Twin Freaks

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. GRASSHAVEN - ESTABLISHING - MORNING

The sun rises on a quaint, quiet village. Villagers wend their ways on dirt paths among rustic wooden structures with thatch roofs. This is a peaceful place with pleasant people aplenty.

SUPER: GRASSHAVEN

EXT. GRASSHAVEN - WHEATKEEPER HOME - MOMENTS LATER

WILIDERE WHEATKEEPER (mid-30s, lithe) walks from the family house to the family barn. The barn door is already open wide.

INT. GRASSHAVEN - WHEATKEEPER BARN - CONTINUOUS

Wilidere enters the barn and is immediately arrested by what she sees.

WILIDERE
(yelling)
Awlden Wheatkeeper!

REVERSE ANGLE

AWLDEN (AWL) WHEATKEEPER (12 years old, sturdy) stands in the center of the barn. In the air overhead, a large bale of hay floats toward the boy. The boy concentrates on the bale of hay.

WILIDERE (O.S.)
Just use the pitchfork!

Awl's concentration is broken. The HAY BALE drops to the floor of the barn with a THUD. Then Awl crumples to the floor and clutches his head in pain. Awl moans.

Wilidere runs to Awl, sits, and cradles her son in her lap. She strokes his hair.

WILIDERE
(softly)
It's okay, my little fool. It's okay.

INT. WHEATKEEPER HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

Awl and Wilidere sit at the square wooden table, eating porridge. Awl has a blank expression. Wilidere watches her son with concern.

Nearby, EMOR WHEATKEEPER (late 30s) cooks at a stove.

WILDERE
(to Emor)
You're sure no one put a spell on you, Emor? You didn't anger a sorceress?

EMOR
(in stride)
I don't know any sorceresses.

WILIDERE
Did you ever swim in an enchanted lake, or bathe in a cursed stream?

EMOR
Not that I'm aware of, Dere. Have you? I mean, after all, they're your children, too.

WILIDERE
And I gave them my fair features.

EMOR
Tylen has more features than just fair ones.

WILDERE
I don't believe I'm to blame for that. Or Awl's... thing, for that matter.

Emor joins his wife and son at the table. He places his hand on his wife's.

EMOR
(gently)
We may never know who, or what, is responsible for their gifts, my darling thimbleweed. And maybe we're better off not knowing.

WILIDERE
Do you really believe that?

EMOR
It's worth trying to believe.

As Emor takes back his hand and begins to eat, TYLEN WHEATKEEPER (12, intense) enters, takes porridge, and sits at the table. She notices the look on her brother's face.

TYLEN
Awl okay?

WILIDERE
He will be.

TYLEN
What happened?

WILIDERE
He used his mind to move a bale of hay.

AWL
(snapping out of it)
I did?
(beat)
Do we not have a pitchfork?

Wilidere sighs. They've had conversations like this before, often.

TYLEN
(to Awl)
You really don't remember? You forget every time?

AWL
I don't know. Do I?

EMOR
Eat, son.
(to Tylen)
You, too.

The children eat, quietly. No one speaks for a moment. A fly lands on the table and walks toward Tylen, slowly, until--

From under the table, with no warning, a horse's tail swats and kills the fly, then disappears under the table again.

AWL
(shocked and confused)
Whoa! When did we get a lion?

EXT. GRASSHAVEN - SCHOOLHUT - AFTERNOON

The Grasshaven schoolhut is a one-room structure, fashioned like all the others in the village. The door is closed, but we can hear the sounds of children being children inside. Around the back, we find HYDNORA SINGLE, the schoolmistress, taking a breather.

Leaning against the rear wall of the schoolhut, Hydnora holds a small ceramic bowl. In the bowl are cut leaves.

Hydnora strikes a flint on the side of the bowl, producing a spark that starts the leaves smoking. She then lifts the bowl to her face and inhales deeply... then exhales.

She does this twice more. Then, sufficiently calmed and reinvigorated, Hydnora upends the bowl, tapping the bottom to release the ashes, which fall to the ground near the rear wall of the schoolhut. Hydnora walks away...

...but we stay long enough to see the ashes, reignited by a breeze, set fire to some straw on the ground near the rear wall... and then the wall of the schoolhut itself.

INT. SCHOOLHUT - MOMENTS LATER

Hydnora enters and walks to the front of the room.

HYDNORA
All right, children. Let's settle in again.

About two dozen boys and girls aged between 5 and 14 -- including Tylen and Awl -- start to take seats on the straw-strewn floor. Others take their time. Meanwhile, smoke begins to seep into the room.

OLDER GIRL
(sniffing the air)
Mistress Single...?

Hydnora is preoccupied with some younger kids.

OLDER GIRL (CONT'D)
(growing alarmed)
Mistress Single, I think... maybe--

HYDNORA
(noticing)
Oh. That's not good. All right, children... everyone out and to the orchard.

EXT. GRASSHAVEN - SCHOOLHUT - CONTINUOUS

The older children shepherd the younger ones out the door of the schoolhut, into the dirt road, then away from the building, which has really begun to burn now. Hydnora brings up the rear of the evacuation procession.

HYDNORA
Quickly, quickly.
(MORE)

HYDNORA (CONT'D)
You don't want to end up like Crispy Walter.

As soon as the group is a safe distance from the burning structure, the kids scatter. Hydnora attempts in vain to regather them, running to and fro, in and out of view.

We PULL BACK to see Awl standing still, staring at the blaze, apparently contemplating the conflagration.

CLOSE ON AWL'S FACE

Flames reflected in his wide eyes, Awl continues to look. A plan is forming in his mind. An idea, at least. Or a simple thought.

We PULL BACK, focused on Awl focused on the fire. He stares... until--

BAM. A squealing pig runs into view, ramming into Awl from the side, knocking him down.

EXT. GRASSHAVEN - ORCHARD - MOMENTS LATER

Grasshaven's orchard is on a hill, from which the schoolmistress and her students can see the burning schoolhut. Hydnora counts her charges.

HYDNORA
Ten... eleven...
(beat)
Nineteen... Twenty...

Hydnora doesn't like the number she's reached. She looks around the group, then turns to peer down and off toward the blaze.

INT. WHEATKEEPER HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

The Wheatkeeper family is again at the table.

WILIDERE
So.
(to Awl)
You were going to move the fire away from the school?

AWL
I guess so? I really don't remember.

WILIDERE
(to Tylen)
And you turned into a pig and stopped him.

TYLEN
Sort of. I'm not sure. That was my idea, anyway.

WILIDERE
But the schoolhut is no longer standing.

EMOR
I can shed some light on that. I got there with the Water Department just after Tylen collided with Awl. If I'm correct, Tylen barreling into Awl didn't quite break his concentration, but more... shifted his focus. I suspect he was still trying to move the fire off the schoolhut even as he tumbled to the ground... and he ended up moving the schoolhut itself, still on fire.

WILIDERE
Which is why there is no longer a schoolhut in Grasshaven.

EMOR
To be fair to the children, Dere, there almost certainly wouldn't be a schoolhut any longer even if they'd gone with the others to the orchard. The schoolhut was already on fire and would have collapsed eventually. Tylen and Awl just... helped.

WILIDERE
<u>Helped</u>?

EMOR
Helped the schoolhut topple and burn, I mean.

Wilidere sighs as she looks at her children.

EMOR (CONT'D)
Maybe we could offer our barn as a substitute.

WILIDERE
That’s not a terrible idea.
(to the twins)
In any case, why don’t you two get some rest. You’ve had a rough day.

AWL
Did we?

EXT. GRASSHAVEN - MEETING HOUSE - EVENING

One of the larger buildings in the village. From without, we can hear spirited murmurs within.

INT. MEETING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Many adult villagers crowd in the room, all focused on a man standing on a raised platform at the top of the room, village council member CESTIFER.

CESTIFER
Those in favor of banishing the Wheatkeepers from Grasshaven, raise your pitchforks and torches and say “aye.”

REVERSE ANGLE

The Wheatkeepers enter the building, pushing their way through the crowd toward the front.

CLOSE ON AWL

AWL
(to Emor)
Did we ever get a pitchfork?

The Wheatkeepers continue to press forward toward Cestifer.

WILIDERE
The meeting just began! There’s been no discussion or debate... and you’re already putting the fate of our family to a vote?

CESTIFER
What’s to discuss? Your children destroyed the school, so now your family must be sent away. That’s how it’s always been done.

The crowd murmurs.

EMOR
When was the last time the schoolhut was destroyed?

CESTIFER
Who can say? I'm sure it's written down somewhere.

EMOR
Then how can you say that casting out those who burn down the village school is what you must do?

More murmurs.

WILIDERE
Our children did not burn down the school! Awlden tried to <u>save</u> the school!

CESTIFER
He did not do a very good job.

WILIDERE
He's twelve.

CESTIFER
He has a gift.

WILIDERE
And he tried to use that gift to save the school.

CESTIFER
And yet the school burned to the ground. It also collapsed.

EMOR
I think we're putting the cart before the horse--

CESTIFER
It was a pig, was it not? And that pig was actually your daughter.

Murmur murmur murmur.

EMOR
Tylen was trying to keep Awl from getting hurt--

WILIDERE
While Awl was trying to save the schoolhut!

CESTIFER
Which brings us right back to everyone in favor of expelling the Wheatkeepers from the village, please—-

WOMAN IN CROWD
Won’t someone please think of the children?!

OTHER VILLAGER
Yes, the children!
(beat)
But which children?

CESTIFER
We are discussing the Wheatkeeper children now. Specifically, banishing them from Grasshaven. For the sake of all the other children. And all of the adults, too.

MALE VOICE IN THE CROWD (O.S.)
May I offer an alternative?

With different murmurs, the crowd turns to spy the village Wise One, PHENOMENIK, who stands tall in the back of the room.

CESTIFER
The Council recognizes Phenomenik, the village Wise One. But, with respect, please keep your remarks brief. The harvest season begins in two weeks.

Laughter from the crowd. Phenomenik walks to the front of the room, the crowd parting for him exactly the way they didn’t for the Wheatkeepers.

PHENOMENIK
Sending this family away, forever, is too harsh a punishment. If indeed punishment is what is called for. I propose that only the children be sent away... but permitted to return when the time is right.

Wilidere gasps. Emor places a calming hand on her arm.

CESTIFER
Go on.

PHENOMENIK
These children are special. They have gifts. But they are young, still, and their gifts are more like burdens to them, just now.

Phenomenik puts a protective hand on each twin's shoulder.

PHENOMENIK (CONT'D)
I know of a Wise One specially trained to teach gifted children. I met her at a conference of Wise Ones last year. Maybe two years ago.

EMOR
Where is this teacher?

PHENOMENIK
I do not wish to say, for her own protection and that of your children, should they enter into her tutelage.

CESTIFER
Then how will the children get there?

PHENOMENIK
I will take them to her.

The crowd reacts with surprise and concern.

CESTIFER
How long will that take?

PHENOMENIK
I'd rather not reveal that either. If one knew how long it would take to travel to another location from a given starting point, such as Grasshaven, and the average rate of speed of the chosen mode of transportation -- say a single horse and small cart -- one could chart a circle of possible endpoints of the journey.

CROWD
(excitedly)
Magik!

PHENOMENIK
No... the other one.

CROWD
Fizziks!

PHENOMENIK
(proudly)
Precisely!

CLOSE ON TYLEN AND AWL

AWL
(whispering to Tylen)
I'm confused. I thought the horse before the cart was a pig. Didn't somebody say that?

TYLEN
Shh. They're talking about us.

AWL
They are?
(beat)
Am I the cart? I don't think I have enough wheels.

INT. WHEATKEEPER HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Wilidere, Emor, and Phenomenik sit at the table.

EMOR
She has... gifts of her own?

PHENOMENIK
Perhaps her greatest gift is patience. She will help the children harness the powers of their abilities, teaching them how and when to use them -- and how and when not to use them.

WILIDERE
Do we... are we expected to pay her? Tuition? Room and board? She's going to feed the children, I assume, and give them a place to sleep?

PHENOMENIK
I expect that she'll have them do chores and run errands to earn their keep.
(MORE)

PHENOMENIK (CONT'D)
I can bring her a token of your gratitude when I eventually fetch the twins to bring them home again.

EMOR
You know of other gifted children this... Niversa has helped?

PHENOMENIK
She worked with my own second cousin. He can communicate with plants now. He used to just eavesdrop on them.

EXT. GRASSHAVEN - WHEATKEEPER HOME - DAWN

The following day. Under a threatening gray sky, Phenomenik waits near a small brown cart hitched to a brown horse. The Wheatkeepers exit their house and join the Wise One.

AWL
(noticing the clouds)
Maybe I could--

OTHERS
(as one)
No!

WILIDERE
(to Awl)
It's okay, sweetheart. A little rain never hurt anyone.

PHENOMENIK
A lot of rain could, though. But we'll be fine. There's a blanket in the cart for the children.

EMOR
And what will you do if it rains?

PHENOMENIK
If it rains... then the Wise One will become the Wet One.

Phenomenik steps away to see to the horse. Emor and Wilidere hug their children.

WILIDERE
(to Awl)
Be good. Be smart. Listen carefully. Try to remember what you're taught. And look after your sister. I love you very much.

The parents switch kids.

TYLEN
(to Wilidere, indignant)
We shouldn't have to leave.

WILIDERE
No. But it isn't a bad idea for you to get... a special education. Both of you.

TYLEN
Will you visit us?

WILIDERE
(tearing up)
I don't think we'll be able to. But no one can stop us from thinking about you every day.

AWL
You're not going to replace us, are you? With new children? Or more hay?

EXT. ROAD - MORNING

On the lone road out of Grasshaven, Phenomenik rides the horse that carries the cart with Tylen and Awl in it. They proceed toward the rising sun. Awl sleeps under a blanket. Tylen leans forward to talk to Phenomenik.

TYLEN
So, where are we headed?

PHENOMENIK
The next village is Dirthold--

Suddenly, the horse stops walking and whinnies. Phenomenik and Tylen realize that they have been accosted by a BANDIT (late teens), brandishing a long, pointy stick aimed at Phenomenik.

BANDIT
Hand over anything of value in your possession, please... or else!

PHENOMENIK
We have nothing of value whatsoever.

BANDIT
(unsure)
Well... what do you have?

Phenomenik pats himself down, comes up empty. The he turns around and considers the children in the cart. Tylen shrugs. Phenomenik turns back to the bandit.

