

Episode 05

An overpowering smell of musk hangs in the air near the cart.

Wulfar sniffs the scene. "Ugh, I can't scent anything through this."

Maon hops up into the cart, looking through the belongings.

"Somebody went through our stuff!" he announces. "Ugh... maggots..."

Everyone looks to one another.

Katerina then looks to the ground around the cart, realization dawning on her.

"Nobody move!" she yells.

Both Maon and Momo freeze halfway in motion.

"Whatever went through our stuff probably didn't fly through here," says Katerina, looking at the frozen ground.

She calls for Wulfar, pointing to a barely visible footprint on the ground. It appears roughly human, though the toes are elongated.

"There," she whispers.

Wulfar's eyes fix on the tracks. He loses all sense of his surroundings, now fixated on the trail left by whatever it was. He steps away from the road and into the forest.

"We'll stay here with the cart," says Faustus, nodding at his men.

"Take care of my horse," says Katerina.

Momo, Katerina, Maon and Hana all follow Wulfar into the trees. By this time he's drawn his crossbow and makes his way forward, totally engrossed by the hunt.

The woods off the road are unnaturally cold. The trail leads through woodlands so dense that the group can't fit through the actual path, but must find alternate routes whilst following the tracks.

"Do we have any idea what we're tracking?" asks Maon quietly, as the group moves along.

"Ice men?" offers Momo.

"I don't think ice men leave maggots behind..."

"What's this about maggots?" asks Momo, worriedly.

"Oh, there were some back in the cart after whomever it was went through our stuff," says Maon.

"Ugh..." says Momo.

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Eventually the tracks lead to a large chasm with a stream running through the middle. The tracks lead right over the edge of the chasm, which is a sheer drop off to the cold, dark waters below. Wulfar's eyes quickly scan the sides of the chasm. He then turns and looks to the others.

"There's a cave down below. Anyone have a rope?"

Katerina looks to Maon, who signs, pulls off his backpack and looks inside.

"Hmmm... let's see..." he mutters to himself. "Ah! Here we go!" he announces, pulling a coil of rope from his backpack.

He then ties one end to a nearby tree and casts the other down the cliff-face. The action reminds everyone of the steep drop and the rushing waters below. Maon gulps.

"So, who goes first," begins Momo, but she's interrupted as Katerina grabs the rope and prepares to repel down.

She looks up to Wulfar and says "cover me," then pushes off and descends.

Wulfar peers over the cliff edge, keeping a close eye on Katerina with his crossbow at the ready.

Hana and Maon watch as Momo peers over the edge, nervously fidgeting back and forth.

Katerina rapidly descends the cliff, heading for the cave like a true mountaineer. She pushes off the side of the cliff and lets the rope slide through her gloved hands. She then grabs the rope tightly and swings back towards the cliff. As she regains her footing and prepares to push off again, **ARMS BURST OUT OF THE CLIFF FACE**, grabbing Katerina!

"Kat!" yells Momo.

Maon swings into action. He grabs the rope, and gets ready to climb down, but Hana stops him, tugging on the rope. Gesturing that they should pull her up.

Wulfar lets a bolt fly from his crossbow. The shot screams down the face of the cliff and right into one of the arms wrapped around Katerina. But instead of piercing the arm, the bolt shatters it, like a piece of dry wood!

Below, Katerina struggles for a moment as the other arm wraps around her waist. She grits her teeth, then follows the pull of the arm as it drags her **THROUGH THE CLIFF!**

Maon looks down at the blank side of the cliff where Katerina was seconds before, then looks up to Hana. "Well, pulling her up was a nice idea at the time..."

Hana gasps, then grabs the rope, climbs over Maon and darts down the rope. Followed, surprisingly, by Momo!

The two clamber down, quickly reaching the spot where Katerina disappeared. As they arrive, they discover that the stone cliff isn't uniform. The place where Katerina was nabbed wasn't stone at all, but soft dirt!

Momo pulls out a pocket knife and drives it into the wall, digging furiously.

Hana turns to her, urgently "She's in danger! Hurry!"

At that moment they hear Katerina's voice coming through the dirt, shouting.

"C'mon!" shouts Momo. She grabs hold of Hana and pushes off from the cliff, swinging far out over the river. The rope then swings them back towards the wall where they **PUNCH A HOLE THROUGH THE DIRT**, and tumble headlong into a cave!

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When the arms pulled her through the cliff, Katerina found herself in total darkness, bitter cold and breathing stale air. Her feet came to stand on hard stone, and she guessed she was in a cave.

The arm wrapped around her waist moved along, looking for a better grip, and she heard footsteps drawing near. But Katerina remained calm. "Who are you?" she asked. "Do you speak Latin?"

The footsteps paused, and Katerina felt herself ease a little.

Then there was a shooting pain in her neck as her assailant BIT INTO HER! As its teeth plunged through her flesh, she felt something pushing itself into the open wound, burrowing deep inside her!

Her mind began racing, panic flooding in. Focusing, she channeled her emotions into anger. She reached over and grabbed the attacker and twisted HARD. She whirled around, unclasping her cloak at the same time, then slammed both onto the floor with flourish, declaring "That's ENOUGH!!" Her voice shook the walls and echoed throughout the cave.

The footsteps retreated back into the cave and she felt her former assailant on the ground, trembling before her rage.

She paused for a moment, then picked up the creature, and shoved it against the wall.

