

Our Eden Script:

P - Player, Percy
M - Michael
C - Captain
A - Antajo
D- Daniel
V - Victor
MH - Ms. Hardwicke
TS - The Shepherd

- My name is Ulvson Gjeter, and today I heard the voice of God.
 - It spoke not as roaring thunder or crashing waves,
 - But as a whisper—carried by a breeze no heavier than a feather.
 - He spoke a tongue I could not understand, neither in Ethlish nor my native Norvensk.
 - And I understood it all the same, every inconceivable syllable that dripped from his lips to my ears; He spoke of the meadow—
 - A good ways behind our hut. Where wildflowers grow, and mountains rise, and distant trees join hand-in-hand.
 - That all are built upon planks of bone.
 - Our putrefaction feeds the Earth.
 - Beauty fueled by rot.
 - Ashes give rise to good soil, bountiful harvests.
 - God ordains His elect to rise from the rubble, to build a new city from bones.
 - And it will be a shining city, surrounded by the meadows of Eden,
 - Fertilized by the burnt, the buried, and the damned.
-
- "Dear Cecily:
 - 3,000 miles.
 - At least, those are the captain's estimates. Could be more.
 - It's near impossible to fathom.
 - Do you remember the lake by our home? We'd wander its shores without a care in the world.
 - From the opposite side, our abode seemed a world away,
 - pitted between two vast expanses of blue, so as to not permit the two to splash together,
 - and swallow the world whole.
 - As I grew older, the world did not seem so large;
 - We delighted in its waters come summertime, but it only took a full lap to wear me out.
 - Remember?
 - And you would always splash me. I still have half a mind to return the favor.
 - Mother had a fit whenever she caught us, and we hadn't the strength to protest.
 - "Never again", we'd say.
 - Of course, until the next sunny day came around.
 - But you stopped after a while. You had more sense than I.
 - I suppose she was scared to lose someone else, what with Father's passing.

- But I felt I could conquer the lake—and I did.
- The exhaustion was no different, but with each passing summer, the lake grew smaller and smaller, whilst its shores stayed intact.
- When I was ready to leave the nest, it was just another lake in Ethland. One whose shores I miss.
- The waters we tread are no lake. The captain announced "land ho!" only an hour ago.
- All eyes were cast towards the setting sun, shining an array of distant cliffs.
- But I looked east,
- and I found myself on that lake shore like we did some 15 years ago,
- this time with no home in sight.
- Only two blue expanses, splashing, converging,
- threatening to swallow me whole.
- My stomach aches. I cannot wait to set foot on solid ground.
- Yet I wish it were Ethland's shores on the horizon.
- I feel less like a diplomat, and more-so an explorer.
- It's a pity I haven't the heart of one.
- Alas, there is no greater weight than the Queen's eyes at one's back.
- I hope these people truly are children of God; perhaps my mission shan't be so hard, after all.
- We land tomorrow. Hopefully my mood will have lifted when I write again.
- In the meantime, I hope this letter shall see the shores of Ethland safe and sound.
- And please, please do not worry about me.
- You're not-so little brother, Percy"
-
- The candle's wax should suffice.
- I'm surprised it has lasted the voyage. It's nearly a stub, now.
- I fold the paper up, careful to refrain from causing the slightest tear.
- The paper slips neatly into the envelope. Wax pours over the fold like a rich glaze, the color like crushed raspberries.
- I stamp the seal and set the letter aside.
- ...
- What am I doing?
- I don't want to do this.
- Perhaps the captain would take a bribe.
- "Drop me off with the pirates in the South Seas; they're scoundrels, too—sans the judgment.
- Or the lunacy."
- I chuckle a little.
- At least I can still laugh.
- I take a deep breath and turn my gaze towards the rickety, cabin bed.
- It's the last time I'll have to sleep on that atrocious thing.
- As long as these so-called Edenites have a comfy bed, I suppose i can't complain all that much.
- I swallow my breath, and blow out the candle. The bed is no less comfortable than it was before.
- No doubt the creaking wood shall compete with my anxiety for my restless attention.