PHENOMENIK
We have a blanket.

BANDIT
Then give me the blanket.

PHENOMENIK
I'm afraid the boy is using it at the moment. Perhaps you could meet us farther down the road, maybe in an hour's time, and we could give you the blanket then?

BANDIT
I don't know. You're traveling at the speed of a horse. I'm on foot. I'd have to run to be where you'll be in an hour.

PHENOMENIK
We could give you a ride. That way you'd be exactly where we are in an hour.

BANDIT
I suppose. But then I'd be pretty far from here, which is where I'd need to be right afterward. So I'd have a pretty long way to walk back. And it might be dark then, and I'd rather not travel in the woods in the dark. There are thieves to worry about, not to mention outlaws.

TYLEN
You could always wait until morning to return. Camp where we part company in an hour.

BANDIT
I could do that, but it gets pretty cold in the woods at night.

TYLEN
But you'd have a blanket!

BANDIT
I would!

The bandit looks over at Awl, sleeping peacefully in the cart, under the blanket.

BANDIT (CONT'D)
He looks so peaceful. Like a little angel.

TYLEN
You could take them both.

The bandit and Phenomenik laugh. Tylen doesn't laugh.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Off the road, the traveling party is in the woods. Around them are trees. Nothing but trees.

PHENOMENIK
(confused)
Hmm.
(beat)
Hmmm.
(beat)
I was sure it was right here.

AWL
I could move the trees.

TYLEN
(sighing)
Please don't. I'll find the house.

PHENOMENIK
How?
(beat)
Oh.

TYLEN
Bird?

PHENOMENIK
Maybe not.
(MORE)

PHENOMENIK (CONT'D)
If you were to fly over the trees, all you'd see is trees below. They're pretty thick. You're probably better off on the ground, hunting for a scent rather than trying to catch a glimpse.

TYLEN
So who smells the best?

AWL
I don't smell so good. But better than the horse, I think.

PHENOMENIK
(ignoring Awl)
A dog would do the trick.

AWL
Not an old dog. Not if it's a new trick. I heard that somewhere, I think. Maybe it was a new stick?

Tylen is already walking away, further into the woods.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

A dog -- the most generic specimen of dog you can imagine -- lopes through the woods, smelling... everything. Hearing everything, too. Then, abruptly, the dog stops.

Rabbit? Rabbit! The dog stands perfectly still. Then the dog bolts after a rabbit. But the rabbit escapes the dog.

But there -- another rabbit! So the dog dives into a shrub... only to emerge without a rabbit.

Then the dog stands still again, as if thinking through the problem. And then the dog changes form and becomes a rabbit, but a rabbit roughly the size of a dog.

The rabbit hops off.

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Back at the wagon with Phenomenik and Awl, waiting for Tylen.

PHENOMENIK
What is it like? When you move things with your mind, I mean.

AWL
What's it like?

PHENOMENIK
How does it work?

AWL
I don't know how it works. I just... do it.

PHENOMENIK
But what do you do?

AWL
I move things. With my mind.

PHENOMENIK
Yes, but...

AWL
I look at something... then I decide that I want it in a different place. So I move it from where it is to where I want it. I think that's how I do it, anyway. I really don't remember.

PHENOMENIK
You don't remember how you do it? Or you don't remember doing it?

AWL
Both. I know that I can move things with my mind, but I think I might know this only because people have told me that I can. And that I've done it. If I try to remember doing it... I can't. So... maybe I can't?

PHENOMENIK
No, you can. I've seen you do it.

AWL
You have? And what did it look like I was doing?

PHENOMENIK
You... you just look like you're... like you're looking at something.

AWL
I see.

PHENOMENIK
And then the pain comes.

AWL
The pain?

PHENOMENIK
You don't remember the pain? After you use your gift, you're in great pain for some time. Not a very long time, but long enough. And then, after that, comes the dull-wittedness.

AWL
I become...?

PHENOMENIK
Dull-witted, yes. And extremely so.

AWL
How extremely?

Phenomenik pauses before answering.

PHENOMENIK
You know how I am called a Wise One?

AWL
Yes.

PHENOMENIK
Well, no one would call you that.

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

The large rabbit is surrounded by regular-size rabbits, all of which consider the new rabbit curiously. The large rabbit has its head cocked and its ears erect, listening...

Then all of the small rabbits scurry off in a hurry, leaving the large rabbit to be grabbed by the ears by a human woman's hand.

The human woman drops the large rabbit into a sack, then hoists the sack over her shoulder.

NIVERSA
Oof. You're heavy. But you're going to make a <u>lot</u> of stew!

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

PHENOMENIK
Is Awl your real name?

AWL
It’s short for Awlden. What kind of name is Phenomenik?

PHENOMENIK
It’s short for Phenomenikulus.

After a moment without conversation:

PHENOMENIK (CONT’D)
It’ll be dark soon. I think we need to go looking for your sister.

INT. NIVERSA’S COTTAGE - KITCHEN

Niversa cuts vegetables at a counter, her back to the wooden table in the middle of the room. On the table is the sack in which Niversa earlier stuffed the large rabbit, and sitting on the sack on the table is Tylen.

NIVERSA
(over her shoulder)
If you’re going to look like an animal, expect people who don’t know that you’re a girl to treat you like an animal.

TYLEN
Ah. You must be Niversa.

Niversa turns around to face Tylen. Tylen climbs off the table.

NIVERSA
I am indeed. Welcome to my home.

TYLEN
Thank you. I’m Tylen.

NIVERSA
And where is your brother, Tylen?

TYLEN
He’s with Phenomenik. At least, I hope he is.

NIVERSA
Assuming that they are together, where are they together?

TYLEN
Near the road. Phenomenik is our village Wise One, but he forgot your address.

NIVERSA
(amused)
Wise Ones often are absentminded.

TYLEN
Are you?

NIVERSA
I don't know. Shall we fetch them? They're probably hungry and tired.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Awl sits on the ground, leaning against the wagon. Phenomenik crouches, talking to a rabbit. A rustling in the woods prompts Phenomenik to stand and produce a twisted twig from the arm of his cloak. He peers into the woods.

AWL
(unconcerned)
Is that a wand?

PHENOMENIK
(whispering)
No.

AWL
It's... just a twig?

PHENOMENIK
Hush.

AWL
What are you going to do with just a twig?

PHENOMENIK
It's not just a twig.

AWL
You just said it was.

PHENOMENIK
I said...
(MORE)

PHENOMENIK (CONT'D)
It's a twig that looks like a wand. Anyone who doesn't know that it isn't a wand will assume that it is. Like you did.

AWL
That makes sense, I guess.
(beat)
As long as you don't tell anyone that it's just a twig if they ask. Like you did when I asked.

More rustling... then Tylen and Niversa emerge from the trees.

PHENOMENIK
Niversa! She found you!

NIVERSA
I found her.

Niversa pats Tylen on the shoulder, then approaches Awl. She produces a carrot from her cloak, hands it to Awl, smiles, and nods toward the horse.

Awl smiles back, nods, then takes a big bite of the carrot.

INT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - MORNING

The following morning, Niversa rouses the children from their slumber with a song:

NIVERSA
(singing)
Get up! Stand up! Come on, throw your hands up! If you've got the feeling, jump up, touch the ceiling!

Tylen rolls over and covers her ears with her hands, but Awl springs from his pallet and stretches.

AWL
(enthusiastically)
What's for breakfast? We will be eating breakfast here, won't we? Every morning?

NIVERSA
Every morning. This morning, it's eggs.

TYLEN
(groggily)
What kind of eggs?

NIVERSA
Is that really important?

AWL
Nope!

INT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - LATER

Tylen enters the kitchen. Awl is sitting on the floor, patting his stomach. Niversa looks incredulously at an empty pan.

NIVERSA
You ate them <u>all</u>?

AWL
There was only one!

NIVERSA
There was one <u>pan</u> of eggs, but there were seven eggs in there.

AWL
Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't know. But they <u>were</u> tasty.

NIVERSA
(mollified)
It's okay. They'll give you strength. And thank you.
(to Tylen)
Tylen, I'll make new eggs for you tomorrow.

Tylen looks at Niversa quizzically.

TYLEN
You mean <u>cook</u> new eggs, right? You're not actually going to... make them.

NIVERSA
(amused)
Yes, you suspicious little moppet.

Tylen sits at the table. Niversa serves Tylen a plate of bread and cheese.

TYLEN
What <u>are</u> your powers, anyway?
(MORE)

TYLEN (CONT'D)
Phenomenik didn't tell us -- wait. Where is Phenomenik?

NIVERSA
He left early this morning. While you were still asleep. Your village needs its Wise One, and he wanted to beat the market traffic on the road.

TYLEN
Speaking of villages, why don't you live in one? If you're a Wise One, like Phenomenik, then isn't there a village without wisdom?

NIVERSA
You do ask a lot of questions!

TYLEN
Well, it's not like I can learn anything at school.

AWL
Ours burned down.

NIVERSA
So I heard.

EXT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - CLEARING - MORNING

The trio stands outside Niversa's home, in a clearing, surrounded by woods.

NIVERSA
Before we begin your training, I need to see what you can do with no training at all.
(to Tylen)
Tylen, you'll start. I've already seen you as a large rabbit, but I didn't see how you got there. Would you mind taking that shape again?

Even before Niversa has finished asking, Tylen has shape-shifted into large rabbit form.

NIVERSA (CONT'D)
Oh. Well, that is impressive. Can you... do it again? A bit slower?

Tylen returns to girl form.

TYLEN
I’m not sure. When I decide to change my shape, I just... change my shape. I don’t do anything else. So I’m not sure I’m in control of the speed.

NIVERSA
(considering)
Have you ever changed from one animal form to another without changing back to your own shape in between?

TYLEN
I don’t think so, no.

NIVERSA
All right. Then let’s try that now. But hold on, because I want to be ready. Change into a rabbit... then into a... pig. I think Phenomenik said you were a pig when your school was burning down. So we know you can do both of those. Are you ready?

TYLEN
Ready.

NIVERSA
Go ahead.

Tylen promptly changes into a rabbit again... but then instead of changing into a pig, the rabbit cocks its head, as if thinking about how to change into a pig. Then the rabbit turns back to Tylen once more. Tylen sits on the ground and pants.

NIVERSA (CONT’D)
Interesting. Catch your breath. We’ve discovered something we’ll have to explore -- but later.

Niversa turns her attention to Awl, who is holding two dandelions and making them fight one another.

NIVERSA (CONT’D)
Now, Awl, before I ask you for a demonstration of your ability, I’d like to know a little more about it. I understand that moving things with your mind causes you discomfort.

AWL
That's what they tell me.

NIVERSA
Let's start small, then, okay?
Very small.
(beat)
Awl, I'd like you to concentrate for a moment on a blade of grass. One blade of grass. Just one. I want you to see that one blade of grass with your eyes, then see it in your mind, then move it with your mind... but just that one blade of grass. And I want you to move it just the tiniest bit. Don't pluck it from the dirt. Don't tie it into a knot. Just... make it... bend. A little. A very, very little. Can you try that?

AWL
Sure.

Awl looks away from Niversa to stare at a spot on the ground. Niversa looks to the same spot and sees that it is a patch of dirt. She leans over and gently turns Awl's head with her hand.

AWL (CONT'D)
Oh. That's better.

CLOSE ON A SINGLE BLADE OF GRASS

It bends. Just a very little.

ANGLE ON NIVERSA

She smiles, just a very little.

TYLEN (O.S.)
That could have been the wind, though.

Niversa stops smiling.

NIVERSA
Awl, could you now move... a leaf? A single leaf, and, again, not very much. But, a leaf on a tree.

Niversa points Awl's attention toward a tree just outside the clearing -- a strong, thick, tall tree.

NIVERSA (CONT'D)
Do you see that tree?

Awl nods.

NIVERSA (CONT'D)
Do you see that branch?

Awl nods again.

NIVERSA (CONT'D)
And toward the end of the branch, do you see one leaf that's more... copper than the rest? More... orange-red than green?

Awl nods a third time.

NIVERSA
Perfect. Awl, I want you to use your mind to pluck that one leaf from the tree. Then just let it fall to the ground. Don't do anything else. Just pluck it... and let it fall.

ANGLE ON AWL, concentrating.

REVERSE ANGLE to the tree. ZOOM IN to the leaf.

The leaf doesn't move... until it does. It separates from the branch and begins its descent downward. We ZOOM OUT as the leaf floats gently to the ground...

...while behind it the entire rest of the tree comes crashing down.

INT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Niversa carries an inert Awl to the bed. Tylen walks behind.

NIVERSA
(straining)
Your brother... is not light.
(beat)
In fact, he's... dense.

Tylen snickers. Niversa deposits Awl onto the bed, then sits on the edge.

NIVERSA (CONT'D)
You know, you might have changed into a donkey or a small ox and helped me move him.

TYLEN
I wasn't the one who told him to pull down a tree.

NIVERSA
To be fair, neither am I. I wanted your brother to move a leaf.

TYLEN
Do you think he didn't understand?

NIVERSA
No. He's not that... he understood. I just think it's very difficult for your brother to keep his focus where it needs to be. And, unfortunately, each time he doesn't is a step backward. But that's exactly why I wanted him to start small. Very small. To break the cycle.

TYLEN
(wryly)
Well, my brother is good at breaking things.

INT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - LATER

Niversa is working at the table, mixing ingredients in a wooden bowl. Tylen enters.

TYLEN
What's for lunch?

NIVERSA
You don't seem very concerned about your brother. Or at all concerned.

TYLEN
He's snoring. So he's alive. And he always wakes up, eventually.

NIVERSA
One time he might not.

TYLEN
Then that's when I'll be concerned. Meanwhile, what are you cooking?

NIVERSA
I’m not cooking. I’m preparing a poultice.

TYLEN
I didn’t see any poultice around. Which is why I wondered where you found eggs.

NIVERSA
(laughing)
Not poultry, Tylen. A poultice.

TYLEN
Okay. Is it edible?

NIVERSA
Is it... edible?

TYLEN
Yes. Can you eat it?

NIVERSA
I know what edible means, Tylen. I’m wondering why you’re asking.

TYLEN
Because I’m hungry.

NIVERSA
I suppose a poultice is edible. This one is, anyway.

TYLEN
Great. Make two?

INT. NIVERSA’S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - LATER

CLOSE ON STEAMING VEGETABLE SOUP

BACK TO SCENE

The bowl of soup is before Tylen, seated at the table. She picks up a spoon and digs in.

