teodoro. Things look good. Their troubles are past.

Mikah looks outside up to the sky. The SOUNDS of the Village Square can be heard.

MIKAH

The past is a good teacher. I have learned much, and my lessons have taught me that there is a much greater trial to come before we can move on.

TEODORO

Why do you ruin everything by making us think all the time?

MIKAH

The pain will leave soon Teodor, and the muscle it leaves will be stronger.

Mikah massages Teodoro on the head and walks out. Pashe laughs at Teodoro and slaps his back.

TEODORO

Is he ever wrong?

PASHE

Yes, many times.

TEODORO

Is he wrong now?

PASHE

No.

TEODORO

Can we go home?

PASHE

When it is time.

Pashe follows Mikah outside.

TEODORO

Can't we ever just eat and leave?

He slumps and follows his friends out.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – DAY

Drakko and his band of thugs charge up to the top of a hill where Gurkin crouches, motioning them down as well.

Drakko dismounts, crouches and approaches Gurkin.

DRAKKO

What is this, Gurkin?

Gurkin pats the ground with his open hand.

GURKIN

It is a hill, a rather nice one too, I might add, as far as hills go. See this soft moss here...

Drakko closes his eyes and grinds his teeth. Gurkin catches himself.

GURKIN

They are down there, my lord. I saw a handful or so just outside that village at the base of that next hill. See?

Drakko squints into the distance to where Gurkin points.

DRAKKO

Where are they now?

GURKIN

I don't know, But they have not left the village.

DRAKKO

They have nothing?

GURKIN

No, my Impossibly Massive General.

DRAKKO

Then why are they still here?

Drakko watches a bit longer, then stands and walks back to his horse.

DRAKKO

Let's rest a bit, then take them at dusk.

A henchman gets on all fours at Drakko's feet. Drakko steps on his back, pushing his face into the dirt, and lifts himself up onto his horse and turns to ride away.

DRAKKO

This time we don't even leave the grass.

Gurkin pulls his face from the ground, spits clods out.

GURKIN

Thank you, Quite Disgustingly Evil One.
You are too good to us.

INT. DINING HALL – DAY

Pashe and Treslyn fill cups with water out of a large pitcher.

Teodoro and some children put bread on the tables at the other end of the hall.

TRESLYN

I can't believe we are about to dine together again after so long. And the food – it is almost like a dream.

PASHE

The food is good, and the company is even better.

Treslyn smiles shyly and continues her work.

TRESLYN

Have you been together long?

PASHE

The three of us?

Treslyn nods affirmatively.

PASHE

It seems we have always been together.
You know about Teodor.

Pashe stares into space and muses a bit.

PASHE

The "Magic Man" and I met just before the war, in the great city north of the Tyrus sea. On a trip to a fishing village.

TRESLYN

You were a fisherman?

PASHE

No. I was a merchant. I bought and sold things. I feel I was rather good.

TRESLYN

And he?

PASHE

I don't know, it never came up. We met, got along – it seemed there was nothing he couldn't do.

They watch Teodoro and the children for awhile, laughing and playing at their job.

PASHE

When we were released from the army, I had nowhere to go, so I traveled with him. I have no idea what I'm going to do.

TRESLYN

We have many skilled people in this village, we used to have many things to trade. It looks as though we may still.

PASHE

Yes, it does.

TRESLYN

Would you... would you stay and

PASHE

Stay and what?

Treslyn searches for words, she can not look Pashe in the face.

TRESLYN

Help us rebuild? Teach us to trade?

Pashe looks away and makes a face. Treslyn does the same, looking as though she regrets the words.

PASHE

Selling trinkets does not hold the importance with me it once did.

TRESLYN

What would it take to keep you here?

They look at one another and slowly begin to smile.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE – DAY

Mikah addresses the people from near the cooking area.

MIKAH

Good news everyone, it's time to eat.

Loud CHEERS and applause go up from everyone. Mikah glances toward Zola and Lothar at the stag spit.

Zola makes a "perfecto" sign and nudges Lothar, who nods his head in agreement.

MIKAH

The dining hall is ready, so my friends
and I will...

Before he can finish, villagers start to move about, gathering items. Henrik directs the action.

HENRIK

Rubia, round up the children. Jon, get
the serving utensils. Zola, we will need
a huge platter for the meat.