- I hope for the best.
- Maybe they really did found a new Jerusalem.
- Maybe...
-
- The air tastes of salt and brine.
- And something else... Pine. Petrichor.
- Much of the crew joins me in standing on deck, watching the new world roll on beside us.
- A world which, besides the separatists, may have only felt the gaze of God's eyes upon its shores.
- The morning sun hides behind a thick, wool blanket dripping with rain.
- But sunbeams still burst from behind the shroud to the East, cast towards the land above our heads.
- Great cliffs, buffeted by the tossing sea, rise and fall to our right in gentle slopes, yet never quite touch the water.
- Pine trees and open pastures lie above, some 30 feet from the tides, looming above the mists.
- A pair of islands pass us to the left, rolling behind us into the fog,
- And the cliff beside us turns; as we edge closer, a great inlet opens up before us,
- The imposing arms of the cliffs cradling the fog-swaddled ocean.
- We sail further into the inlet; slowly from the white air came great masts and wooden hulls—ships of incredible stature bobbing in place, weathered with age.
- Some strange symbol adorns the tattered masts.
- And along came the visage of a dock, shanty in its construction,
- and amazingly enough, people.
- They wave the ship over down the dock as the walls of inlet draw closer the deeper we sail.
- The captain turns to me, nodding as if he knows something I don't.
- C: We've arrived.
- P: Great. I'll grab my stuff."
-
- I feel no sentiment wandering down the dark corridors below deck. God forbid a storm hit; one could hardly make their way down the halls without stumbling.
- I grab my belongings from my cabin and stand in the door frame, looking back at the now barren room.
- I guess I lied. There's always a twinge in my heart when saying goodbye to a room, as though it were a soldier who'd done his duty honorably.
- I shook my head.
- P: Bye, room.
-
- We docked. The patter of rain against the wooden deck ceased, replaced by the wind running through distant trees.
- C: Come, this way!
- P: Yes, coming.
- C: You have your belongings?
- P: Yes- Oh! Um.

- I rummage through my coat pocket, pulling out the letter.
- P: This goes back.
- C: Understood. I'll see to it. We'll be stationed to the south.
- I nod and turn to leave, before a hand grabs my shoulder.
- The Captain's grip tightens as he stares into my eyes.
- C: You're doing a noble deed.
- C: The Queen appreciates it, and we appreciate it.
- P: Many thanks-
- C: Don't forget who these people are.
- ...
- C: You're young. May not be as fresh in your mind, but we remember.
- C: I remember.
- P: I-I understand.
- He nods, before looking out towards the dock, patting my back.
- C: Godspeed.
-
- A procession of 3 men await me, all clothed in black. (Silhouette them until they're introduced)
- On the left stood a fox, thin and frail; he wore a hood. His orange fur burned like the fire in the black of a stove.
- To the right, a badger, stout and smiling, looking to me as though I were a friend long gone.
- And in the middle stands the tallest—a reindeer—a tower of ebon with a pleased countenance, and a crown of antlers that rise , as though reaching for grace.
- As I de-board the ship, he approaches with arms outstretched, like his smile.
- ???: Ah! Our white horse hath arrived upon our shores, safe and sound!
- P: Pardon? Urf-!
- He pulls me into a tight embrace, squeezing for a second or two. My arms are clasped against my sides.
- He pulls back, gripping my hand.
- ???: My God, you made it.
- ???: I trust it was a safe passage?
- P: Aye, yes. Yes.
- ???: God bless. I apologize if my hug was a bit tight; I think I heard something pop!
- ???: But you haven't slept in a proper bed for weeks, have you?
- I suppose this chap would know the feeling.
- P: It's been rough.
- ???: Well, you needn't worry about that any longer.
- We look back to the ship as the captain waves us farewell. I extend the favor.
- ???: Come, come; let us make haste!
- He hurries along, motioning me to follow along as the others pass.
- At the end of the dock sits a canoe, a stark contrast to the dilapidated ships behind us.
- We hobble in as it bobs beneath our feet; the water looks mighty cold, and I've no intention of falling in.

- I must admit, I'm not keen on yet another boat ride.
- ???: Settled in?
- I nod.
- TS: I can see that look on your face. 'Prithee, Lord, not another boat ride!'
- The other two begin to row us along.
- ???: Fear not. Providence is hardly an ocean away.