AWL (V.O.)
Something smells delicious.

Awl enters the kitchen, looking the worse for wear.

AWL
I mean purple. Something smells purple.

NIVERSA
No, you were right the first time.

Awl sits at the table. Niversa brings Awl a bowl of soup.

TYLEN
It is really good.
(to Awl)
How do you feel?

AWL
With my fingers, mostly.

TYLEN
Okay, he's back. I'm going outside. Call me if you need me.

Tylen leaves the table and heads for the door.

NIVERSA
(calling after Tylen)
Practice!

TYLEN (V.O.)
(calling back)
Maybe later.

AWL
Do you have any more of that paste? I'm still hungry.

NIVERSA
(confused)
Paste? Wait, did you... did you eat the poultice?

AWL
What's a poultice?

NIVERSA
The... paste.

AWL
Was I not supposed to?

NIVERSA
The paste was for your head.

AWL
Is it okay for my stomach?

NIVERSA
It... it's fine.

EXT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - LATER

Niversa and Awl in the clearing again.

NIVERSA
(to Awl)
You've only ever moved things with your mind, yes?

AWL
No, I've also moved things with my hands. And my feet, too, I guess.

NIVERSA
No, I mean... using your mind, you've only ever moved things... that weren't already moving.

After a moment of thought:

AWL
Yes.

NIVERSA
Okay, then. So now we're going to see if you can do the opposite.

AWL
Move something that's already moving?

NIVERSA
Stop something from moving. I'm going to toss something toward you. You'll focus your attention on it, concentrate, and hold it in mid-air.

AWL
We'll see!

TYLEN (V.O.)
I want to see too!

Tylen comes around the corner of the cottage into the clearing. Niversa steps toward the edge of the clearing to look for a things to throw at Awl. Tylen finds a medium-sized boulder in the clearing and sits on it. Niversa returns to the clearing with an armful of projectiles -- fruits and acorns. She takes a position about six feet from Awl.

NIVERSA
Ready?

AWL
Sure.

NIVERSA
Now, remember, I'm going to toss a fruit toward you... and you're going to stop it in the air. You don't have to hold it for long, if it hurts. Just stop it, then let it fall.

TYLEN
(calling)
Just like a tree!

NIVERSA
(calling to Tylen)
Hush!
(to Awl)
Okay, here we go. And...

Niversa lobs the first fruit toward Awl...

...who is still looking at it when it smacks him in the face.

AWL
Ow.

On her rock, Tylen claps with glee.

TYLEN
(calling)
Again!

NIVERSA
(sighing)
Awl, I just want to make sure I was clear about this exercise. I'm going to toss a fruit toward you--

TYLEN
(calling)
And you're going to catch it in your mouth!

NIVERSA
(calling back)
Tylen! You are not helping!

TYLEN
Am I supposed to be helping?

NIVERSA
You could try.

TYLEN
Can I throw the fruit, then?

NIVERSA
Definitely not.
(to Awl)
Let’s go again.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Niversa tosses fruit toward Awl. Awl stares at fruit. Fruit hits Awl in the face. Tylen claps. Repeat.

EXT. NIVERSA’S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Niversa collapses to the ground, defeated. Awl remains standing, surrounded by fruits. Tylen gets off her rock and walks over to Awl.

TYLEN
Hi.

AWL
Hi.

TYLEN
Having some trouble?

AWL
I guess so. I’m supposed to be stopping the fruit before it hits me.

TYLEN
I know. Do you think the fruit is too big?

AWL
Maybe?

TYLEN
Probably not. You did knock down a whole tree this morning.

AWL
I did?

TYLEN
You did. I’ll show you later.
(beat)
Is the fruit too small? Are you having trouble seeing it?

AWL
It gets clearer when it gets closer. But then fuzzier when it gets very close.

TYLEN
Huh.

AWL
Huh?

TYLEN
Where are you trying to stop the fruit?

AWL
In the air.

TYLEN
But where in the air?

AWL
Above the ground.

TYLEN
Try to stop the fruit, in the air, above the ground, when it’s the clearest. When you can see it the best, I mean. Maybe when you can see it best with your eyes will be when you can see it best in your mind. And maybe that’s the magik moment.

Awl nods. He continues nodding.

TYLEN
Yes?

AWL
Sure.

Tylen returns to her rock.

TYLEN
(yelling)
Again!

Niversa stands, holding a fruit.

NIVERSA
Ready?

AWL
Ready!

Niversa tosses the fruit, and it smacks Awl in the face. Niversa hangs her head. Tylen waves Niversa over to the rock.

TYLEN
Don't ask if him if he's ready.

NIVERSA
What?

TYLEN
You're asking if Awl's ready. Don't give him the choice of being ready. You're giving him time to be distracted from the fruit. So maybe...

NIVERSA
Maybe if he's distracted by the fruit...

TYLEN
Exactly.

NIVERSA
That's smart.

TYLEN
I'm smart.

Niversa turns to walk back to the clearing.

TYLEN
Throw it from here.

Niversa stops where she is, nods, then whirls around where she stands and throws a fruit at Awl's head from ten feet away.

TYLEN (CONT'D)
(yelling)
Awl!

Awl spins to face his sister and Niversa, and a moment later all three of them are staring at a fruit hanging in the air, three feet off the ground.

AWL
(whispering)
Wow.

AROUND NIVERSA'S HOME - MONTAGE

In which we see the trio's daily routine: waking early, eating breakfast, practicing their skills outside, eating lunch,

resting, walking in the woods, training some more, eating dinner, winding down for the night.

INT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Awl is already asleep on his pallet. Tylen is lying on hers. Niversa is in the room.

TYLEN
This is taking some time, isn't it.

NIVERSA
You have to crawl before you can walk. Tylen.

TYLEN
You realize that a large part of my training is actually walking, though, right?

NIVERSA
It's just an expression, Tylen. It means you have to start small.

TYLEN
I <u>can't</u> start small. I have to be roughly the same size whatever shape I take.

Niversa pinches the bridge of her nose with her fingertips.

NIVERSA
Right. Right.

TYLEN
You mean we need to start with the basics before we can handle the harder stuff. Don't you?

Niversa sighs.

EXT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - CLEARING - MORNING

The trio is outside. Awl and Niversa sit on the ground. Tylen stands apart from them, but not far away. As Niversa calls out the names of different creatures, Tylen takes that form.

NIVERSA
Dog! Pony! Pig! Turkey! Basilisk! Groundhog! Eagle! Dragon!

Finally, Tylen resumes her own form. Awl and Niversa clap enthusiastically. Tylen curtsies, only mildly out of breath.

NIVERSA (CONT'D)
Excellent!

Tylen and Awl switch places. After a moment, Awl looks at Niversa. Niversa nods. Then Awl looks to Tylen... then looks away, toward the edge of the clearing. He focuses his attention there...

...raising a fallen tree branch into the air, smoothly. The branch floats through the air into the clearing, where it hovers... before floating to where Awl stands, pivoting so that it floats like a bat. The baseball kind.

Awl nods at Niversa. Niversa nudges Tylen and offers her an acorn.

TYLEN
No, thank you. I had acorns for lunch.

NIVERSA
I hope you didn't!

TYLEN
Why not?

NIVERSA
Raw acorns are poisonous to humans.

TYLEN
I was a squirrel at the time.

NIVERSA
Were you?

TYLEN
No.

NIVERSA
Did you really eat acorns?

TYLEN
No. And I guess I shouldn't eat this one?

NIVERSA
Throw it. Throw it at your brother.

TYLEN
Really?

Tylen takes the acorn from Niversa and stands up. She throws the acorn toward Awl. The acorn flies nowhere near Awl.

TYLEN (CONT'D)
Sorry. Bad throw.

Niversa hands her another acorn, and Tylen tries again. Again, the acorn sails wide of the target.

TYLEN (CONT'D)
Once more?

Niversa hands her a third acorn.

AWL
Just hold it.

TYLEN
You want me to wait?

AWL
No, hold the acorn out. In your hand.

The branch still hovers in the air in front of Awl, at shoulder height. Tylen extends her hand, palm up, with the acorn sitting in it. Abruptly, the acorn leaves her hand at great speed. The acorn flies, like an arrow, from Tylen's palm directly toward Awl's chest. When it arrives at just the perfect point in space, the branch swings suddenly, making contact with the acorn -- with a CRACK -- sending the nut sailing out of the clearing, over the grass, toward the trees.

Then Awl lowers the branch to the ground, letting it down evenly until it comes to rest gently on the dirt. Awl remains standing where he is.

NIVERSA
Holy cow!

Tylen promptly turns into a calf. Awl bows and Tylen lows.

EXT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - DAY

Tylen and Niversa are outside when they hear a horse-drawn cart approach the property. Moments later, the cart arrives. It is Phenomenik's horse and cart, with Phenomenik at the reins... and the twins' parents in the cart. Tylen runs to them.

TYLEN
Mother! Father!

The cart comes to a halt. Wilidere and Emor climb out of the cart. Phenomenik disembarks as well.

TYLEN (CONT'D)
Phenomenik!

Niversa takes the reins of the horse and leads it and the cart away. Tylen hugs her parents, then:

TYLEN
(calling inside)
Awl! Come out here!
(to the adults)
Just to warn you, he's a little different now.

WILIDERE
Different now... how?

Awl comes from the house into the clearing... then hugs each parent in turn. He shakes Phenomenik's hand.

AWL
Welcome. This is a delightful surprise. Was it a pleasant journey from home?

Emor and Wilidere stare at Awl. Eventually:

WILIDERE
(whispering)
Is this magik?

EMOR
(whispering)
Or fizziks?

PHENOMENIK
Not magik or fizziks. Training.

Niversa reappears from behind the house.

NIVERSA
(calling)
Come inside! After we eat, there will be an exhibition.

EXT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - CLEARING - AFTERNOON

Things look a bit different in the clearing. For one thing, there is a kind of archway made of boulders at the edge of the clearing, with a medium-size rock just behind the archway, and a pile of stones and pebbles behind that rock. Awl stands behind a tree just outside the clearing, in view of the archway.

There are four other medium-size rocks set up like seats closer to the cottage. The four adults sit here. Phenomenik, Emor, and Wilidere are watching the archway, but Niversa has her eye on the sky.

We TILT UP to see a hawk appear in the sky above the clearing, circling once... then twice... then diving toward the ground at great speed. When it is no more than a foot from the dirt, in the blink of an eye the hawk becomes a different creature entirely, and none too cute: two strong legs with webbed feet, large leathery wings, scaly green skin, a narrow snout with sharp teeth, and ridges along its back from the top of its head all the way to its barbed tail.

Wilidere gasps when she sees it, then grabs and squeezes Emor's arm. Emor winces. Phenomenik claps in delight at the spectacle. Niversa watches with reserved pride.

The creature pads toward the archway, stopping just shy of it for a moment... then runs off into the woods. A moment later, the medium-sized rock behind the boulder archway begins to stir, slowly... until it is lifted off the ground. The rock floats smoothly through the archway... over the clearing, just about a foot off the ground... and into Phenomenik's cart, parked near the cottage.

Now Emor and Wilidere join Phenomenik in clapping. But there's a bit more show:

Following the rock come the pebbles and stones through the archway, in a stream like a ribbon, hundreds of them flowing through the air to collect in the shape of a pyramid at the feet of the seated adults -- who then all stand and cheer.

INT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - CLEARING - DUSK

All but Awl are seated around a campfire. Awl walks from the woods with an armful of twigs and small branches, which he deposits onto the fire. Then he sits.

TYLEN
...and then, the entire tree came down!

EMOR
No! Did it? The whole tree?!

NIVERSA
You should be very proud of your children. I'm very proud of them.

PHENOMENIK
(to Niversa)
Do you think they’re ready... to come home?

NIVERSA
Soon. Another week. Maybe another two. But then... yes.

The twins exchange glances and smiles, and then all four Wheatkeepers do the same.

EMOR
That... thing you turned into, Tylen. Was that something you thought up?

TYLEN
No, that’s a real bird.

Awl flicks his sister on the ear.

AWL
He means the crocatrix, Tylen.

Tylen flicks her brother back.

TYLEN
I know what he means, Awlden.

EMOR
Crocatrix? Like in the stories?

PHENOMENIK
Those aren’t just stories. The crocatrix exists!

TYLEN
(to Phenomenik)
Have you seen one?

PHENOMENIK
Before today? No. But I’ve seen detailed illustrations of them.

AWL
In your bestiary?

PHENOMENIK
And elsewhere. Of course, those images were all rendered from memory.
(MORE)

PHENOMENIK (CONT'D)
A crocatrix isn't going to sit to have its portrait drawn... and there probably isn't a person willing to spend that much time in the company of such a fierce creature.

Everyone around the fire nods. We hear Phenomenik's HORSE SNORT his agreement.

EXT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Niversa stands outside her house waving goodbye as Phenomenik leads his horse away, Wilidere and Emor in the cart waving back.

INT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - BEDROOM

Tylen and Awl lie on their pallets. Tylen's eyes are closed. Awl's are not.

AWL
She's planning something, you know.

TYLEN
Mom?

AWL
Niversa.

TYLEN
Another surprise?

AWL
I guess you could say that. But not exactly a treat, I don't think. Not for us.

Tylen opens her eyes, props herself up, and faces Awl.

TYLEN
Awl, I'm tired. Can you just tell me what you think so I don't have to guess? Thanks.

Awl sits up in his pallet and turns to face his sister.

AWL
That course Niversa's been having us run -- every day lately, several times a day -- it's not just something she invented. It represents something real.

TYLEN
Isn't it already real?

AWL
I mean that the arrangement isn't random. The archway, the boulders, the pebbles... they're all standing in for other things, somewhere else. And you -- circling above as a hawk, then dropping in as a crocatrix... over and over. It's not practice anymore.

TYLEN
Then what?

AWL
It's rehearsal.

TYLEN
For what, though?

AWL
Have you ever seen a crocatrix, Tylen?

TYLEN
No, but Phenomenik says it's a real thing.

AWL
Real, yes. But rare. Maybe even more rare than real.

TYLEN
So what are we rehearsing for, then, exactly?

AWL
I don't know. But here's what I think will happen next: Someone's going to show up here, asking for help. They'll say that there's a crocatrix terrorizing them... or something. No -- wait. The pebbles....

TYLEN
The pebbles?