They start to move like a well-oiled machine, oblivious to Mikah.

MIKAH

... just stand here and watch you.

JON

Henrik, Zola, where are the large bowls
for the soup?

HENRIK

Zola and I will get them. Do you mind,
Zola?

Zola smiles as she looks at Henrik, his hand outstretched to her. Their eyes lock and you can almost hear violin music playing.

ZOLA

Not at all. This way, Henrik.

They start to walk away together.

Antolin is at Mikah's side.

ANTOLIN

Thank you for all you have done.

MIKAH

I can truly say I have done very little, Antolin. May I ask one last thing of you, though?

ANTOLIN

Of us? What?

MIKAH

Would you mind if my friends and I stayed to eat with you?

ANTOLIN

Of course, you may all stay, even your new friends.

MIKAH

Our what? Who...

Antolin points, Mikah glances around the outskirts of the square.

Drakko's men are standing at each of the different entrances to the square.

MIKAH

Go to your father, Antolin, be brave, no matter what. Go, now.

Antolin glances at the men in furs and then hurries away.

Gradually the villagers start to notice the men too, and they all grow quiet until an uneasy silence engulfs the plaza.

TEODORO

Right again.

MIKAH

It's not something I'm happy about, Teodoro.

At one entrance, the small group of raiders PARTS and the huge black horse bearing Drakko trots slowly through, followed by toady Gurkin and a larger group of raiders.

Drakko surveys the area, SNIFFING at the air. He rides toward the center of the square.

The soldiers FILE in casually but confidently.

Villagers back away toward the cooking area trying to HIDE the cauldron as the raiders strut around.

The intruders finally settle near the well.

DRAKKO
Who opened the well?

No one answers. Drakko grows impatient

DRAKKO
Who opened up the well? I told you it was dry.

Again, no answer. Drakko grabs a MAN who is close by and pulls him in closer.

DRAKKO
You?

MAN
N... no.

DRAKKO
Somebody did. It might as well be you. I told you what would happen.

Drakko un-slings his club with one brawny arm and holds it high, ready to strike.

He stops, his nose lifts to the wind and he sniffs.

DRAKKO
What is that?

The villagers all shuffle nervously.

Drakko throws the man aside and glares at the villagers.

DRAKKO
What is that smell?

WOMAN
What smell?

MAN

Oh, that is the uh, garbage dump, east of town.

DRAKKO

Garbage? Gurkin, that smell like garbage?

Gurkin shakes his head and sniffs. All the soldiers sniff.

GURKIN

No, my Profoundly Enlarged Tyrant. Smells like chicken. Dead chicken. Roasted with vegetables to provide fiber.

ZOLA

Chicken, hah. That's venison.

She catches herself too late, covering her mouth with both hands. All eyes are on her. Drakko dismounts.

DRAKKO

You feast while we have been on the road for weeks and weeks starving away to skin and bones?

He motions toward Gurkin, who stands holding his pants up, scratching his huge gut and sucking his teeth.

DRAKKO

Gurkin, find it.

Gurkin grabs a few more men and begins to go through the food stuffs on the tables, picking things up and sniffing them.

DRAKKO

Where did this food pile come from? You held back on us? You lied to Drakko? You.

He POINTS at Henrik deliberately. Henrik swallows hard and stares back.

HENRIK

Me?

DRAKKO

You look like the leader of these pathetic people. Where is that smell coming from?

Henrik is frozen, he stares at Drakko and barely whispers.

HENRIK

I look like a leader?

Zola is by his side and takes his arm.

ZOLA

It comes from the next village over.

The villagers all clump together blocking the cauldron, eyes wide and scared.

GURKIN

Hmmm... could it be? Yes. I think I found it, Drakko.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

The soldiers gather around the simmering cauldron smelling deeply. Drakko takes a huge wooden ladle from a table and dips up a steaming spoonful.

He snaps his fingers and a couple of lackeys blow on the hot soup for him. Then he downs the entire portion and chews like a pig.

DRAKKO

Mmmmmmm. Mmmmm. Good. Who made this?

The villagers stand and stare at the soldiers in silence. Then Mikah's voice booms over everyone.

MIKAH

I did.

Everyone turns to see Mikah, Pashe and Teodoro standing apart from the other villagers.