(River)

- As we row to the end of the inlet, the cliffs continue their descent until they turn to dirty, cold beaches.
- Before I know it, we're surrounded by trees. The smell of pine is intoxicating.
- Behind us, the inlet is now a river, snaking peacefully through the woods.
- By now, the sun had begun to dispel the mist, cutting away with beams of light, which trickled through the pine needles.
- ???: So, Percy, I presume? I'm glad to finally meet you.
- P: You as well.
- D: I'm reverend Daniel.
- V: Reverend Victor.
- D: Are you nervous?
- P: Aye.
- D: Don't be.
- He smiles and continues to row along with the other. The one in the middle, though...
- His eyes are fixed aside, watching the army of trees slowly recede into rolling pastures.
- Farmland, remarkably enough, begins to stretch as far as the eye can see, with forest interspersed.
- ???: Not much further, now.
- Thank goodness.
- ???: What do you smell?
- P: Excuse me?
- ???: Breathe.
- My lungs drink in the air. Seconds pass.
- P: Pine.
- ???: Deeper.
- ...
- P: Earth?
- He nods.
- His hand coaxes me to continue.
- ...
- P: Fresh rain.
- P: Wildflowers.
- P: Apples.
- ???: Quite like Ethland, yes?
- P: I suppose so.

- ???: I encourage you to take time out of each day to simply... absorb this.
- ???: His blessings abound here. It clears the mind and works wonders for the soul.
- Birds sing as we row by. My God, it's been months.
- Their singing heralds the coming sun, gliding across the river's surface.
- ???: I imagine you have heard quite a lot about us.
- P: A bit.
- ???: Our departure from Ethland was... unusually theatrical.
- He laughs.
- P: And a bit treasonous.
- ???: Yes. Treasonous.
- ???: Treasonous to a king who demanded servitude even from the Lord, Almighty.
- ???: Treasonous to a man for whom peace was a bargaining chip.
- ???: A man who tended to his flock by way of sword than staff.
- ???: Percy, he would've labeled you a traitor simply for coming here. For speaking with me.
- ???: But you're no traitor. And to have come here, for peace—that is dedication most honorable in His eyes.
- ???: What I wish to say is, keep an even temperament. Make no assumptions. Trust us.
- ???: A good relationship is built upon trust and clarity of mind. Common knowledge, I imagine, for a diplomat such as yourself.
- P: I know. I mean, yes.
- I know my job plenty well. Perhaps they're nervous?
- His smile suggests anything but, what with his serene gaze returning to our surroundings.
- It was as though I suddenly did not exist—as though none of us exist.
- The lot of us could vanish save him, and this man would float down the river without a care in the world.
- It's enviable. Luckily, it's also infectious.
- A breeze caresses my cheek as I slump into the boat, watching the shoreline slowly loll along.
- Daniel and Victor keep up their pace without a word, just as silent as the other.
- The other... I look back to him. I feel like a fool, now; I hadn't got his name.
- I suppose it wouldn't hurt to ask.
- If not a bit rude, admittedly.
- I hope he shan't mind.
- P: Um. Excuse me?
- ???: Shhh.
- P: Huh?
- Through a bottleneck from the woods, the world seems to open up around us. Greater fields and pastures expand around us, and in the horizon
- houses, buildings, and bridges can be seen where the river appears to eventually split.
- Smoke-stacks rise in wispy plumes as the distant millings of yeomen can be heard far across the waters.
- The reindeer stands, motioning me to join him as he peers towards our destination. The boat is largely unfazed by the shift in balance.
- ???: Percy.

- P: Yes?
- He turns, his eyes overjoyed to meet mine.
- TS: Welcome to our Eden.
- I shivered.
-
- We dock along the river, beyond the split now; civilization surrounds us as we hobble out of the boat.
- Wooden huts and brick buildings run along dirt roads, sprawling in every direction.
- Walking off the dock and onto the dirt road, I take my first step onto the soil of the new world.
- I pause.
- ???: Everything alright?
- P: Yes.
- ???: Many of us had the same reaction. Come; I'm sure you're eager to see where you'll be staying.
- The four of us continue down the dirt-paved road. (Enter other actors)
- Wooden shacks slowly turn to wooden houses, and wooden houses turn to cobblestone.
- It's the silence that keeps me from taking it in. There is not a soul out on the streets.
- Yet, from the corner of my eye, I swear I've seen faces, peering behind closed curtains and front doors.
- I've a hard time believing this is real. Never before has a town appeared so... desolate.
- P: May I ask, where are the townsfolk?
- ???: Likely the fields. I'm not sure.
- P: Mmm....
- Soon, we reach a fork. On either path, the houses continue, but the left path winds towards a hill. Atop sits a white chapel.
- It's near blinding in the sunlight, its details imperceptible.
- ???: It was good to finally meet you, Percy. Victor here will show you to your accommodations.
- ???: We'll meet this evening in the meeting house, up there.
- He points to the left.
- ???: Let us pray you don't get lost!
- I force a laugh.
- P: Aye. That would be unfortunate.
- P: Thank you for your kindness.
- He nods.
- D: Peace be with you.
- I shield my eyes from the sunlight as they walk away.
- V: You coming?
- Victor is already a few paces ahead of me.
- P: My mistake.
- I catch up; we press on. House after house passes us without a word spoken, or a passerby met.
- We stop outside a two-story home—one of the few I've seen thus far in Providence.