AWL
The pebbles. All the small stones. Coins. Maybe other valuable things. The crocatrix is hoarding them... but they belong to the people of the village.

TYLEN
What village? Grasshaven?

AWL
Not our village. Another village, not far from here. At least, that’s what the person who comes for Niversa’s help will say.

TYLEN
But why would someone come for Niversa’s help with a crocatrix hoarding coins that belong to the people of a village?

AWL
Because she’s a Wise One. Because she knows ways to help people.

TYLEN
And she’s been training us to help her help people... who haven’t yet asked for her help? How does that work?

AWL
Because it isn’t real.

TYLEN
The crocatrix? Phenomenik said they <u>are</u> real!

AWL
(patiently)
Not the crocatrix. The crocatrix is real. And the coins are real. But the village might not be real. The... <u>story</u> isn’t real. It’s a ruse. And Niversa’s in on it.

After a moment:

TYLEN
You're a lot smarter than you used to be. Do you know that?

AWL
I do know. And it's... strange. I can think so much more clearly now.

TYLEN
Do you feel different?

AWL
Kind of. Yes. I feel like... I've woken up from a long nap.

TYLEN
You have taken a lot of long naps.
(beat)
So when do you think someone's going to show up here asking for Niversa's help?

AWL
Soon. Maybe even tomorrow.

Both children lie down and close their eyes.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - BEDROOM - DAWN

A RAPPING on the DOOR of the cottage wakes both children, who open their eyes as one. We hear the DOOR OPEN, then:

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
Wise One, my people desperately need your help!

Awl turns his head to look at Tylen.

INT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - MORNING

The children sit at the table with Niversa and STIGGUR (lanky and circumspect).

NIVERSA
Tylen, Awl: This is Stiggur Glue. Stiggur is a Roamen solider.

STIGGUR
A sentry, really. A night watchman.

TYLEN
Shouldn't you be asleep now, then?

AWL
Roamen?

STIGGUR
Yes. We're an itinerant people. Wanderers.

TYLEN
Is "Roamen" plural? It is one Roa_man_, two Roa_men_?

STIGGUR
No, the plural is Roamen. One Roamen. Two Roamens.

TYLEN
That's confusing.

NIVERSA
Stiggur came on behalf of his clan to ask for our help.

AWL
Our help?

STIGGUR
My clan has been camping in the nearby woods for some time already. Maybe a year now. From time to time, we've discovered that our valuables have gone missing. Coins, mostly, but also nuggets of precious metals and gemstones. At first, we suspected one of our own, but then it became clear that our camp was being raided. Likely at night.

TYLEN
Sounds like someone wasn't doing a great job watching the camp. At night.

Awl pokes his sister and shoot her a look that says, <u>Stop it</u>.

STIGGUR
If it were a man getting past us, I would be ashamed. But it's worse than that.

AWL
Worse than a man?

TYLEN
Two men?

STIGGUR
It’s a crocatrix.

Stiggur waits for the children to react, but when Awl merely nods slightly:

STIGGUR (CONT’D)
A creature with webbed feet, large leathery wings, scaly green skin, a narrow snout with sharp teeth, and ridges along its back from the top of its head all the way to its barbed tail!

TYLEN
Yeah. We know what a crocatrix looks like.

STIGGUR
Oh. Well... then you know how fierce a crocatrix can be. And how stealthy.

NIVERSA
And greedy. So that’s where all your coins and valuables have gone?

STIGGUR
Yes. Into the crocatrix’s lair.

NIVERSA
And you want it all back?

STIGGUR
Our valuables, yes. The crocatrix can stay.

INT. NIVERSA’S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - LATER

Tylen and Awl are at the table. We hear the DOOR to the cottage CLOSE, then Niversa enters the kitchen.

NIVERSA
So, what do you two think? Do we try to help the Roamens?

TYLEN
Do we really have a choice?
(MORE)

TYLEN (CONT'D)
You've already been preparing us to help them, haven't you?

AWL
Tylen--

Niversa takes a seat at the table.

NIVERSA
You're really very perceptive children.

TYLEN
It was mostly Awl.

AWL
It was <u>all</u> me!

NIVERSA
Okay, okay.
(beat)
Yes, I've been preparing you to help the Roamens. I'd heard rumors of a creature in the woods. Only rumors, though. Separately, I'd heard about a Roamen camp being looted, and I realized these things might be related. So I did some investigation of my own.

AWL
Investigation. You went looking for the creature in the woods?

NIVERSA
Yes.

TYLEN
When?

NIVERSA
At night. When I thought the creature might be visiting the Roamen camp.
(beat)
And I found its lair.

AWL
A cave.

NIVERSA
A cave.

TYLEN
And what were you planning to do?

NIVERSA
I was planning to wait for someone to ask for my help. But at the same time I was preparing you both to help me to help them.

AWL
And now they've asked.

NIVERSA
Yes. They've asked for my help, and I'm asking for yours. I have an idea about how to get the Roamens' valuables out of the crocatrix's cave, and it puts to good use both of your abilities.

Tylen and Awl exchange a look.

TYLEN
Does your plan involve hurting the crocatrix?

NIVERSA
Not at all. The crocatrix will be nowhere near the cave when Awl empties it.

TYLEN
And where will I be?

NIVERSA
Also nowhere near the cave.

EXT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - CLEARING - AFTERNOON

The trio is outside again. It has been raining. Awl examines the boulder arch. Tylen and Niversa discuss the plan.

TYLEN
I'm the bait?!

NIVERSA
Not bait, Tylen. A decoy.

TYLEN
What's the difference?!

AWL
(calling)
Bait usually gets eaten.

Tylen shudders. Awl walks over to them.

NIVERSA
So far, you've practiced two-thirds of your part, Tylen. You start overhead, as a hawk, with a bird's-eye view of what's happening on the ground.

AWL
At the entrance to the cave.

NIVERSA
At the cave. When you see the crocatrix emerge, Tylen, you'll dive for the ground and change shape--

AWL
Wait. Why will the crocatrix come out of its cave when Tylen's in the air?

TYLEN
Do crocatrices eat hawks?!

NIVERSA
No, crocatrices do <u>not</u> eat hawks. The crocatrix is going to come out of its cave because you, Awl, are going to move the egg that's in there.

TYLEN
The egg?

AWL
The medium-sized rock. That's... an egg?

NIVERSA
Yes.

AWL
So I move the egg... out of the cave. That gets the crocatrix to follow. When she's out, Tylen swoops down...

NIVERSA
...and becomes a small crocatrix herself. Which gets the mother crocatrix's attention all over again.

TYLEN
And then I...?

NIVERSA
And then you run! I'd have thought that was obvious.

TYLEN
Then I run. Won't the mother crocatrix chase me?

NIVERSA
Absolutely she will. That's the whole point.

TYLEN
But then.... Isn't she...? Won't I...?

AWL
Is the idea that the mother crocatrix will think her egg has hatched?

NIVERSA
I'm not sure that matters. The egg will be out of sight. You're going to lower it -- gently -- into the woods, out of view of the cave entrance. The crocatrix will follow Tylen off in another direction. And when you and she are some distance from her lair, Tylen, you're going to change shape a third time.

TYLEN
Into what shape?

NIVERSA
Decoy's choice. Something common, though. At that point, you'll want to blend in with the other creatures of the woods.

TYLEN
Can I just turn back into myself then?

NIVERSA
Oh, no, no.

AWL
Why not?

NIVERSA
Because crocatrices do eat people. Especially small ones.

Tylen and Awl both shudder.

TYLEN
So where will you be during all of this?

NIVERSA
I'll be where Awl puts the egg down. We don't want any harm to come to that egg.

AWL
Right.
(beat)
Wait. I'm going to have to put the egg back, aren't I?

NIVERSA
Of course. After the coins and gems and nuggets are out of the cave and onto the cart--

AWL
The cart?

NIVERSA
There will be a cart in the woods, hitched to a horse. Stiggur will be there as well. The valuables go onto the cart.

TYLEN
So... once the cave is clear, the egg goes back, before mama crocatrix comes back.

AWL
How fast is she? The mother crocatrix.

NIVERSA
Not fast. Crocatrices are stealthy. Cautious. When they move, they prefer not to be seen or heard. It's how this one has been able to get in and out of the Roamen camp without being noticed. More than once.

AWL
I’m sure that makes Stiggur feel a little better.

NIVERSA
I would think so. I hope so. He really can’t be blamed for letting a crocatrix sneak into the camp.

TYLEN
And out. More than once.

EXT. GLADE - DAY

Another day, another glade in the woods. There is a cave, its façade reminiscent of the arch built in Niversa’s clearing. We cannot see into the cave.

PAN TO a bush near the cave opening, then PUSH IN to find Awl in position, crouched behind that bush, watching, waiting, remembering...

FLASHBACK - EXT. ROAD - MORNING

Niversa and the twins walk the road, headed toward the glade.

TYLEN
Why do we need to move the egg at all? In fact, why do we need to move the egg or the crocatrix? Why doesn’t Awl just move the valuables out... around the crocatrix and the egg?

NIVERSA
(to Awl)
Do you think you could do that?

AWL
Maybe... if I were looking at the coins and gemstones and whatever it is... but not without seeing them. I’d probably wind up hitting the crocatrix and the egg with all of the loot.

NIVERSA
(to Tylen)
That’s why. Your brother’s going to be moving the valuables blind, so to speak.

AWL
But I'll be able to see the egg?

NIVERSA
The egg is much closer to the entrance of the cave than the loot.

TYLEN
I wonder why that is.

NIVERSA
Eggs need sunlight. Pilfered treasure does not.

EXT. GLADE - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Picking up where we left Awl... we hear a SHRILL WHISTLE in the air. Awl looks to the sky. We TILT UP.

In the sky is Tylen, as a hawk, circling the glade.

Back on the ground, Awl inches his way from behind the bush toward the mouth of the cave... closer... closer...

When he's close enough, Awl sees the egg just inside the cave. It's the size, if not the shape, of the medium-sized rock he's practiced with. He focuses his attention on it... and then it moves.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

A baby crocatrix scampers on the ground, not bothering to camouflage itself. In the trees, a much larger crocatrix stalks the baby. We don't see the mother crocatrix, but we know that it's there, following Tylen, getting ever closer. A rustle of leaves here, the snap of a twig there, a glimpse of an eye...

Every few feet, Tylen-as-crocatrix looks over her shoulder.

EXT. GLADE - MOMENTS LATER

Back at the crocatrix lair, Awl stands at the entrance and peers into the dark. The egg is no longer there. Awl concentrates on treasures unseen... but none appear. He closes his eyes and tries again. No treasure.

Awl looks behind him, toward the woods, then back to the cave. He steps toward the cave entrance.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

A large fox runs through the last few feet of woods before entering the glade.

EXT. GLADE - CONTINUOUS

The large fox changes form and becomes Tylen. Tylen walks toward the cave entrance. She looks for Awl. When she doesn't see him, she looks confused.

She continues walking to the cave. When she reaches the mouth of the cave, she looks down. Just inside the cave, she sees a shallow indentation in the ground where the egg sat. Tylen looks carefully at the ground. Then Tylen peers into the cave.

Taking a deep breath, Tylen walks into the cave, out of our view...

After a silent moment, we hear the sound of a COLLISION, one person running into another person, knocking them both to the ground, inside the cave.

AWL (V.O.)
Tylen!

TYLEN (V.O.)
How do you know my name?!

AWL (V.O.)
I'm your brother. Tylen, get up.
And open your eyes.

Tylen and Awl exit the cave, reappearing in the glade. They dust themselves off.

TYLEN
We can't stay here.

AWL
We won't.

TYLEN
Where's the treasure?

AWL
There wasn't any.

TYLEN
None?

AWL
Not a coin. Not a gemstone.
(MORE)

AWL (CONT'D)
Not a fancy seashell. There was nothing in that cave besides the egg.

TYLEN
And where's the egg?
(beat)
And where's Niversa?

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Stiggur is asleep, on the ground, leaning against his cart, which is hitched to a horse, which is also asleep. The cart is empty.

TYLEN (V.O.)
Hey. Wake up!

Tylen and Awl come into view. Awl kicks Stiggur hard in the rear end.

STIGGUR
(coming to)
Whuzza?

TYLEN
That's just what we'd like to know.

Stiggur gets to his feet, dusts himself off, looks in the cart, and scowls.

STIGGUR
Where's the... everything?

TYLEN
Everything is missing. The loot, the egg, and Niversa.

STIGGUR
What do you mean? You didn't--?

AWL
It wasn't there. There was nothing belonging to your clan in the cave. Only the egg.

TYLEN
And the crocatrix.

STIGGUR
Where's the crocatrix now?

AWL
We don't know.

Just then, the trio hears a sound... from back in the glade. A WHIMPERING.

STIGGUR
What is that? It sounds like... whimpering. Like a dog when she's in pain. Only scarier.

AWL
(to Tylen)
Go look? We'll wait here. I have some more questions for Stiggur.

Tylen thinks for a moment, then turns into a bobcat and lopes off toward the cave. When she's gone:

AWL
You lied to us.

STIGGUR
About what?

AWL
About the coins and gemstones. There were no stolen valuables. That was a story to get us to help you and Niversa.

STIGGUR
No, it's true! Our small valuables have been going missing. And Niversa said she'd found them.

AWL
You're not lying to me now?

STIGGUR
I swear on my horse's grave.

AWL
Your horse is still alive.

STIGGUR
That's not my horse. I borrowed this one for the day.

AWL
You knew nothing of Niversa's plan, then?

STIGGUR
Well, I thought I knew as much as you did. She told us all the plan, after all.

AWL
No. She told us only as much as she needed us to know. I'm talking about her real plan.

STIGGUR
What was her real plan?

AWL
To steal the crocatrix egg. And your clan's valuables.

Stiggur gasps, and Tylen returns -- in her own form -- from the woods, out of breath.

TYLEN
She's back in her lair. The mother crocatrix. She's just... laying on the ground, her head near where the egg was. And she's crying. Big fat crocatrix tears.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

Tylen and Awl are in the cart behind Stiggur, who's riding the horse. They progress up a hill, and as they reach the top, they see smoke rising from the woods. Something is on fire.

EXT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

The group pulls up to Niversa's cottage, which is burning. Awl immediately disembarks from the cart and takes a position in the clearing facing the cottage. He looks at the blaze intently.

TYLEN (O.S.)
Are you going to--?

AWL
Yes, I am.