"Hi, I'm Katerina," she said to the thing. "Who're you?"

Just then the wall next to her exploded as Hana and Momo come tumbling through, damp air and sunlight pouring in along with them.

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Katerina looks over her shoulder to the late-comers. "Nice of you to drop by," she quibs.

Momo gets to her feet and looks towards Katerina. "Are you all right?"

Katerina ignores her and turns back to the creature she's hold, now able to see it for the first time.

It's human, or at least it was. The thing is hairless and bone white, its brittle frame masked only by the remnants of once fine clothing.

"Who are you?" she repeats to the creature.

Maon climbs through the opening and looks at the scene.

Momo continues to look at Katerina. "Are you sure you're okay?" she asks. "That bite looks pretty nasty."

Katerina ignores her, staring at the creature. It gurgles and snarls back at her, seeming to get more and more worked up.

Nearby Hana points to something glinting down the tunnel. A second later a knife slams into it, and there's a soft thudding sound.

Looking for the source of the knife, Hana turns and sees Wulfar, climbing down into the opening, his eyes trained on that spot in the darkness. Once he plants his

feet inside the opening, he readies his crossbow, and steps inwards.

When he reaches his target, he finds another one of the dry-looking white creatures, but this one is dressed like a roman legionnaire.

"What is it Wulfar?" asks Momo timidly.

"This man was a roman legionnaire at Dyfed," starts Wulfar coldly. "Now he's one of those," says Wulfar, pointing back towards the thing Katerina's got.

Katerina looks deeply into the creature's eyes, trying to discern if anything intelligent or sane lies on the other side. Her face then wracks with disgust and rage. She wraps her hands around the creature's head and breaks its neck. As it collapses to the floor, she spits on it.

"It's a ghoul," she says icily. "Neither alive nor dead."

"I guess we know what hit the fort..." says Maon.

Katerina looks at him, then picks her cloak up and puts it back on.

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"We need light," announces Wulfar, who turns and looks to Maon.

"Okay, one second," says Maon, who once again sets his pack down.

Katerina looks to Momo and Hana. "You okay?" she asks.

"I'm fine," says Momo, "but, Kat, is your shoulder okay? I'm no doctor but I could bandage it up—"

"It's nothing," says Katerina.

Maon lights a torch, then looks over the creature's body. As he does, the head starts to convulse, then, a second later, it bursts from the inside out, expelling dozens of quarter-inch long, chalky-white maggots!

"Oh god!" cries Maon as he backs away from the thing. "More maggots!"

Momo shrieks and grabs Wulfar.

Katerina gags at the sight. She rushes to the cave opening and vomits.

As the maggots flee the corpse, it strangely starts to look human again. Features, even skin color flow back into the body inexplicably.

Maon leans down again, holding the torch out towards the maggots. Surprisingly, the pests home in it, like moths to open flames. They squirm into the flames, killing themselves with juicy popping noises in the process.

Another audible "pop" comes from the one that Wulfar knifed.

"Oh why are there so many maggot?" cries Momo, clutching Wulfar.

The hunter maintains his cool and looks to the rest of the group. "We should keep moving."

"I'll get another torch," says Maon. "Who'll take this one?"

Momo looks at the torch, then at the maggots squirming towards it. "Not me!" she exclaims.

"I'll take it," says Katerina. "I'm not afraid of worms," she says, looking at Momo and stomping on a nearby maggot to make a point.

She takes the torch and looks back towards the opening.

"Hana?" she calls out.

She looks up and finds the girl watching the cliff-face from a ledge nearby. She waves at Hana.

"Come on, sweetie."

Hana gestures to her, emoting that she's watching the other entrances, like the cave down below them.

"We're heading inside," Katerina says to her. "You're not staying here by yourself."

Hana waves her off, in a gesture that says "I'll be fine."

Kat frowns.

Back inside, Maon, Momo and Wulfar make ready to head deeper inside the cave.

"Hold up everyone," says Maon, reaching into his pack again.

"I have a terrible feeling about these maggots... let's see... I think I've got some wax here... yes! It might be a good idea to get some ear plugs as an added precaution," he says holding out a hunk of wax.

Momo covers her ears in utter fright.

"It's okay," says Maon, "here." He passes the wax to her, then pulls out another torch and lights it on Katerina's.

"Ooookay..." says Momo, who forms the wax into earplugs and passes them to Wulfar and Maon. She then makes a pair for herself.

Wulfar then looks down the tunnel, his crossbow at the ready.

"Keep the light near me," he says to Maon. "And watch my back." They start to head in, but Momo stops them.

"Wait, what about Hana and Kat?"

"We'll stay here," says Katerina, who looks slyly at Momo, then up to Hana. "Besides, I think Hana's a bit scared. Not that I blame her."

Momo nods and the three head into the caves.

"It's too bad," continues Katerina, now talking to herself as Hana looks on, "you're pretty quick in a fight. But I understand if a child of the woods is afraid of a dark cave."

Hana nods down at Katerina, and gives her a quick grin.

Katerina smiles back. "Maybe when you're older you won't be so scared, huh?"

Hana frowns.

Inside, Wulfar leads Maon and Momo through the large tunnel, past numerous smaller side passageways.

Up ahead he hears the sound of rushing water and can see light. But when the three reach the source, they realize it's just the cave opening they saw from the top of the chasm.