- It is wooden, but I'd sooner believe it to be constructed from toothpicks than planks. Its stability is enough to spur one to praise the Lord.
- On closer inspection, the bottom floor appears to be a store; its austerity doesn't exactly scream "come on in".
- V: In here.
- P: But—
- V: She's kindly letting you stay on the second floor.
- I cannot exactly argue with that.
- We make our way inside; to the right is the store, though I haven't a chance to get a better look.
- Victor quickly ascends the stairs to the left, urging me to come along.
- V: Please do not tarry.
- P: Apologies.
- The staircase was thin; the walls squeezed one like the hug of an unfavorable family member.
- A hollow 'plonk' accompanied each step up the stairs, creaking with every ounce of weight.
- Finally at the top, a white door separated me from what I'd begin to call home.
- *Creeeeaaaaaak*
- The room is larger than I expected. Bare walls, a few windows, and some simple, wooden furniture; Thank God the bed is fully furnished.
- P: Spartan.
- V: Hmmph.
- He's positively radiating the blinding light of the Lord.
- P: What time can I expect to meet with... um.
- P: I'm sorry, I'm just realizing I never got his name—
- V: The Shepherd.
- Excuse me?
- P: The... Shepherd?
- V: Aye. Sunset.
- V: Don't be late.
- P: Uh-huh....
- In seconds, he's gone, pattering down the stairs.
- The room feels smaller.
- After a few moments of silence, I pace to the bed, sitting and facing the window.
- A beam of light falls to the floor as a society of dust waltzes in-and-out of God's eye.
- P: The Shepherd....
- Was he serious? Perhaps 'Shepherd' is a title for the clergy. But that doesn't account for the "the".
- Strange.
- Would he have told me that when I had asked?
- P: Hmm....
- I shrug. He's nice, at least. Daniel, too. Victor, though—a real gentleman, that one.
- I hope the other denizens are bit more genial than him, assuming they exist.
- I'm not too privy believing this Shepherd fellow looks after a congregation of ghosts.
- *sigh*

- I'm in need of a stretch.
-
- My belongings litter the room, hardly a dignifying sign of a competent diplomat.
- I can't imagine I'll be judged by my room's cleanliness, though.
- Around me, shadows melt in an orange light, stretched across whatever they can find like a reclining cat.
- I suppose I best leave.
-
- I scurry down the stairs, careful not to trip.
- ???: Goodness!!!
- I freeze; my caution blinded me from the old woman standing at the bottom, looking as though she'd been robbed.
- P: I'm so sorry!
- ???: Heavens! Be careful, lad.
- ???: That youthful zeal will be the death of both of us.
- P: Again, my apologies, sincerely.
- ???: It's alright, it's alright. You must be the tenant upstairs.
- P: Yes; it's a pleasure, uh...
- MH: Clarice Hardwicke. Ms. Hardwicke works fine.
- P: Yes, ma'am.
- She chuckles.
- MH: I see they haven't forgotten their manners in the homeland.
- P: No, no they have not.
- ...
- A wide grin stretches across her face, but her eyes tell a different story.
- Is she expecting something...?
- Casually, she extends a hand, gesturing.
- OH!
- P: Oh my Goodness. I'm a fool. I'm Percy!
- She laughs again, harder this time.
- MH: Part of me wanted to know how long it'd take you to realize.
- P: It's been a quite a day.
- P: I must admit, I had the exact same thing happen with that "Shepherd" character!
- Her countenance dropped.
- MH: That does not surprise me; praise be His guidance.
- P: Why is that?
- A pause drifted longer than expected.
- She gulped.
- MH: Well, he—
- MH: You must understand that—
- A sigh escapes.
- MH: Because he is our shepherd. His guidance.
- P: You sound disappointed.