Awl plants his feet in the dirt, braces himself, and concentrates. Tylen and Stiggur watch from a distance.

After a moment, the flames separate from the cottage... then, once separated, dissipate and disappear into the air. The cottage smokes, but no longer burns.

Awl walks back to the cart, past a staring Stiggur, to Tylen.

TYLEN
So. It would have worked. Back home. You would have saved the school... if I hadn't stopped you.

AWL
I guess so.

TYLEN
I'm sorry I doubted you, then.

AWL
It's okay. You had every reason to doubt me. I had no reason to believe I could actually remove flames from a burning hut with my mind.

TYLEN
Sure, but you still would have. It doesn't matter whether you knew it or not.

AWL
I'm not sure that's true, though. Just because it would have worked doesn't mean it wasn't a dangerous idea.

TYLEN
Doesn't it?

INT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The cottage has cooled enough for Tylen, Awl, and Stiggur to look around inside. Tylen and Stiggur check the canisters on the shelves.

STIGGUR
What are we looking for?

AWL (O.S.)
Anything that might tell us where we'll find Niversa.

TYLEN
And the egg. You're sure she never mentioned her intention to steal it?

STIGGUR
Not to me.

TYLEN
And you have no idea why she would want to steal a crocatrix egg in the first place?

STIGGUR
I really think you're imagining that the Wise One spoke to me much more than she actually did.

AWL (O.S.)
Tylen. Come take a look at the floor.

Tylen turns around, away from the shelves.

TYLEN
Anywhere in particular, or all of it?

REVERSE ANGLE

Awl stands on the kitchen table, taking in the view from above. He points to a patch of wooden floor planks a different shade than the rest.

AWL
There. Is that...?

Tylen crouches and looks for a place to insert her fingers between boards but finds none.

TYLEN
A little help?

Before Awl can attempt to lift part of the floor, Stiggur steps in and uses the blade of his dagger to pry up what proves to be a panel concealing a hidey-hole under the cottage.

Tylen reaches in, feels around, then pulls out a single silver coin. She hands it to Stiggur.

Awl climbs down from the table.

AWL
That's why your clan's valuables weren't in the cave. Because they were here, right under our noses.

TYLEN
And feet.

Stiggur turns the coin over in his hand.

STIGGUR
Do you think the coin might be a clue? As to where Niversa's gone?

AWL
No. I think she just missed it when she cleared out.

TYLEN
I don't see anything else that might help us.

AWL
Then it's time for us to clear out, too.

STIGGUR
(to Tylen)
Are you going back home?

TYLEN
(to Awl)
Are we?

AWL
Home? No. Not yet. We trusted Niversa and she used our trust to help her steal a crocatrix egg. I want to know why. I assume you do, too.

TYLEN
Well, yeah.

STIGGUR
But if you don't know where she went, where are you going to go?

AWL
To start, we're going with you.

STIGGUR
With me?

AWL
Yes. We'll help you get that coin safely back to your clan.

EXT. ROAD - EVENING

Tylen, Awl, and Stiggur ride to the Roamen camp -- Stiggur on the horse, the twins in the cart.

AWL
(to Stiggur)
Will your elders speak with us?

STIGGUR
Why wouldn't they?

AWL
Because they're... elders.

TYLEN
And we're youngers. Elders don't always like talking to youngers. It reminds them how much elder they are.

Suddenly, the bandit from weeks earlier appears from behind a tree and accosts them. The horse and cart come to a halt.

BANDIT
Hand over anything and everything of value in your possession, if you please!

TYLEN
Wait a second. Don't we know you?

The bandit peers at Tylen.

BANDIT
Oh ho! We <u>have</u> met before! I almost stole your... cloak was it?

TYLEN
Blanket.

BANDIT
Blanket!

TYLEN
You don't still need one, do you? I'm afraid we don't even have a blanket this time.

AWL
Tylen? Who is... this person?

Tylen looks at Awl, then:

TYLEN
Oh, that's right. You were asleep last time. I tried to trade you for safe passage. This is...

Now Tylen looks to the Bandit for help.

BANDIT
I’m called Robin.

AWL
Is that your real name? Or do people call you that because you rob them?

ROBIN (BANDIT)
It’s my real name. My mother loved birds.

TYLEN
Speaking of robbing, though. Do you have any idea, as a professional thief, why someone would steal a crocatrix egg?

ROBIN
Breakfast? For a month? And the shell could be displayed as a decorative accent in the home.
(beat)
Or, for a magikal or mystikal ritual? If you believe in those sorts of things.

AWL
Stiggur. Put your dagger away and give this young man your clan’s last coin, please. He just earned it.

EXT. GLADE - ROAMEN CAMP - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Roamen men, women, children, and domesticated animals do their various things in a glade.

INT. ROAMEN CAMP - ELDERS TENT

The twins sit on blankets facing three elders on cushions. EAHTA (female, ancient), GARRIDAN (old, pleasant), and FINNEGUS (old, cranky). Stiggur stands near the entrance.

GARRIDAN
So the valuables taken from us were not in the cave?

AWL
That’s correct. They had already been removed, if they’d ever been there in the first place.

GARRIDAN
What do you mean?

AWL
I've been thinking about it. It's possible that the crocatrix did not steal your coins, stones, and nuggets.

GARRIDAN
But someone stole them.

FINNEGUS
Was it you, then?

TYLEN
Us? How would we have done that?

FINNEGUS
How did you do it?

TYLEN
We didn't!

FINNEGUS
Then who did?

AWL
Niversa. Possibly. We don't know, but it really doesn't matter at this point, does it? Either Niversa stole your valuables from you, or she stole them from the crocatrix who had stolen them from you. And she stole the crocatrix's egg. If we can find her, Niversa--

FINNEGUS
Eahta. What can you see?

All look to the elder woman. Eahta closes her eyes... then slowly opens them.

EAHTA
(sagely)
Ask again later.

GARRIDAN
It is later, Eahta. Now is later.

EAHTA
Is it? Then be quiet and let me look.

Eahta closes her eyes again. The rest of them watch her. After a short while, she opens her eyes once more.

EAHTA
What was the question?

GARRIDAN
Never mind.

AWL
Wait. Eahta can see the future?

FINNEGUS
Of course not. What a ridiculous notion. If one of us could see the future, this would be the wealthiest Roamen clan of all time. We'd bet on everything and always win!

AWL
Then...?

GARRIDAN
Eahta can see the past.

TYLEN
The past? She can see <u>the past</u>? Everyone can see the past! That's just called "remembering." <u>I</u> can see the past!

GARRIDAN
Not as Eahta can. Eahta can see the past as if it were the present, happening right before her eyes. Sometimes.

TYLEN
Sometimes?

GARRIDAN
Her ability is... inconsistent.

FINNEGUS
And getting worse.

AWL
Can she see just her own past, or...?

GARRIDAN
She can see any past that she can see.

TYLEN
(unimpressed)
When she can see it. Which isn't always.

AWL
That's why she says to "ask again later," isn't it? Because it needs to be later.

GARRIDAN
Precisely.

FINNEGUS
But inconsistently. And more so all the time.

EXT. GLADE - ROAMEN CAMP - OUTSIDE ELDERS' TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Tylen and Awl confer.

TYLEN
You're sure you don't want to go home? We don't have to go looking for Niversa, you know. We don't owe anyone anything. We didn't take the Roamens' valuables, and we might not even have helped Niversa take them, depending on when she did it. All we can be sure we did was help her steal the egg. And, well, I hate to see a sad mother crocatrix as much as anyone, but maybe we owe it to ourselves to just go back to Grasshaven and be normal kids. Or, I guess, just kids. For a few more years.

AWL
Three.

TYLEN
(confused)
Three what?

AWL
Three more years. When we turn sixteen, we'll be expected to work in Grasshaven, for the good of Grasshaven.

TYLEN
Ah. I see. But I think your math is off. I know you're much smarter than you used to be, but if we're twelve now--

AWL
We aren't. Sometime since we left home a few months back, we turned thirteen.

TYLEN
We missed a birthday? And our parents didn't even realize it? I mean, they visited us. Are you sure?

AWL
I'm almost positive. I'm sorry, Tylen.

TYLEN
Eh. Twelve, thirteen, what's the difference? But my point remains: We don't have to hunt for Niversa. The Roamens can chase her if they want, if they want their coins and whatever back, if Niversa even still has them.

AWL
Tylen, we have to see this through. Yes, Niversa used us. No, we're not responsible. But don't you want to know what it's all about? And don't you want to know that you did whatever you could to put things right again?

A moment, then:

TYLEN
(sighing)
I do.
(earnestly)
So I guess this is what it means to be thirteen.

EXT. GLADE - ROAMEN CAMP - LATER

Tylen and Awl stand together, waiting. Stiggur arrives with three other Roamens: TERRINE (female, wiry), WYRE (male, muscular), and CLEFF (male, gangly).

STIGGUR
Tylen, Awl... these are the search party volunteers.

Stiggur gestures for the new three to introduce themselves.

TERRINE
Terrine. Fifth-generation spoonmaker.

WYRE
Wyre. Humble tumbler.

CLEFF
Cleff. Minstrel and balladeer.

AWL
(aside to Stiggur)
Doesn't your clan have anyone... useful? A pathfinder? Or someone who can tell us what berries we can and can't eat?

STIGGUR
Those guys are busy today. The clan is on the move again.

TYLEN
What about fighters?

STIGGUR
We're a peaceful people. We use our words to solve conflicts.

AWL
(sighing)
Fine. A spoonmaker, a musician, and an acrobat it is.

Awl turns to address the newcomers when Eahta arrives and approaches.

EAHTA
I'd like to join your expedition.

Tylen and Awl look to Stiggur. Stiggur shrugs, then:

STIGGUR
Elder Eahta, we are about to undertake a journey that might prove long and dangerous--

WYRE
Really? Dangerous?

AWL
Yes. Maybe.

STIGGUR
We will be traveling far and possibly wide, searching for a treacherous woman who raided the lair of a crocatrix. We might be away from the clan for days or weeks, maybe months.

TERRINE
Oh, I don't think I can be away for months. Maybe not even weeks. There are a lot of spoons that need mending.

AWL
Mending?

TERRINE
Straightening, at least. And sometimes retempering. Not to mention burnishing.

STIGGUR
We have no idea where this duplicitous woman has gone, but we can expect to find only trouble when we get there. This journey is not for the weak.

AWL
Or the fearful.

TYLEN
Or the slow.

TERRINE
I'm out. I'm very sorry.

WYRE
Me, too. I'm kind of slow and a little bit fearful.

Terrine walks back toward the camp. Wyre tumbles after her. Eahta stays put.

EAHTA
(insistent)
I'm going with you.

AWL
Fine. Let's just get moving.

STIGGUR
Which way?

AWL
What?

STIGGUR
Which way should we go?

AWL
I have no idea! That's why I suggested we bring a pathfinder. Or a wayfarer, at least.

EAHTA
Follow me. Before I change my mind. Or die of old age.

EXT. WOODS - MORNING

The group -- now comprising five -- exits the woods onto a road... when Robin appears again.

ROBIN
Ho, there! Your valuables, if you please.

STIGGUR
Wow. You're furtive!

ROBIN
I have to be.

EAHTA
Now who is this?

TYLEN
This is Robin. He's a thief. He accosts us from time to time. This is the third time, in fact.

AWL
Robin, it's nice to see you again, but we really need to make some progress.

ROBIN
Still looking for the evil woman who took the crocatrix egg?

STIGGUR
And our clan's treasure.

AWL
Yes. Although we've hardly begun our hunt.

ROBIN
Well, then I won't keep you. You've been plenty generous to me, and I am grateful. Fare thee well.

STIGGUR
Did you spend all of that coin in one place?

ROBIN
(laughing)
Actually, I still have it.

Robin produces the coin in question from a pocket and jauntily flips it with his thumb into the air. Eahta thrusts out a scrawny arm and snatches it. Everyone else looks at her, amazed by her dexterity.

Eahta herself has now gone into a kind of trance, her bony fingers closed around the coin. Her eyes dart to and fro, as if she is dreaming while awake.

AWL
Eahta?

STIGGUR
Eahta Boll?

TYLEN
Her second name is "Boll"?

CLEFF
We usually just call her "Magik Eahta." Because of her magikal ability.

ROBIN
So, "Magik Eahta Boll"?

Eahta snaps out of her half-conscious state and speaks:

EAHTA
This coin has a past. It was stolen from us.

ROBIN
(quickly)
Not by me, though. I earned it.

EAHTA
(ignoring Robin)
This coin spent much time in darkness.

TYLEN
In the crocatrix's lair.

AWL
Or under Niversa's cottage.

EAHTA
Take me there.

STIGGUR
Where? The cottage or the cave?

EAHTA
Yes.

ROBIN
Mind if I tag along? I like to go where the money is.

EXT. NIVERSA'S COTTAGE - LATER

The cottage is as the twins and Stiggur left it, charred but no longer smoking. Tylen, Awl, and Robin stand off to one side of the clearing.

AWL
It really feels like we're going in circles. Maybe we <u>should</u> have just gone home to Grasshaven.

Eahta, Stiggur, and Cleff step out of Niversa's cottage.

EAHTA
Come. Come.

Everyone meets in the clearing.

EAHTA (CONT'D)
This house has much to tell.

ROBIN
If the walls could talk. Right?

EAHTA
(witheringly)
We don't need them to talk. The past itself speaks to me. Sort of.

AWL
What did you learn?

Eahta points to Awl.

EAHTA
You. You were here.

AWL
(unimpressed)
Yes. I was here. For several months until just... yesterday. I could have told you that. I think we did tell you that.

EAHTA
(undeterred)
I saw you. While your sister slept, you scratched yourself in many places. All the places.

Stiggur, Cleff, and Robin snicker. Eahta wheels and points at Tylen.

EAHTA (CONT'D)
And you! While you slept, many a night, you... you walked outside, out here... and turned into a large squirrel. And ate many acorns.

TYLEN
Did I really?

AWL
Did you see Niversa? The woman who lived here? The woman who stole your clan's treasures and tricked my squir-- my sister and me into helping her steal a crocatrix egg?

Eahta stares for a long, uncomfortable moment at Awl. Then:

EAHTA
I did.

AWL
And? Did you see or hear anything that might tell us why she did what she did? Or where she might be now?

EAHTA
I saw her speaking with a man.
(MORE)

EAHTA (CONT'D)
He was a man of average height, with dark hair and dark eyes.