Gurkin draws his notched cutlass, but Drakko holds his arm down.

DRAKKO

You? You are not from here. Who are you?

Mikah looks Drakko and the raiders up and down.

MIKAH

I am the soup maker. This is Pashe and Teodoro. We made the soup.

Zola fidgets and SHAKES her head angrily.

DRAKKO

Good soup, my friend. Mind if we eat?

TEODORO

You have not helped make it, and you don't look like you've missed too many meals.

Mikah shhhs him.

MIKAH

He said he was hungry, he may eat. There is plenty. If the rest of you don't mind.

Mikah looks to the villagers, who stand frightened and unmoving. Some shake their heads.

Mikah sighs and makes a gesture of "help yourself" to the raiders.

DRAKKO

Thanks, friend.

The soldiers grab up bowls and mugs and start to take out huge dripping scoops of the soup. They grab up handfuls of fresh bread and eat sloppily and noisily.

Mikah looks at Zola and Henrik, who say nothing. Zola drops her gaze to the ground and turns away.

Gurkin farts and grins as he tosses a half-eaten chunk of bread toward the fire.

GURKIN

Good food. Take all the bread and utensils, men. And grab that carcass.

He points with a food-covered hand toward what's left of the stag on the spit.

DRAKKO

Thank you for sharing, my good people. I hope you don't mind if we take a little water and a few other things with us.

GURKIN

We only get into town once in a while, so we need to stock up.

JON

As long as there is some soup left.

DRAKKO

Huh? There's some left?

He looks into the cauldron, which is not even a quarter empty.

DRAKKO

Hmmm, sure is. Gurkin, make sure you share this with the rest of these people.

Gurkin and two other raiders chuckle, then LEAN into the cauldron with their shoulders, giving a mighty HEAVE and push it over.

The contents SPILL out onto the ground, spreading to the villagers, who look on in shock.

The stones come out last. Drakko picks one up.

DRAKKO

What's this? You try to poison us? Who put this in there?

Mikah holds up a finger.

MIKAH

I did.

Gurkin grabs Mikah and drags him over to Drakko.

GURKIN

Are you trying to poison our Lumbering, Odorous Leader Drakko? Even though you can't, 'cause he's too powerful?

MIKAH

No, it was part of the soup.

DRAKKO

Rock soup? Who makes soup from Rocks?

Mikah starts to speak, but Henrik cuts him off.

HENRIK

It's a stone.

Drakko reels on Henrik.

DRAKKO

What?

HENRIK

Nothing.

GURKIN

Did you call Drakko a liar? Inferring that he lies? Even though if he did, they'd be some of the best lies you ever heard...

HENRIK

I... I just said it's a stone.

Mikah looks up at Henrik, and a soft smile creeps across his face.

MIKAH

We make stone soup. My friends, Pashe, Teodor and I.

JON

Those... those were my potatos.

WOMAN

And my beets.

MAN

We gave the water, quit taking all the credit.

WOMAN 2

I made biscuits.

Many villagers find their voice and start to talk all at once.

Drakko whips the club off his back and sounds a loud, ringing GONG on the cauldron.

DRAKKO

Shut up. Everybody.

Drakko pulls Mikah closer and breathes in his face.

DRAKKO

Nobody makes soup from rocks. What is this here for?

MIKAH

Its magic.

Drakko looks at the stone in his hand. A laughing FACE appears in the STEAM drifting from the stone, then dissipates.

DRAKKO

Bah!

He abruptly WHACKS one of his FLUNKIES in the forehead with the stone. The flunky goes cross-eyed and falls backward to the ground.

The rest of the raiders laugh and point.

DRAKKO

What do you think, Gurkin?

GURKIN

Wondrous in it's powers, oh Gigantic Seething Wizard.

DRAKKO

Great, I keep it then.

MIKAH

I wish you wouldn't.

DRAKKO

What did you say?

MIKAH

I said I wish you wouldn't. I need to keep that for...

Drakko picks up Mikah with one arm and throws him against a tree. Mikah falls to the ground with a groan.

DRAKKO

Nobody tells Drakko what to do.

The villagers gasp. Pashe and Teodoro rush to Mikah's side.

PASHE

Are you alright? Talk to me.

TEODORO

He's dead. I know it, he's dead.

Mikah shakes his head to clear it.