- Damn; I shouldn't said that—
- MH: No! No, no, no. It's, uh...
- MH: Just strenuous—nay, impossible—to articulate.
- P: I understand.
- P: Well, it was a delight to meet you, Ms. Hardwicke. I should hope we'll meet again!
- MH: I'm here quite often. I'd love to hear tales of the old world.
- P: Aye, not much to tell.
- MH: Oh, I doubt that.
- P: Well, over tea sometime. But I must get going. Meeting The Shepherd.
- She nods.
- MH: Go in peace.
- P: Many thanks.
-
- The evening sun is warm in every facet. It sits atop a crown of toppling mountains.
- I hadn't noticed them before, but my God—they are tall. Higher than anything in Ethland.
- Some are snow-capped, some aren't. But great shadows stretch across the land.
- Two mountains, in particular, rise as a pair of twin peaks, dominating the northwest, competing with one another.
- And between us seems an ocean of forests and foothills as far as the mind's eye can comprehend.
- What the Edenites had found is truly something special, I must admit.
- Looking to the church before me, a modern, yet humble palace, I'm struck by a wave of newness.
- Social orders in Eurocs had ruptured before, but thus far it had only bred din and confusion.
- A whole religion torn apart, ripped to shreds by the hands of commoners, and kingdoms along with it.
- As I walk up the hill, though, I feel whole; this community feels whole.
- Standing at the top, Providence lies before me, encased in golden light.
- And this house of God, modest and fair, looks as much as one's home as it does a place of worship. A place of comfort and of rest.
- I shake my head.
- Focus.
- You're not here to flatter these people, much less convert to them.
- Don't let pretty sights get the best of you. You've only just arrived.
- I remember the Captain's words before.
- I rest my hand on the door's handle and breathe.
- The sun's light expires behind me, and I open the door with an aging creak.
-
- The space feels open, despite its small size. Brown and white dominate the palette.
- Wooden beams break up the monotony, with great, arched windows letting in the twilight.
- Only the pews, the pulpit, and the balcony above furnish the space.
- Daniel is by the pulpit, conversing with the man from before. His antlers reach like a bare tree to the sky, with a sober look upon his face.

- The Shepherd.
- They turn.
- TS: I'm pleased you made it.
- P: I apologize.
- P: I encountered Ms. Hardwicke as I left. She's a lovely woman.
- The Shepherd nods, smiling.
- TS: Only the most hospitable for our guest.
- He looks to Daniel-
- TS: So,
- -Then back to me.
- TS: Shall we begin?
- This is new.
- P: What, may I ask?
- TS: Our business.
- TS: I hope you didn't forget the reason you sailed across an ocean.
- P: Ah, I'm a fool. Forgive me.
- TS: No, no, don't say that.
- TS: Don't let doubt cloud your vision; accidents happen.
- TS: Daniel, you may leave.
- D: Yes. Peace be with you.
- He passes me, his steps echoing behind us.
- TS: You are a diplomat. We are blessed that Ethland has decided to pursue peace. Let bygones be bygones!
- TS: You are our guest, delivered safely by His Grace.
- TS: And under our generous wings, you reside among us, a guest in Eden.
- TS: And while you are here, we ought to establish rules.
- TS: Just a few.
- P: I understand.
- TS: Be mindful of who you speak to, and what you speak of.
- TS: Our people are happy here.
- TS: Don't do anything that might take that from them.
- P: I don't quite follow—
- He grabs my hand in his.
- TS: Good. I'm glad.
- TS: Blessed are the meek, yes?
- P: Yes?
- He smiles, letting go.
- TS: The world out there, it's sick. Men die. Women and children, too. Nations war, kings bark, and serfs control.
- TS: It's a sick economy, run by a currency of souls.
- TS: Souls destined to sing His praise. But the sheep are scattered, and wherever they are, they find their throats in the jaws of wolves—
- TS: All for power. Like a game of chess to some pagan deity across Eurocs.