STIGGUR
Was it me? Was I the man you saw?

TYLEN
What? Why would it be you?

STIGGUR
I'm a man of average height. I have dark hair and dark eyes. And I was here once, when I came to ask for Niversa's help.

AWL
(sighing)
Don't you think Eahta would have recognized you, then?

STIGGUR
Yes. But she didn't say it <u>wasn't</u> me. She just said it was a man.

EAHTA
It was not you.

CLEFF
What was the man wearing?

EAHTA
He wore a tunic.

STIGGUR
I wear a tunic!

AWL
It's not you, Stiggur!

EAHTA
There was a horse.

STIGGUR
(mumbling)
I had a horse. I mean, I had to borrow it, but still.

Awl stomps off in a huff.

ROBIN
(to Tylen)
Where's he going?

TYLEN
He probably needs to clear his head.
(beat)
He never used to. He used to be an idiot, you know. When you first met him -- well, he was asleep, but he was stupid. Really very little going on up there.

Tylen taps her own head.

TYLEN (CONT'D)
It came with his power.

ROBIN
What's his power?

TYLEN
Awl can move things with his mind. Niversa taught him how to do it without it making him dumb afterward.

ROBIN
Move things with his mind? That would be the greatest thing for a thief! I could lift a purse without lifting a finger!

TYLEN
(coyly)
I have my own ability.

ROBIN
Oh? What's yours?

Tylen turns herself the cutest Tylen-sized bear.

ROBIN
Trousers! You're a--!

Tylen returns to her own form.

TYLEN
A guiser.

ROBIN
That... that's something else. You were something else. You can be... different things.

TYLEN
A lot of them, yes.

ROBIN
I guess changing shape could be useful to a thief, too. But I think I'd still rather be able to move things with my mind.
(beat)
Maybe we should go find your brother. His head must be clear by now.

EXT. WOODS - GLADE

Awl takes his last stomping steps, then just walks into the glade. He is beginning to calm down... when he hears something. A LOUD WHIMPERING. Awl stops walking. Standing still, he looks around. He recognizes this place, this glade. That cave.

ROBIN (V.O.)
Awl!

STIGGUR (V.O.)
Awl!

TYLEN (V.O.)
ALWDEN WHEATKEEPER!

Awl hears the others calling him. He remains still and winces. He is watching the cave opening.

AWL'S POV

On the ground lies the crocatrix, her head just inside the mouth of the cave, sobbing, the depression in the dirt left by the missing egg filled to overflowing with her tears.

EXT. WOODS - GLADE - MOMENTS LATER

At the edge of the glade, the search party emerges from the woods, Tylen first. She walks right into Awl, standing still, facing the cave. Even when Tylen makes contact, Awl doesn't move.

TYLEN
Hey!

AWL
Shh.

TYLEN
What?

AWL
Look. And shh.

Tylen looks where Awl is looking. At the crocatrix. Their crocatrix. Then Tylen turns around swiftly and tells the others to be quiet as they enter the glade.

STIGGUR
(yelling)
Why?

TYLEN
(hissing)
Quieter!

The whole group reunites in the glade and considers the sobbing crocatrix.

AWL
This is heartbreaking.

Then, as the others watch, Awl finally walks, slowly but directly to the mouth of the cave.

EAHTA
(to Tylen)
Isn’t that your brother?

TYLEN
Yes.

EAHTA
That’s too bad.

CLOSE ON AWL

Awl approaches the crocatrix gingerly.

AWL
(over his shoulder)
What do we have to eat?

STIGGUR (O.S.)
(yelling back)
Nothing!

Awl grimaces.

STIGGUR (O.S) (CONT’D)
Are you hungry?

AWL
It’s not for me. It’s for her.

ROBIN (V.O.)
I’ll catch something.

In a moment, the bandit is at Awl side, holding out a small dead rodent on the bandit's knife.

AWL
Uh, thanks.

ROBIN
No problem.
(re: the crocatrix)
Friend of yours?

AWL
Not exactly. But I owe it to her to try to help her.

The others in the search party join Awl and Robin at the cave. Stiggur keeps his distance. Cleff stays behind Eahta.

TYLEN
(to Awl)
Talk to her.

Awl looks at Tylen, then turns back to the crocatrix.

AWL
Hello.

TYLEN
Introduce yourself.

AWL
My name is Awl. Short for Awlden. Wheatkeeper. I'm from Grasshaven. Have you ever been?

TYLEN
Skip the small talk. Tell her why we're here.

AWL
(to Tylen)
Do you want to do this?

TYLEN
Sure.
(to the crocatrix)
Hi. I'm Tylen. This is Robin, Eahta, Stiggur, and Cleff. You've already met my brother, Awl. We want to help recover your stolen egg.

At the word egg, the crocatrix twitches.

TYLEN (CONT'D)
Awl and I... ah, might have helped a bad woman named Niversa steal your egg... but we're very sorry.

AWL
Very sorry.

TYLEN
So if you'll just be a little patient, we'll do our best to bring your egg back to you. Give us a few days. Maybe a week.

The crocatrix moves. She turns her head away from the humans.

ROBIN
(to Cleff)
You. You're a singer?

CLEFF
I am.

ROBIN
Maybe a song will cheer her up. Do you know anything mirthful?

CLEFF
Mirthful?

ROBIN
Sure! Give her a mirthful mouthful!

CLEFF
I... Let me just...
(singing, improvising to the tune of Greensleeves)
Alas great lizard you feel so down / You've lost your egg so suddenly / But we shall travel all around / And search for your offspring urgently

ROBIN
That's your idea of mirthful?

The crocatrix lifts her head, turning to give the humans her attention.

TYLEN
Um...

STIGGUR
Should we...?

AWL
No. Wait. Cleff, sing more.

CLEFF
About what?

AWL
Tell her... ask her if she'll come with us.

EVERYONE ELSE
What?

AWL
She's coming with us. It's her egg. We're looking for Niversa to put things right, but no one has more of a right to find Niversa than this... majestic creature.
(beat)
Besides, she needs something to do. She needs a reason to get up and get out of her cave. She needs to be a part of this mission, this hunt, this quest. And we need her.

STIGGUR
For what?

AWL
To ride on. If she'll let us. We're very, very slow, you might have noticed. But this... she can carry us, and quickly. At the very least, she can carry some of us. Eahta, most importantly. And finally, even though we're obviously a crack team of trackers, who better to sniff out a crocatrix egg than its own mother? So, Cleff, if you wouldn't mind, please ask her if she will join us.

Cleff looks around at the others. The other nod, though tentatively.

CLEFF
(singing)
Alas green monster you are so blue / Miserable in your majesty / If you would join us as we move on / We'd love to have your company

The crocatrix now gets to her feet, her head in the air above the humans' heads. She looks from human to human, sizing them up. Then she strides out of her cave, lowers her head to the group, and gestures with her snout as if to say, "Let's go."

EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

All six humans ride on the crocatrix's back as the creature trots down the road.

STIGGUR
Well, I guess it's good we didn't bring the spoonmaker.

CLEFF
(laughing)
Or the acrobat.

EAHTA
I still don't know why we brought the old lady.

TYLEN
You're sure this won't hurt her?

ROBIN
Who are you asking?

TYLEN
I don't know. Anybody.

STIGGUR
She's fine. She probably doesn't mind us any more than a horse minds its rider.

TYLEN
Well, we should at least give her a name, then. We can't keep calling her "the crocatrix."

STIGGUR
"Croc."

CLEFF
Too obvious. "Trix?" Or "Trixy?"

AWL
No. She deserves a dignified name.

CLEFF
(teasing)
A majestic name?

TYLEN
Eahta, what do you think?

EAHTA
About what?

TYLEN
About a name for our crocatrix friend.

EAHTA
(thinking)
Signs...
(beat)
...point to “Herb.”

ROBIN
Signs point to herb?

EAHTA
(with a hard H)
Herb.

STIGGUR
As a name for the beast?

EAHTA
Why not? My husband’s name was Herb.

CLEFF
How about a specific herb? Like... fennel. Fennel the Crocatrix.

STIGGUR
Licorice the Crocatrix.

The others groan.

EAHTA
(with a long A)
Basil.

The others consider this, silently... then:

AWL
Basil.

TYLEN
Basil.

Basil belches her approval. Awl wrinkles his nose.

AWL
What’s that?

TYLEN
Basil just belched.

STIGGUR
No, what you're smelling, children, is the sea. More specifically, the fish.

Tylen looks in every direction but sees only land.

TYLEN
Where is it?

ROBIN
Still a ways off.

TYLEN
But we can smell it already?

EAHTA
(sagely)
There are many fish in the sea.

TYLEN
How many?

EAHTA
Plenty.

EXT. SEASIDE VILLAGE - LATE MORNING

Arriving at a seaside village and dismounting, the group finds the place abandoned. There are the usual buildings -- houses, barns, sheds -- and the other usual things, but no people or common animals. Some uncommon animals are roaming around, but they keep their distance, from Basil in particular.

STIGGUR
(calling out)
Hallo! Is anyone home?

CLEFF
(sing-songy)
Yoo-hoo.

EAHTA
Quiet, you two. You're scaring away all the no people.

EXT. SEASIDE VILLAGE - SHORELINE - MOMENTS LATER

The group has advanced from the road side of the seaside village to the sea side. Tylen and Awl run to the shore, fascinated. Robin runs to the water's edge with them. Tylen immediately plucks a large seashell from the sand.

ROBIN
(to Tylen)
Put it to your ear.

TYLEN
What? Why?

ROBIN
Just do it.

Tylen puts the shell to her ear.

ROBIN
Do you hear the ocean?

TYLEN
No.

ROBIN
That one must be broken. Sorry.

TYLEN
And now I have sand in my ear.

ROBIN
Don't wash it out with seawater.
That'll only make it worse.

Awl stands at the water's edge, looking out into the distance.

AWL
Do you guys see that?

ROBIN
I do.

TYLEN
What is it?

ROBIN
It's an island. I think.

EXT. SEASIDE VILLAGE - BEACH - MOMENTS LATER

The adults and Basil join the kids on the beach.

STIGGUR
So where are we, exactly? And why is it deserted?

AWL
Eahta?

EAHTA
Am I supposed to know?

CLEFF
Not necessarily. But maybe you could...

EAHTA
(muttering)
Oh, sure. Make the oldest person do all the hard work.

TYLEN
Is it difficult? Seeing the past, I mean.

EAHTA
Not really. It’s a lot like falling asleep. In fact, sometimes I do, if the past isn’t interesting.

The others watch as Eahta unfocuses her eyes and looks back in time. At the same time, Awl paces at the water’s edge, trying to put his finger on something...

AWL
(whispering)
Boats.

TYLEN
(also whispering)
What about them?

AWL
There are no boats here. I’ve never been to a seaside village before, but shouldn’t there be boats?

ROBIN
(not whispering)
Hey, yeah.

TYLEN
Shh.

AWL
(to Robin)
Come over here.

Everyone but Eahta gathers by the water. Eahta stays put and sways.

AWL (CONT'D)
(at regular volume)
No people. No animals. And no boats.

CLEFF
It's very strange.

STIGGUR
Maybe a plague?

CLEFF
Would a plague wipe out the boats?

STIGGUR
Probably not.

ROBIN
My guess is that everyone who lived here ran off. And then the animals ate the boats.

TYLEN
Maybe the people left and took the animals. In the boats.

ROBIN
Why would they take the boats? Boats are no good on the road.

AWL
I think Tylen's suggesting that the people of the village -- and the animals -- left the village <u>in</u> the boats. On the water.

STIGGUR
To go where?

Awl points to the island on the sea. As the humans all turn to face the sea and look at the island, Basil crawls into the water and disappears under the surface.

ROBIN
Now where's <u>she</u> going?

CLEFF
(singing)
Alas, great Basil--

Stiggur stops Cleff with a hand on the singer's arm.

STIGGUR
She can't hear you down there.
(muttering)
Lucky beast.

AWL
She's headed to the island.

ROBIN
Should we follow her?

AWL
We can't. No boats.

TYLEN
I don't need a boat.

Tylen turns into a large albatross and takes to the air.

STIGGUR
I guess it's just the men now.
(beat)
You guys want to throw rocks at the water while we wait?

EXT. SEASIDE VILLAGE - BEACH - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON EAHTA

EAHTA
(dramatically)
The people left... when the beast arrived.

PULL OUT to reveal that Eahta is alone.

EAHTA
(muttering)
I'm talking to myself. Just leave the old lady standing all alone. In a trance. She'll be fine. We'll all be fine. Nothing terrible could happen here. Again.

Eahta walks toward the shoreline, where the males are. When she reaches them:

EAHTA (CONT'D)
What are you all staring at?

The males turn, surprised, to find Eahta among them.

STIGGUR
There's an island, in the distance. Basil and Tylen went there.

EAHTA
Which one is the girl, again?

AWL
Tylen.

EAHTA
And which one are you?

AWL
I'm Awl.
(beat)
Did you see anything about this place? What happened here?

EAHTA
This place is called Shorelief. It was home to hundreds. Mostly fishers, fishmongers, fish-wives, and fish hawks. But also some networkers, hookwrights, and spear-sharpeners.

STIGGUR
And? Where are these hundreds now?

EAHTA
Gone. Some time ago, this village was visited by a...

AWL
A...?

EAHTA
An animal. A beast. A creature. I'm not sure exactly what kind, but it was large. And hungry.

CLEFF
The beast ate the entire village?

EAHTA
What? No. It ate all the fish. All the fish in the village.
(MORE)

EAHTA (CONT'D)
The people ran for their lives. Or, really, rowed for their lives.

AWL
In their boats. That's why there are no boats here.

ROBIN
You noticed that too?

STIGGUR
Where is the beast now?

EAHTA
How should I know? I can't see the present.

AWL
Well, we know where our creature is. And my sister. So I think we should go there.

EAHTA
Where?

Awl points again.

AWL
The island.

EAHTA
And how do we get there?

ROBIN
We could build a boat.
(beat)
Could we build a boat?

EAHTA
Not one that would hold all five of us. Not for very long, anyway.

AWL
We don't need a boat. At least, not much of one. We just need a... platform. Something just large enough for us all to sit on, that I could move from here to there.

STIGGUR
That's right! You've got... that thing!

AWL
Yes, I do. I have that thing.

ROBIN
The word you want is raft.