MIKAH

Thank you for the encouraging words,
Teodoro.

PASHE

What now?

Mikah eyes the villagers and the soldiers, glaring at each other.

MIKAH

Now we see what empty stomachs and full
heads and hearts can do.

DRAKKO

Leave my sight. All of you. Gurkin,
prepare for pillaging.

Drakko and his men start to gather up their things, and pack away stuff from the village.

GURKIN

You heard Drakko, nothing else to see here. Cowering should be done in your houses. Please prepare your dwellings for incineration. Try to pile combustible items in the center of your main room. If you have lamp oil, please soak your walls and floors, this will help save time and expedite...

Gurkin finds a roolly-polly doll on a table and tosses it aside. It rights itself.

GURKIN

Ooh, that's interesting.

Gurkin does a double take. He pushes it down and it pops back up. He motions toward Drakko.

GURKIN

Putrid Muscular One, look at this.

Drakko turns from his task of glaring at people toward Gurkin. He sees the doll, Gurkin pushes it.

DRAKKO

Huh? Let me see that.

Drakko strides to the doll and stomps it down. It stays momentarily, then pops up.

DRAKKO

Rrrrrrrgh.

He stomps it again and again. He looks up and does a double-take.

The villagers have amassed around the band of raiders. They do not look scared, they do not look like they are leaving.

ANTOLIN

Stop it, that is for my sister.

Drakko turns slowly toward Antolin, his eyes filled with anger.

DRAKKO

Who dares tell me to stop?

Antolin fidgets. He looks to the doll, over to Mikah and back. He opens his mouth to speak but is cut off by Treslyn.

TRESLYN

I did.

Pashe's eyes widen he tries to wave to Treslyn to stop.

Drakko glares at Antolin, then over to Treslyn.

DRAKKO

I'll eat your head while you watch, you insolent

TRESLYN

You have taken what you want, please leave that alone.

Gurkin is beside himself, sputtering and gesturing and waiting for Drakko to say something warlord-like.

Drakko picks up the doll and heaves it at a nearby stone wall. The doll splinters.

Drakko takes a few huge strides toward Treslyn, but just before he is in her face, Pashe steps between the two.

Treslyn whispers to Pashe.

TRESLYN

I am not afraid of him, Pashe.

PASHE

That's okay, I'm afraid enough for both
of us.

Drakko reels back a fist to strike at Pashe.

An object THUNKS off of Drakko's head and lands on the grass
nearby. It is another doll.

Everyone looks in the direction the doll came from.

Henrik stands alone, lowering his hand slowly. He shrugs and
smiles sheepishly.

HENRIK

It slipped. It's slippery. I was trying
to...

RIFKA

He was trying to hit your huge fat
bottom.

HENRIK

Yes, I was trying to hit your... oh no no
no wait.

Henrik thinks a moment, looking at the faces of his
neighbors.

His gaze rests on Zola's face. She smiles proudly. Henrik
turns back to Drakko unafraid.

HENRIK

You have plundered our village for the
last time. You will leave - now.

There is a short silence as Drakko and Henrik glare at each
other.

Another doll hits Drakko, then another.

Soon dolls are flying everywhere. The soldiers draw weapons
and form a prickly huddle near Drakko, who brandishes his
battle club.

DRAKKO

You will pay for that. Kill them all!

Drakko raises his club above his head to strike.

Suddenly, an ARROW pierces Drakko's hand, pinning it to his weapon.

DRAKKO

Aaaargh!

Mikah and Teodoro look in the direction the arrow came from.

At the head of large CONTINGENT stands the Taburki with a bow. Many other strong men stand behind him with weapons at the ready.

Drakko's group is greatly outnumbered.

GURKIN

Taburki, a lot of them this time. You know what to do men.

Gurkin points his CUTLASS in the Taburki's general direction, his pants fall.

The soldiers look to the Taburkis for a tense beat.

Mechanically, as one, they DROP their weapons and take off at a manic TEAR out the other side of the square, with Taburkis and villagers in hot pursuit.

Gurkin takes a few steps and falls flat on his face, ankles tangled in trousers.

Drakko nurses his gun hand and backs up as other villagers close in on him.

DRAKKO

I will make you a deal. I will let you keep half of all I have if you help me fight the Taburki dogs. I'll give you...