- P: Please excuse me, but what are you getting at?
- TS: It's not a game we will play.
- I wince.
- His implication is unappreciated.
- P: Then why am I here? What do you expect us to settle?
- TS: Let us save that for the coming months.
- TS: I do not believe you come with ill intent. But as a sovereign individual,
- TS: All I ask is that... you consider what your leaders want, and what my people want.
- Sweat; I shiver. I want nothing more than to leap from my body. Why?
- Am I hot? Am I cold?
- P: I appreciate the hospita- hospitality. I wish only to establish a relationship, whatever that may be.
- He looks off to a window.
- TS: Of course.
- P: Your piety is admirable, and know I do not wish to interfere with that, nor does Ethland. You're far from our shores.
- P: We only, uh... what's that verse? "I didn't come with a sword, but with peace".
- TS: God bless.
- I nod.
- P: Indeed.
- TS: And, please.
- He turns his eyes to me.
- TS: Do avoid the woods.
- Silence.
- It lingers, creeping in like the night through the windows.
- P: May I ask why?
- TS: Much of it is uncharted. Getting lost would be a terrible fate. It's best to just avoid them.
- Just then, a door opens. A creaking fills the church, followed by steps.
- The Shepherd looks up; I quickly turn behind me.
- TS: Michael.
- M: Ahh! Oh goodness, I'm so sorry!
- A lithe canine pants, resting a paw against his chest as he regains his composure.
- His silhouette is half-illuminated in candlelight.
- M: I-I didn't expect you to still be here! I was just returning these hymns for tomorrow. I'd just remembered and, um... Uh.
- ...
- M: Hi.
- TS: Come meet our wonderful guest. They only just arrived this morning.
- M: My goodness.
- He hastens towards me, his black garb nearly tripping him along the way.
- M: My apologies. Michael Mathers. Peace be with you.
- He is eager to shake my hand, though his panting hasn't quite let up.
- M: I hope you've been enjoying Providence, yes?

- P: Aye. It's beautiful. You are truly lucky.
- M: I was hardly a child when I left Ethland. How is it?
- P: Better, better. I'm honored to be here on behalf of the Queen.
- His smile is contagious, a welcome bit of relief after the previous conversation.
- TS: Well, thank you, Michael. Perhaps it's time we all retire.
- M: I sure could use the sleep, heh.
- P: It's been a while since I slept in a real bed.
- TS: Well, we don't back down on our promises. I hope the accommodations are to your liking?
- P: Of course.
- TS: Good.
- M: I must go. But it was nice meeting you. We ought to talk sometime.
- P: My pleasure.
- He looks to the Shepherd.
- M: Bless.
- As he leaves, the Shepherd steps down, and we walk the isle.
- P: Before we go, may I ask: did you think I had any reason to go into the woods?
- He stops, chuckling for a moment.
- TS: I'm sorry. I know it's a miscellaneous point, and I didn't mean to frighten you.
- P: I understand.
- He places a hand on my back.
- TS: We are an island between great oceans.
- TS: But never were the Elect so alone than where they were.
- He opens the door; the cool, night air is like a drink of fresh, spring water as we leave the church behind us.
- TS: But our arrival here was gospel.
- TS: Now look at the fruits of our faith.
- Stars shine above as the trees shiver in the wind.
- TS: Goodnight.
- P: Goodnight.
-
- Sunlight touches my face. It hurts; I turn.
- *Yawn*
- No, no... It's time to get up. Come on.
- I open my eyes; the room blossoms with light. I push the covers off and haul myself onto my feet.
- Birds sing outside; I can hear the bustling of people outdoors.
- I wander to the window. The sun hangs just overhead. My God, it's late.
- Down below, the dutiful citizens go about their business, all dressed with austere piety, as one might expect.
- I get dressed and proceed downstairs.
- There isn't exactly anything I must do today. Perhaps I can get acquainted with Providence.
-
- P: Ms. Hardwicke?

- She looks around the corner.
- MH: Yes, dear?
- P: I just wanted to know if you were here. Good morning.
- She chuckles.
- MH: Good noon. The early bird must not get the worm across the pond, hmm?
- P: I know; it's hardly professional for me to sleep this late.
- P: Mind you, I spent weeks on that boat. I earned a good night's rest.
- MH: Hah! Sure you do, dear.
- She spares a laugh, before returning to whatever she had been working on.
- P: I'm think I'm going to go explore Providence; I do hope to see you later.
- MH: Lovely idea. Go in peace.
-
- I step outside; a couple passes me, exchanging looks, then going about their way.
- I try to remember what I'd passed yesterday, or what I could try and find.
- Where should I go...?

