

(SNEAKER ties Aspiration to the tree outside the cave.)

GIDEON

But I'm on an important mission! I'm helping a Cavalier fight a Blundersnorp!

TRENT

I love that! I think I'm going to use that, if I'm ever captured.

TROUBADOUR

It was here where they encountered... a complication.

(Another bandit, HACK, arrives. He drags along a young woman a little older than Gideon. She wears fine clothes that are smudged and torn. The girl - ALANNA - struggles and yells in protest.)

ALANNA

Let me go!

TRENT

What have we here?

HACK

What'd you say you were again?

ALANNA

I am Alanna, viscountess of Cembria, and know now that my father will never pay ransom. We do not treat with thugs such as you!

HACK

She's our hostage!

SNEAKER

We've already got a hostage!

SPIKE

That makes

(pauses to think)

... two!

TRENT

Lovely, but there's a difficulty. We're loading the horses with treasure tomorrow. Even with this new horse, we've barely got room for one hostage.

HACK

Why not make a horse carry 'em both along with treasure?

TRENT

Don't be absurd. That would be inhumane.

(points to Gideon and Alanna)

No, we'll have to kill one of them.

GIDEON / ALANNA

What?!?

ALANNA

My father will pay fabulous ransom for my release!

GIDEON

Can't you just let one of us go?

TRENT

No, we can't risk you revealing this secret camp. We've put in a lot of paintwork.

HACK

What've ye got?

SNEAKER

Stableboy. Easy to sell.

HACK

I took this one off a fancy royal convoy. Got to be worth a pretty penny.

TRENT

Yes, but then, it's dangerous to collect ransom.

ALANNA

Incredibly safe!

(TRENT grabs both Gideon and Alanna by the scruff and pushes them into the cage. While he does this:)

TRENT

We'll work this out tomorrow. Ugh, into the cell, there you go. To the campfire, my thieves! We've some celebrating to do!

(The BANDITS cheer. TRENT removes his bow and quiver of arrows and thrusts them into Kludge's hands.)

TRENT

Kludge, guard duty. Take this bow.

(KLUDGE groans with disappointment. TRENT throws Kludge a bottle labelled "xxx".)

TRENT

This'll keep you company. If either of them tries to escape, put an arrow through them!

(KLUDGE disconsolately sits down at the tree, puts the bow and arrow in his lap, and begins sipping from the bottle. TRENT and the other BANDITS exit offstage.)

ALANNA

(to GIDEON)

Well clearly it's got to be me.

GIDEON

What does?

ALANNA

The one to survive. I mean it's an unfortunate situation, but we must exercise social responsibility. You're a stableboy, and I am nearly royalty.

GIDEON

Nearly?

ALANNA

I am directly related to the queen, which means that one day I will be queen. It's just a matter of waiting for seven of my cousins to die.

GIDEON

That seems like a long wait.

ALANNA

Succession of the throne is the foundation of society. I must be allowed to continue on that path!

GIDEON

Well I know I'm just a stableboy, but don't I have the same worth as you?

ALANNA

Let me explain as best I can.

**(4. Royalty)**

ALANNA

Whatever are you doing up in that tree?

GIDEON

(climbing down)

I see where the Great Highway ends at the forest. Which means the cavalier must be somewhere that way.

ALANNA

I haven't any idea what you're talking about.

GIDEON

(jumping the final distance to the ground)

I'm following a cavalier. He's in great danger and I have to warn him. There's a Blundersnorp in these woods!

ALANNA

(her concern evaporates)

Is that what he told you?

GIDEON

No, he doesn't know. That's why I have to warn him!

ALANNA

No one's seen a Blundersnorp in hundreds of years!

GIDEON

There was a big announcement from the king! I heard it!

ALANNA

Stableboy, my people are wardens of the Great Forest and all lands to its north. If there was a giant monster on the loose, I quite think we would know about it.

(There is a blood-curdling ROAR in the near distance.)

ALANNA

I'm sure that was just the wind.

(Another ROAR, even louder than the first. A distant shout -- of a human being -- and the ring of steel. ASPIRATION whinnies nervously.)

GIDEON

It's coming from over there.

(to Aspiration)

Stay here girl.

ALANNA

I'm sure there's a... scientific...

GIDEON

Come on!

(The two of them run to an adjacent clearing in the woods. The sounds of combat grow louder.)

## SCENE 7

TROUBADOUR

This part of the story requires some imagination. Accounts of what a Blundersnorp looks like differ widely.

(pages through a monster tome)

Some say it's a giant lizard, others insist it's a rolling thing with a shell, and still others call it a magical blend of an owl and a bear. But storytellers generally agree that the Blundersnorp was large, hungry, and distinctly terrifying.

(GIDEON and ALANNA stumble into another clearing where before them rises a giant monster -- the Blundersnorp! It sings in a collective voice. **7. The Blundersnorp**)

(Blundersnorp Incident #1:)

BLUNDERSNORP

ANGRY, HUNGRY

ANGRY, HUNGRY

ANGRY, HUNGRY

ANGRY, HUNGRY

(Facing the creature is SIR HALLOCK, leaning against a tree for support. His armor is dented, and his cloak torn. He keeps his weight off one leg, which is bleeding. He fends off the Blundersnorp with his sword. The action freezes.)

ALANNA

That's distinctly terrifying!

(The TROUBADOUR gestures to the monster tome. *Told you so.*)

TROUBADOUR