ZOLA

It is not yours to give.

The Taburki sees Mikah and goes to his side. He pulls out a bandage for the cut on Mikah's head.

MIKAH

Thank you, my friend. It is very good to see you again.

TABURKI

Good friend.

PASHE

Yes. Good friend.

Rifka looks at the food on the ground as her father hugs her.

RIFKA

Father, the food is all gone.

HENRIK

No, Rifka, it is still here. We just need to clean up and start over. Eh, Zola?

Zola takes his hand and pulls her daughter close to her.

ZOLA

Anna and I would be proud to help. How do we begin?

Henrik looks over at Mikah and his friends.

HENRIK

We have what we know now, that is where we start.

They all begin to pick up loaves and plates, and other things strewn by the raiders.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE – DAY

Mikah, Pashe and Teodoro are bent over their knapsacks packing their belongings.

Treslyn helps Pashe pack his, she eyes him a little nervously. Pashe calmly nods to her as if to say "it's okay."

Henrik KNEELS at the side of the grave of Elana, he is speaking softly, no one can hear.

Villagers stop and shake hands or offer hugs and farewells. Some children fetch items for the trio.

A little girl brings a doll for Teodoro.

TEODORO

For me? Thank you very much, what is her name?

GIRL

I named her Tanya, after me, so you will always remember us.

Teodoro stops his packing and gives the girl a huge hug.

TEODORO

How could I do anything but remember you?

Teodoro packs the doll in his knapsack.

Lothar and Zola approach Mikah. Zola holds a small bundle.

ZOLA

You are leaving? For sure?

MIKAH

I have taken advantage of you kind people
for more than is fair.

ZOLA

Bah, there is plenty. Here, I have some
fresh bread to take with you.

LOTHAR

Fresh.

MIKAH

Thank you Lothar, Zola. You are the
finest cook I have ever met.

ZOLA

My kitchen has never seen such a
wonderful meal as you made yesterday. I
will never forget you.

LOTHAR

Never.

Zola hugs Mikah, Lothar gives him a powerful handshake, and
they wander off.

TEODORO

We may never make it out of town. Pashe,
pack faster, it will be dark before...

Mikah and Teodoro watch as Pashe packs slower and slower.

MIKAH

This is another day of new beginnings,
eh, old friend?

Pashe smiles meekly.

TEODORO

What?

MIKAH

I think Pashe has found his village,
Teodor.

TEODORO

What?

Pashe stands upright and he and Treslyn glance at each other.

PASHE

I am sorry, but we... we.

TEODORO

What?

MIKAH

No need for apologies or explanations.
It is time you started your life. I wish
you both the best life has to offer. I
will not forget all you have done for me,
Pashe.

PASHE

Me... done for you? In six years all I
have done is

MIKAH

You have been my friend, and you have
always been there for me. That has made
my life bearable.

TEODORO

What? Is he dying? Why am I always the
last to know? It was teh Sickweed wasn't
it? We slept on Sickweed.

PASHE

Teodor, my friend, I am staying here with
Treslyn. We want to be part of each
other's lives.

TEODORO

Staying? Was it something I said?

Teodoro is near tears, he pouts and sticks out his lower lip.
Treslyn hugs him.

TRESLYN

You are one of the kindest, happiest men
I know, sweet Teodoro. Don't be sad.

MIKAH

It isn't so bad, we can visit.

PASHE

Ahh, you are always like a child my
friend.

TEODORO

A child? Am not. You're the child, you
big...

A little boy runs past and taps Teodoro on the arm

BOY

You're it, Uncle Teodoro.

The child runs off, Teodoro immediately chases after the boy.
Pashe, Treslyn and Mikah laugh.

Henrik walks up beside Zola. He wears an ornate vest
emblazoned with the symbol from Elana's grave.

MIKAH

Henrik, you've been keeping this
village's faith afterall.

HENRIK

I have let them down. I burried myself
the day my wife died...

Zola takes his hand gently.

ZOLA

And I will dig you out, Henrik. We will
rebuild. Faith Keepers work in pairs.

Henrik smiles, he and Zola stare deeply into each other's
eyes. Smiles all around.

EXT. EDGE OF TOWN — DAY

Mikah and Teodoro have their gear on and are ready to leave.
Pashe and Treslyn and the villagers form a half circle around
them.