EXT. SEASIDE VILLAGE - BEACH - LATER

Eahta sits in the sand. Awl, Stiggur, Cleff, and Robin return and pile up planks of wood and coils of heavy rope.

AWL
Just line them up.

CLEFF
End to end?

STIGGUR
How would that work?

CLEFF
I don't know. I'm not a raftwright.

AWL
Side by side. Make a rectangle.

EXT. SEASIDE VILLAGE - BEACH - LATER

The raft is built, planks fastened together with rope. The males are at the shore getting ready to launch.

STIGGUR
(calling to Eahta)
Are you coming, Elder?

EAHTA (O.S.)
I'm counting the sand. Almost finished.

Eahta joins them, and they all get on the raft.

AWL
And we're off...

Awl concentrates and the raft heads out on the sea of calm, blue water.

EXT. SEA - LATER

The raft is far enough from shore that the water is too deep to stand in. This is when the ropes securing the boards begin to come undone. Cleff notices, scrambles to reach for an escaping board, loses his balance and falls overboard.

CLEFF
Help! I can't swim!

ROBIN
Tread water!

CLEFF
How?!

ROBIN
Move your legs like you're riding a pedal cycle!

CLEFF
What's that?!

ROBIN
Awl?

Awl stops using his mind to move the raft and uses it instead to lift Cleff from the water. Before he can replace Cleff on the raft, the raft comes apart entirely. The ropes unravel and float away, the planks separate, and the whole group drops into the sea.

STIGGUR, EAHTA, ROBIN, CLEFF
Help! I can't swim!

Awl lifts all of them, himself included, out of the water and holds them there, mid-air.

AWL
(groaning with effort)
I can't keep this -- us -- up.
(beat)
I'm going to lower each of you onto one plank. Hold on to it to stay afloat.

Awl lowers Stiggur first, then Cleff, Robin, Eahta, and finally himself. When they are all in the water again, each gripping a plank of wood, Awl draws everyone back together.

AWL (CONT'D)
Try to stay here. Use one hand to hold your neighbor if you need to.
(beat)
I need to think.

EXT. SEA - MOMENTS LATER

AWL
I’m going to build us a bridge.

CLEFF
A bridge?

AWL
Well, maybe not quite. A path.

CLEFF
How?

AWL
I can either explain it, or I can get started. And I think I should get started, because something large just swam past my leg.

ROBIN
Same here. Are there sharks in this sea?

CLEFF
Sea shark is actually my favorite key to sing in.

STIGGUR
(to Cleff)
Not now. Or we’re all going to die.

AWL
Listen. I’m going to lift you all into the air one more time, then line up the boards on the water like a raft.

ROBIN
But the rope--

AWL
I’m not making a new raft. I’m making a floor. Something for us to stand on. Then walk on.

STIGGUR
Walk on?

AWL
Yes. We’re going to walk on the boards toward the island.

CLEFF
But there are only six boards. Right? Just six?

AWL
That's right. One more than there are of us. So we're each going to step from one board to the next, in a single file.

STIGGUR
But...

ROBIN
There is no next board, Awl. There are only six boards.

AWL
I'm going to move the board in the back to the front. So there will always be a next board. Whoever's in front -- and I suggest it be you, Robin -- will step from the front board to the back board when it becomes the new front board. Everybody will need to step forward at the same time, from one board to another. This will work.

EAHTA
Will it?

AWL
It <u>can</u> work. If we move quickly, but also carefully. And if nobody falls into the water again, because I don't think I can afford to be distracted.

For a moment, no one says anything but each holds their board a bit tighter.

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - BEACH - AFTERNOON

The party has made it across the sea, landing on the beach of the island. As the planks of wood drift away on the water, Stiggur carries an exhausted and unconscious Awl onto the sand, to where Eahta, Cleff, and Robin already are, shaking water from their ears and other holes.

Stiggur gently places Awl on the sand under a tree that provides shade. Eahta sits beside the boy, putting his head in her lap.

EAHTA
(to Stiggur)
You three go on. I'll stay here and watch over the boy. He'll be all right.

STIGGUR
Will you be all right? He can't protect you if anything--

EAHTA
I don't think we'll be disturbed here. But don't take your time. Go and find everything. Everyone. Then come back as soon as you can.

Stiggur walks off to join Cleff and Robin. Eahta strokes Awl's forehead as he sleeps.

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - INTERIOR - LATER

Stiggur, Cleff, and Robin have moved in from the beach but are now stopped.

CLEFF
Which way do we go?

STIGGUR
The smart thing to do would be to walk in a spiral -- around the outside of the island at first -- moving inward as we go in a tightening curve, in order to cover the most area in the most effective way.

ROBIN
Or we could walk directly toward the interior. Since that's where anyone or anything is most likely to be.

CLEFF
He makes a point.

Cleff and Robin start walking again.

STIGGUR
(muttering)
Fine.

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - BEACH

Eahta still sits under the tree, Awl's head in her lap. She considers him, then places her fingertips gently on his scalp, unfocuses her eyes, and nearly falls over when Awl springs awake suddenly and violently.

AWL
Ow!

EAHTA
I barely touched you!

Awl, now awake, clutches his head in his own hands, eyes squeezed shut, tears streaming down his cheeks.

Eahta grabs Awl, pulls him back into her lap, holds him down with one aged but firm arm, and places the fingertips of her other hand on his forehead. After a moment, Awl relaxes, even smiles, his eyes still closed.

EAHTA
You and your sister are very special.
(beat)
My daughter loved animals. She played with every animal she came upon in our travels -- every animal that would suffer to be played with. She was always very kind to them. She would never hurt one. Sometimes, I thought she wanted to <u>be</u> an animal--

Awl stirs in Eahta's lap, then settles himself again.

EAHTA (CONT'D)
My son had a strong mind. He left us to find his fortune many years ago. I haven't seen him in a long time, although...
(beat)
...I thought I saw him just recently. Or someone who might have been him. But it was in a memory.
(beat)
Only, it wasn't <u>my</u> memory. Does that make any sense, boy?

Awl farts.

EAHTA
No, I suppose it makes no sense at all.

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - INTERIOR - CLEARING

Stiggur, Cleff, and Robin enter a clearing and stop to rest. While they take a look around, they hear a voice and look up to see a man in a dark cloak, his face shrouded. This man is Phenomenik, but they can't see that.

PHENOMENIK
Who are you? And what business do you have here? And how did you even get here?

Phenomenik produces his twig and levels it at the other men.

PHENOMENIK (CONT'D)
Speak up!

Stiggur, Cleff, and Robin all speak at once:

STIGGUR
We're two Roamens and a bandit.

CLEFF
We're looking for a girl, a beast, an egg, and some treasure.

ROBIN
You wouldn't believe us if we told you.

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - VISITOR'S CENTER

A wooden structure in a glade, larger than Niversa's house was. Niversa is outside the structure when Phenomenik arrives with Stiggur, Cleff, and Robin. Phenomenik directs them from behind, with his twig. He has lowered his cloak.

NIVERSA
(surprised)
Stiggur.

STIGGUR
Niversa.

They glare at each other for a moment, then:

CLEFF
I'm Cleff. And this is Robin.

NIVERSA
(to Cleff)
You're also Roamen, aren't you?

CLEFF
Yes.

ROBIN
I'm not. I'm a bandit.

STIGGUR
So is she.

NIVERSA
Not at all, Stiggur.

STIGGUR
You stole our valuables! And a crocatrix egg.

NIVERSA
Well, that is true. I just wouldn't have called myself a bandit.

ROBIN
What, then?

NIVERSA
My brother and I have a legitimate business. We run a sort of live bestiary.

CLEFF
A what?

PHENOMENIK
A bestiary is a descriptive or anecdotal treatise on various kinds of creatures.

ROBIN
A what?

NIVERSA
It's a book about animals. The more interesting ones, usually.
(now monologuing)
But even the pictures in a bestiary are a far cry from the real things. Many times, the creatures drawn don't look anything like the actual animals.
(MORE)

NIVERSA (CONT'D)
And they certainly don't behave like them.
(beat)
So what we did, Phenomenik and I, was gather as many of the fascinating creatures depicted in his bound bestiary as we could, to put them on display in a single collection, for the enjoyment of those willing to pay for an experience entirely like no other in the world.

CLEFF
Where?

NIVERSA
Where what?

CLEFF
Where is this... what did you call it? Live bestiary?

PHENOMENIK
Yes. But we've been playing with shortening that to "liviary."

ROBIN
Lie-very?

PHENOMENIK
(enunciating)
Lie-vee-eh-ree.

STIGGUR
Lie-vuh-reh-ree.

PHENOMENIK
(flustered)
Not quite. But anyway we're still experimenting with the name.

CLEFF
The creatures you gathered. Where are they all? Where can your... customers see them?

NIVERSA
(amused)
Right here!

ROBIN
Here? On Minifen?

PHENOMENIK
How do you know the name of this island?

ROBIN
Eahta told us.

NIVERSA
Eahta? Is she here? On Minifen?

STIGGUR
(too quickly)
No.

NIVERSA
Well, then, would you like to see the beasts?

CLEFF
I don't think we can afford to.

NIVERSA
(laughing)
We do usually charge quite a lot, but we'll make an exception in this case. Since you're already here. Come on.

Niversa leads the group to the edge of the glade, toward the woods. Phenomenik brings up the rear.

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - INTERIOR - LIVIARY

Niversa leads the visitors on a tour of the beasts in sturdy cages made of tree branches and rope, Phenomenik trailing.

NIVERSA
And over here you'll see the only slugbear on this continent.

Stiggur looks where Niversa points.

ROBIN
(aside, to Cleff)
What's a continent?

NIVERSA
Up next: our unigriff and hippocorn. Separated at birth, but reunited at last!

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - VISITOR'S CENTER - LATER

The tour group returns to where it began. Waiting for them outside the visitor's center is Awl. He keeps his distance.

EVERYONE BUT AWL
Awl!?

Everyone looks at everyone else, all surprised and confused. Phenomenik reaches for his wand-twig.

AWL
(calling)
Don't! And don't come any closer.

Phenomenik takes his empty hand from inside his cloak again.

AWL (CONT'D)
Send the others over here!

Phenomenik and Niversa trade glances, then:

NIVERSA
Pick two!

AWL
The watchman and the musician!

Stiggur and Cleff look to Niversa; she nods to them. They walk across the glade toward Awl.

NIVERSA
(to Robin)
I'm sure it's nothing personal.

PHENOMENIK
(calling to Awl)
What do you want? Besides your friends.

AWL
We want the egg. And the Roamen valuables.

PHENOMENIK
No!

AWL
Yes! That's what we want!

PHENOMENIK
I mean you can't have those!

AWL
Fine. Then I'll open all the cages!

Phenomenik doesn't respond right away. He steps aside to confer with Niversa.

Robin turns to run toward his friends, but Awl gestures for him to stay where he is.

STIGGUR
(to Awl)
How did you know about the cages?

AWL
I'll tell you later.

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - VISITOR'S CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Phenomenik and Niversa are still conferring, with their backs to Robin. Robin picks Phenomenik's robe pocket for his wand.

ROBIN
Got it!

Robin bolts for the other end of the glade, to join his friends. When he reaches them, he offers the wand to Awl. Stiggur offers to take it instead. Robin gives the wand to Stiggur, who tucks it into his belt.

PHENOMENIK (O.S.)
Give it back.

Awl and company look up to see Niversa and Phenomenik standing much closer to them now. Phenomenik's hand is out.

AWL
No. But we'll trade you your wand for the egg and what you took from the Roamens. Or else I open the cages.

Awl gestures with his arms suggestively.

NIVERSA
You want to open the cages? Here! Use these!

Niversa produces a set of heavy iron keys on a heavy iron ring, then tosses them at Awl. They hit him square in the forehead.

AWL
(in Tylen's voice)
Ow!

Then "Awl" shifts shape into that of his sister.

STIGGUR, CLEFF, AND ROBIN
Ohhh.

When the four turns their attention back to Phenomenik and Niversa, they see that Phenomenik has his wand again and is pointing it at them. Niversa picks up her keys from the ground.

NIVERSA
As luck would have it, we have an empty cage!

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - LIVIARY - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON CAGE DOOR LOCK

Niversa's hands CLICK the LOCK shut. We PULL BACK to see Tylen, Stiggur, Cleff, and Robin standing in a cage.

CLEFF
(to Niversa)
You're locking us up? I'm pretty sure you have no right to do that.

REVERSE ANGLE to see Niversa and Phenomenik outside the cage.

PHENOMENIK
You're trespassers. You have no right to be on this island.

STIGGUR
But you're thieves! We came here only to take back what doesn't belong to you!

NIVERSA
Listen, this is temporary. As soon as we can send you back to the mainland, we'll do that. But until then, we can't have you roaming around unescorted, interfering with our business, and possibly disturbing other guests.

ROBIN
Will you feed us? I don't know about them, but I'm pretty hungry.

NIVERSA
Of course. I'll cook you all up some eggs.

Niversa and Phenomenik walk away.

CLEFF
(quietly)
Speaking of eggs...

The others turn to see what Cleff is talking quietly about. In a corner of the cage is a roost, a bed of mud and leaves and other woodland material. In the nest sits a large egg.

TYLEN
That's Basil's egg!
(beat)
Which makes sense, since this was Basil's cage.

STIGGUR
Basil's cage?

TYLEN
(deducing aloud)
Of course. The beast that visited Shorelief, that ate all the fish and scared away all the people came from here! That was Basil! That's how she knew to take us to Shorelief, and to swim to the island from there. She knew where Niversa was because she'd been here before.

CLEFF
That's pretty smart.

TYLEN
Thank you.

CLEFF
I meant... that was pretty smart of Basil. But you too, Tylen.

STIGGUR
Basil escaped, so Niversa and her brother--

TYLEN
Phenomenik.

STIGGUR
I know.
(MORE)

STIGGUR (CONT'D)
It's just such an awkward name to say.

TYLEN
He was the Wise One of my village.

ROBIN
Oh, yeah? He probably won't be any longer, after putting you in a cage.

STIGGUR
Anyway, Niversa and her brother realized that they couldn't keep a full-grown crocatrix in their liv-- in this place...

CLEFF
...but maybe they could hatch one here. And a crocatrix hatched here might be easier to keep in a cage.

TYLEN
So they hatched a plan to steal Basil's egg. I wonder whether they knew it was the same crocatrix.

ROBIN
How many are there? Niversa said there's only one slugbear on the continent. Maybe there's only one crocatrix.