:By the river. :The Church.

—

River:

- It's a bit warm today; I'm sure it'll be refreshing.
-
- I make my way through town.
- To my surprise, people are actually... out.
- Their expressions are sober, walking with heads down, deviating only to throw me a passing glance.
- My outsider status is not lost to me. I must admit, I feel as uncomfortable as they do.
- They seem to hurry their pace as we pass; their lips are pursed tight. Might they have something to say?
- They'll get used to me. Or perhaps, I'll get used to them. To this.
-
- I reach the northern river. A bridge crosses it a little ways down stream. More houses can be seen on the other side.
- Though not many.
- It's strange. The bridge isn't wooden as one might expect, but stone, with arched gates.
- Dramatic. They haven't quite gotten the Ethlish out of their habits.
- The water trickles by without a care. I sit along the bank as a grasshopper leaps beside me.
- A cool breeze runs down the river like Hermes, late for a meeting with the sea.
- It's not unlike Ethland. I remember when grandfather took Cecily and me hunting for the first time.
- Cecily always had a knack for the bow, but I was more content to sit by the stream and watch the fish swim by.

- She'd thwack me upside the head when I least expect it. Granddad never took kindly to prying two imps off one-another.
 - "You ought to put the fear of God in 'em", he'd tell my mother. She'd look to us and give that agitated head-shake.
 - But the second he was out the door, "What an old fart", she said. We giggled like idiots.
 - Slipping off a shoe, I dip a toe into the water.
 - Frigid.
 - Must be that fresh, mountain water, as clear as the truth.
 - ???: It's the third one this season.
 - A voice sounds from behind me. A conversation?
 - ???: The Devil is at our doorstep.
 - Two women.
 - ???: This is unacceptable. Outrageous. What is the Shepherd going to do about this?
 - ???: Shhh, don't speak like that! I don't want to see you piked up on the Commons like Decency... Don't look at me like that.
 - ???: I wouldn't... I won't. I'm just as faithful as anyone here.
 - ???: That's no excuse to act a fool.
 - They pass behind me.
 - ???: I'm scared. What if it's my Isiah, next? I can't even begin to imagine how Hope must feel right now.
 - ???: Distraught. Like the others.
 - ???: God save us; It's happening all over again. We have to fight back.
 - ???: No one is going into those woods, Serenity. We'd sooner forsake... name.
 - ???: ... disappears... Hell to pay....
 - They fade in the distance. What just happened?
 - I stand up, looking to see two figures trek further into the distance.
 - Strung up? Third one this season? The woods?
 - I'd be an absolute fool to bring any of this up to the Shepherd.
 - Yes, yes. Of course. There's no need to bring it up. Follow her advice. Don't be a fool.
 - I feel the heat bear down on me.
 - Oppressive....
 - I'm not feeling well. I should head home....
-
- I shut the door behind me; the foyer hardly offers any respite from the heat.
 - Ms. Hardwicke looks around the corner.
 - MH: You didn't take long.
 - P: The weather is hardly sporting.
 - MH: Aye. The Good Lord sends a little bit too much of his warmth at times, but we're grateful nonetheless.
 - MH: Just you wait a few months, then you'll really have something to complain about.
 - P: I'll gladly let autumn take its time.
 - MH: Hah!
 - She walks back into her shop.