Rifka, Henrik, Zola and Antolin are at the front of the
congregation.

RIFKA

Bless you. Thank you again.

MIKAH

You are too kind, and I am undeserving of your thanks.

HENRIK

I am ashamed of my behavior toward you, my friends, please forgive me. You are welcome here anytime. Any time at all.

TEODORO

We will be back, I promise.

Teodoro shakes hands with Pashe, then hugs him emotionally.

Antolin looks up at Mikah sadly.

MIKAH

Antolin, I have almost forgotten. I have something to give you, it is not much, but I want you to have it.

Antolin perks up a bit.

ANTOLIN

What is it?

Mikah produces his magic stone from his pocket.

MIKAH

You know its power, use it wisely and it will do you a world of good.

Antolin takes the stone and smiles. Mikah pats his head and stands up again and waves.

MIKAH

Good bye, my friends, may you all live and love for many years.

Mikah and Teodoro walk off down the dirt road away from the village. The villagers wave and shout as they go.

Slowly, the villagers turn from the road and start back to their homes. Pashe and Treslyn are the last to leave.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Mikah and Teodoro walk at a leisurley pace, chatting quietly. Mikah's attention is taken by a rustling in the bushes.

Mikah motions for Teodoro to stop.

MIKAH

Who's there?

Silence. Mikah and Teodoro scan the bushes for a second. Mikah shrugs, and they continue walking.

An arrow whizzes by and perches in a tree just in front of Mikah and Teodoro. They stop.

TEODORO

The marauders!

He dives for cover behind a fallen tree. A commotion and CAT'S WAIL shoot forth, Teodoro yelps. An animal zips away into the woods.

TEODORO

Wildcat. My fault entirely.

The Taburki steps out into the path, bow in hand, a pack and bedroll in his other hand.

Mikah and the Taburki look at each other for a moment. Mikah smiles and motions for the Taburki to join him.

MIKAH

I would consider it an honor, my friend.

The Taburki motions to where Teodoro is and asks a question in his language.

MIKAH

He's alright. He missed the Rashweed bush.

Mikah and the Taburki start to walk again. Teodoro gets up, dusts himself off and hurries after them, catching up quickly.

TEODORO

But... but wait...

Teodoro glances back and forth at Mikah and the Taburki a few times. Mikah smiles.

MIKAH

Yes, Teodoro?

TEODORO

You gave away the magic stone.

MIKAH

Yes, I did.

TEODORO

But they don't need it anymore.

MIKAH

Maybe.

TEODORO

What are we going to do now, we still have many miles to go, through some pretty inhospitable country.

MIKAH

So?

Teodoro makes a lot of GESTURES as he tries to put the words together. The Taburki tries to avoid the rabbid movements.

TEODORO

We have no magic stone now.

Mikah chuckles and shakes his head.

MIKAH

Teodoro, you make my soul laugh.

Teodoro walks on, complaining and whining, trying to make the Taburki understand their plight.

TEODORO

What will happen next time we need to eat, or the time after that? Maybe we will not be so lucky, or we'll be at a cannibal village.

Teodoro's face registers new concern and his hands flail about, panicky.

TEODORO

Oh, that would be great, "oh wait, I think I have an arm here somewhere," and you, just handing our magic away like it was some common bauble or something.

Mikah stops and nonchalantly looks down at the ground.

He bends over and picks up an odd shaped STONE, turning it over in his hands and brushing it off.

A WISP of dust flies off the stone, and a FACE appears ever so briefly and WINKS before the dust FADES into the air.

Mikah nods in approval and tucks it into a POCKET at the side of his pack.

MIKAH

Don't worry; I have another, you know.

TEODORO

What?

Teodoro scrambles up to Mikah's side, his eyes widening.

TEODORO

How many magic stones did that old man give you? Where did he get so many magic stones?

Mikah laughs, still shaking his head as they walk on. Teodoro nudges the Taburki, who smiles.

TEODORO

How come I never got a magic stone? I got a doll. You get magic stones, Pashe gets a wife and a village. I got a doll at the last two villages, and a key-ring at the village before that. I'll probably get an ashtray at the next one...

Teodoro grumbles under his breath, and Mikah and the Taburki laugh louder as they start down a hill and out of view.

FADE OUT

THE END