CLEFF
Well, I don't know much about making baby beasts, but I'd guess there's at least one more crocatrix around.

STIGGUR
I wonder what he's up to.

TYLEN
I wonder what ours is up to. Basil's here, isn't she?

STIGGUR
We don't know. You saw her last.

TYLEN
I lost track of her. I was keeping an eye on her from above, but then she disappeared.
(MORE)

TYLEN (CONT'D)
I looked for her everywhere, which is how I saw all the cages.

CLEFF
You'd think she'd have made her way right back to this cage. She must be able to... smell her egg?

Robin sniffs the air above the crocatrix egg in its roost.

ROBIN
I don't know. It just smells like wet leaves and mud.

TYLEN
I'm sure Basil has a more sensitive nose than you do, Robin. Maybe she's just waiting for the right moment.

STIGGUR
Well, let's hope that moment is coming soon. Because this cage is about to get a bit more crowded.

TYLEN
Why?

Stiggur motions toward the egg, which is now rocking.

STIGGUR
Because that egg is hatching.

The humans step back.

CLEFF
What's going to happen when a baby crocatrix comes out and sees four humans? But no other crocatrix? No mother?

TYLEN
(thinking aloud)
Maybe it could find... a friend.

Tylen changes into a crocatrix.

STIGGUR
Okay. That could be... nice. For the baby beast.

The egg rocks a bit more, then begins to hatch in earnest.

Bits of the protective casing flaking off, until tiny, slimy, scaly crocatrix digits appear and tear the rest of the egg into shreds. Then the entire tiny, slimy, scaly crocatrix emerges, yawns, sneezes, and finally shakes its entire slimy, scaly body mostly clean of shell.

Stiggur, Cleff, and Robin watch as the Tylen-crocatrix pads over and removes the last small pieces of shell from the baby's skin with her own mouth.

Robin reaches toward the baby crocatrix. The baby crocatrix responds by snapping its jaws at Robin's hand quickly and fiercely. Robin barely has time to pull his hand back with all of his fingers still attached.

CLEFF
Maybe don't do that?

STIGGUR
Well, Niversa and her brother will probably be back any minute now.

ROBIN
That's right! Our lunch!

STIGGUR
And also because I'm sure they've been waiting for this moment. If their hope is to make the baby crocatrix feel at home here, so that it won't want to escape like its mother did, they'll probably want to see it as soon as possible. And the other way around.

CLEFF
In that case, they might not be too happy to find Tylen in crocatrix form. That could complicate things.

STIGGUR
Too bad! We're not here to make things easier for them. We came for the egg, and now our concern is that baby beast.

CLEFF
And the Roamen treasure.

ROBIN
And lunch. Seriously, I'm starving! You guys aren't starving?

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - LIVIARY - LATER

Phenomenik returns to the cages, looks in on the humans, finds fewer humans and more crocatrices than expected.

PHENOMENIK
(shouting back)
Sister! It's here!

Nearly immediately, Niversa joins her brother among the cages. She looks into the prison cage and scowls.

NIVERSA
Tylen. You'll confuse the little thing. And when you go, she'll be upset.

Tylen changes back to her own form.

TYLEN
(defiantly)
When we go, the baby crocatrix is coming with us.

CLEFF
(to Niversa)
How do you know it's a she?

NIVERSA
What?

CLEFF
You're calling the baby beast she.
How do you know it's female?

NIVERSA
I... I don't. It's just easier to--

Niversa is interrupted by a giant shadow falling upon the group from the sky above. Everyone looks up as one to see Basil swooping down from above the trees. On Basil's back sits Eahta, holding onto Awl in front of her.

EAHTA
(calling)
Look out below!

AWL
(yelling)
I'm a cloud!

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - LIVIARY - MOMENTS LATER

Basil touches down softly onto the ground, next to the cage, putting herself firmly between Niversa and Phenomenik and her baby. Her stance is protective and menacing.

Eahta climbs down from Basil's back, helping Awl down after her. Basil leans her snout toward Niversa until they are practically nose-to-nose. Niversa doesn't move.

NIVERSA
(calmly)
Nik, please open the cage.

Phenomenik edges slowly around Basil to get to the lock on the door of the cage and remove it. Stiggur, Cleff, Robin, and Tylen parade out. Tylen carries the baby crocatrix in her arms.

As Phenomenik makes his way back toward Niversa, Basil turns to face Tylen, who holds the baby crocatrix. Basil brings her snout right up to the child, then licks it. The baby crocatrix squirms. After several more licks, Basil opens her mouth wide. Tylen takes a step back.

EAHTA
Put the small one into the big one.

TYLEN
(horrified)
What?! Basil's going to--

EAHTA
She's going to take her baby home.
(beat)
Maybe she'll eat her there, but probably not.

Tylen furrows her brow, then gingerly places the baby crocatrix into Basil's maw. Basil closes her mouth, mostly, and does not swallow. Then, with her baby safely behind her sharp teeth, Basil looks at Tylen, Robin, Cleff, Stiggur, Eahta, and Awl in turn, as if to thank them, and then at Niversa and Phenomenik, with scorn. Finally, with a single snort, Basil leaps off the ground and takes wing into the sky.

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - LIVIARY - MOMENTS LATER

CLEFF
Well, now we're stranded here.

NIVERSA
(sighing)
No. You're free to go.

CLEFF
I assumed we were free to go. But how will we get back to the mainland? Our ride just flew off!

PHENOMENIK
We'll give you a boat.

CLEFF
Oh. You have boats?

PHENOMENIK
Of course we have boats. How do you think we got here?

STIGGUR
(to Niversa)
Are you staying?

NIVERSA
For now. We've got some cleaning up to do.

STIGGUR
And you've got some treasure to return.

ROBIN
Here's what I don't understand: You're running a... a beast park for wealthy customers. We know why you stole the crocatrix egg. But why did you steal the Roamens' valuables, too?

NIVERSA
Business hasn't been so good recently. Partly because we lost our main attraction.

TYLEN
Basil.

NIVERSA
What about it?

TYLEN
No, "Basil" is what we named the mother crocatrix.

NIVERSA
You named her? Does she know that?

TYLEN
She seemed to.

NIVERSA
Basil's a funny name. But, then, our father's name was Herb.

Tylen looks at Niversa. Then at Phenomenik. Then at Eahta, who stands off to the side.

STIGGUR
(to Tylen)
Niversa and Phenomenik are Eahta's children. You didn't know that?

TYLEN
No! You did?

STIGGUR
Of course. Actually, Eahta's my great aunt twice removed, or something like that. Niversa and Phenomenik are my cousins, in some way.

TYLEN
Your cousins? But you couldn't remember Phenomenik's name?

STIGGUR
I didn't say I couldn't remember it. I said it was awkward to say. Even the short version.

TYLEN
You're not the cousin who can communicate with plants, are you?

STIGGUR
Actually, I am. You know about <u>that</u>?

TYLEN
This whole time... this whole journey, you could talk to plants?

STIGGUR
Yes. But how would that have helped us?

Tylen turns away from Stiggur to address Eahta.

TYLEN
These are your children? Niversa's your daughter, and Phenomenik's your son? Your husband was their father?

EAHTA
As far as he knew.

TYLEN
Did you know that we were looking for your own children? Did you know that your children had a... an animal park?

PHENOMENIK
A liviary.

CLEFF
You really need a different name. What about “Brute Court”? Or “Horn Depot”?

EAHTA
(to Tylen)
No, I didn’t know about this place. I did know that your Niversa and my Niversa were one and the same. It’s not a common name, after all. But my boy... I hadn’t seen him in ages. Not since he left our clan to find his fortune. He never wrote.

PHENOMENIK
(embarrassed)
Hello, Mother. How have you been?

EAHTA
Better not tell you now.

TYLEN
Wait. You <u>did</u> see him. You saw him in your vision at Niversa’s cottage. You didn’t recognize him?

EAHTA
I guess not.

STIGGUR
She thought it was me.

TYLEN
No, she didn’t! <u>You</u> thought it was you. And you didn’t know what you were talking about! You’re all... you’re all nuts!

After a moment of awkward quiet, Niversa takes a tentative step toward Tylen.

NIVERSA
Tylen, you're a very special girl, with a very special gift. I know you've been struggling to find a use for that gift. I have an idea.

Everyone listens attentively to Niversa.

NIVERSA (CONT'D)
Would you consider staying here, on Minifen, with us, and being the new main attraction in our exhibition?

TYLEN
What?! Of course not! I want off this stupid island as soon as possible! I want to go home. Awl wants to go home. We all want to go home!

ROBIN
Actually, I think I'd like to stay.

Everyone looks at him, at least a little confused.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
I think this place is terrific. It's secluded, it's exciting, and people with too much money visit. If you'd be willing to put me to work, I'd be happy to clean cages and pick pockets.

PHENOMENIK
(to Niversa)
He is a good grabber.

EAHTA
I think I'd like to stay, too.

NIVERSA
Mother?

EAHTA
Why not? If this is where my children are, then why shouldn't I stay here? But I'm not cleaning cages.

Niversa and Phenomenik trade a glance.

PHENOMENIK
(to Eahta)
It would be our pleasure. We'll put you in the Handmaid's Suite.

EAHTA
Is that the nicest one?

PHENOMENIK
Not even close. But it won't cost you anything.

TYLEN
So... you're keeping this place... up and running?

NIVERSA
For now, anyway.

TYLEN
But the animals--!

NIVERSA
The animals are happy here, Tylen.

TYLEN
Basil wasn't!

NIVERSA
And Basil escaped.

TYLEN
Maybe the others can't escape! That doesn't mean they're happy.

NIVERSA
No. But we treat them well. We feed them and give them shelter.

TYLEN
I don't like it.

PHENOMENIK
Well, no one invited you here in the first place.

EXT. MINIFEN ISLAND - BEACH - LATER

A different beach. Niversa, Phenomenik, Eahta, and Robin stand on the shore; Tylen, Awl, Stiggur, and Cleff are in a small boat. Niversa hands to Stiggur a burlap sack tied with cord.

STIGGUR
It's all here?

NIVERSA
Don’t count on it.

Eahta kisses Awl on the forehead, then does the same to Tylen.

EAHTA
(to Tylen)
Look after him. And he’ll look after you.

TYLEN
We couldn’t have done this without you. But I’m not sure we really did much.

Eahta leans very close to Tylen and whispers in her ear:

EAHTA
I’m just a confused old woman. Sooner or later, I’m probably going to let all the animals out of their cages.

EXT. SEA - LATER

Stiggur and Cleff propel the boat with wooden oars. Minifen shrinks behind them. Tylen sits, scanning the skies for Basil. Awl rests his head in his sister’s lap.

AWL
(groggily)
Did we throw the ring into the volcano?

TYLEN
(patiently)
There was no ring. Or volcano.

AWL
Did we topple the fortress of evil?

TYLEN
No evil fortress, either. There was a weird animal garden. I’m sorry you missed it. I think.

AWL
Did we rescue the princess?

TYLEN
Sort of.

AWL
Well, that’s good.

TYLEN
Yeah. We did good.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GRASSHAVEN - DAY

Some time has passed. Maybe five years.

INT. NEW SCHOOLHUT

The village children are seated in the rebuilt school, all looking expectantly at their teacher.

TYLEN (V.O)
All right, students. Who gets to pick today?

One little girl, nine years old, raises her hand.

REVERSE ANGLE to reveal Tylen, now 18.

TYLEN (CONT’D)
Aroline! It’s your day?

AROLINE
Yes!

TYLEN
Well, then, young lady, name your animal!

AROLINE
A kadobbler!

TYLEN
A... kadobbler?

Aroline nods enthusiastically. Tylen squints at Aroline playfully.

TYLEN (CONT’D)
Is that a real animal, Aroline, or did you make it up?

Aroline blushes, and the other children giggle.

AROLINE
It’s really real.

TYLEN
Well, I've never heard of it. So you'll have to describe it to me, and I'll do my best. I mean... I'll do my <u>beast</u>.

All the children laugh.

EXT. GRASSHAVEN - OUTSIDE A HUT - LATER

The last schoolchild heads into his home. Tylen changes from whatever a kadobbler is to her own form again. She continues walking without breaking stride.

INT. WISE ONE'S HUT - MOMENTS LATER

Awl's back is to us. He is now 18 as well. A large book floats in the air near him, as well as mechanical items of wood and iron, glass flasks with colored liquids in them, and a partially eaten apple.

AWL
Is it time already?

The floating items come to rest slowly, evenly. Awl turns around and joins Tylen. Arm in arm they exit his workplace.

EXT. GRASSHAVEN - WHEATKEEPER HOME - MOMENTS LATER

AWL
(calling)
Mother? Father?

TYLEN
We're here!

Wilidere comes around from the back of the house to hug and kiss Tylen and Awl in turn. Then:

WILIDERE
Your father's inside. We have a visitor. A stranger to Grasshaven.

TYLEN
(guarded)
Who is it?

AWL
And what does this stranger want?

WILIDERE
As it happens, he wants to speak with you. Both of you. He says he knows you.

INT. WHEATKEEPER HOME - MOMENTS LATER

At the kitchen table, Emor is speaking with a man.

TYLEN
Stiggur!

Stiggur stands up and embraces the twins. His hair is a bit grayer at the temples, but otherwise he looks the same.

STIGGUR
You've both grown so much. How old are you now?

AWL
Eighteen.

STIGGUR
And can you still...?

AWL
Better than ever.

STIGGUR
And you as well, Tylen?

TYLEN
Yes. And how have you been?

STIGGUR
No complaints. Except that I've been having trouble sleeping recently. The woods can be... loud.

EMOR
Of course. All the noisy creatures of the night. The aardvarks, the bats, the crickets -- and that's just the beginning of the alphabet!

TYLEN
Not to mention the trees.

Emor and Wilidere laugh. Awl doesn't laugh; he knows.

AWL
(to his parents)
Stiggur is Phenomenik's cousin. The one he once told us about. The one who can hear what the plants are discussing amongst themselves.

WILIDERE
That's you?

EMOR
So what are the trees talking about? Are they all planning to leave?

The twins groan.

STIGGUR
(seriously)
They're talking about your children. That's what I came to tell you.
(beat)
Tylen, Awl, the trees are talking about you.

TYLEN
Us? What are the trees saying about us?

Stiggur peers at Tylen and Awl gravely.

STIGGUR
I think that maybe you should come hear for yourselves.

FADE OUT.