- MH: Would you like any tea?
 - P: Too hot.
 - MH: Spruce beer?
 - ... Spruce... beer?
 - P: What?
 - MH: You'll like it. Come in.
 - How very forward.
-
- I only just noticed I hadn't been in her shop yet.
 - Knick-knacks and trinkets decorate her shelves, whether they be dolls, axels, or silver platters.
 - And everything in between.
 - The air is musty, but it smells ambiguously of home.
 - She returns with a couple of mugs and a hefty jug of some opaque, brown liquid.
 - I swear there's a tree branch inside. This woman is mad.
 - She sets it on a side table.
 - MH: Go on! Sit.
 - She's nothing if not forward.
 - I oblige, taking a seat as she pours the strange liquid into a mug.
 - It froths at the mouth, bubbles popping at the surface as an intense aroma of pine fills the air.
 - P: Bloody hell, that's strong.
 - MH: Watch your profanity. And yes, yes it is.
 - MH: Bottom's up!
 - ...
 - I'm just looking at it. It's all I can do.
 - My stomach begins to turn at the thought—
 - MH: What are you waiting for?
 - P: Nothing! I'm sorry. I'm nervous about trying new foods.
 - MH: It's not gonna kill you!
 - I hope not.
 - Here goes.
 - *Sip*
 - ...
 - Woah.
 - WOAHH.
 - I jolt, a shiver erupting across my body as the flavor barrages my mouth.
 - P: Heugh. Ahh.
 - MH: Enjoying it?
 - I'm not sure if it's good. But it has character. No doubt about that.
 - P: Uh. Delicious.
 - I take another sip; it's more tolerable this time around, though it's still giving me a run for my money.
 - MH: I have to get back to work, but feel free to take it upstairs with you.
 - P: Thank you, Ms. Hardwicke.

- P: By the way, may I ask an odd question, perchance?
- MH: Aye.
- P: Have you heard any talk of disappearances, or the like?
- She stops dead in her tracks.
- MH: That... I... why are you asking?
- P: I overheard a conversation while I was out.
- Her gaze falls. She begins to say something, but stops herself before the words see the light of day.
- P: Ms. Hardwicke?
- MH: Wolves. They can be particularly active this season.
- MH: So, a few unlucky individuals go missing. It's tragic, but that's what happens when one lives on the frontier.
- P: Huh. I suppose I understand.
- P: Anyways, thanks for the beer.
- MH: Be careful.
- P: Alright.
- I turn and walk up the stairs.
- Be careful?
- Of what—
- P: Gah!!!!
- Spruce beer splashes onto the wood as I catch myself, having tripped on the top stair.
- MH: Everything alright!?
- P: Yes! No worries!
- What a charmer you are.
- I pick myself up and curse myself for the mess I've made.
- P: Hope she left me a wash-cloth....

—

Church:

- I wonder if any familiar faces are up at the church.
-
- I'm already sweating. Mercy me, it is a hot day.
- The white wood is near-blinding in this sunlight, but I'm so close.
- *huff*
- *huff*
- *huff*
- I collapse against the side. The view is as astonishing as ever.
- I turn and knock on the door.
- No answer.
- It opens with a slight push; only sunlight illuminates the lonely pews.
- The air is cooler inside, a relief from the late-summer oppression outside.
- P: Hello?

- That word echoes briefly, then fades.
- I suppose it's just me and the Lord.
- I meander to the pulpit, sitting high above on a raised platform, accessible by stairs.
- A great window stands above, sending a gust of light into the room.
- Atop the pulpit, everything seems much smaller.
- I rest my hands against the wood and I feel my back straighten up.
- What a feeling....
- I feel childish. My feet take a step back, and it's only then I notice a shelf beneath the podium.
- My curiosity gets the best of me.
- Hunkering down, I find it's mostly empty. Mostly.
- On the bottom shelf appears to be a book; likely a Bible.
- The cover bears only a symbol: a pair of staves cross one another, with a star shining above them.
- It resembles the one on the ship mast I saw yesterday...
- *Creeeeeeaaaak*
- Fear let's lose a silent shriek throughout my body, freezing me in place.
- *Pit-Pat Pit-Pat Pit-Pat*
- They're getting closer. They mustn't have any reason to come up here, though. Just stay silent.
- Stay silent.
- *Pit-Pat*
- ...
- Who are you?
- What are you doing?
- Oh, please be done with it.
- ... *Pit-Pat Pit-Pat*...
- I can't help it.
- Gripping the wood, I begin to slowly peek around the corner of the pulpit.
- Nothing.
- The door is still open.
- I bring my head back and take a breath.
- Be swift.
- Stuff the book in my pocket.
- Stand up.
- Walk down the stairs.
- Door is still open. Go.
- Keep walking; no one is here.
-
- Sunlight blinds me as I make it outside; it takes a few seconds for my wincing eyes to adjust.
- ????: Oh!
- My head whips to the voice.
- P: Michael?
- He's standing against front of the church, pen in one hand, and a tiny notebook in the other.

- M: Goodness. I'm not sure if I'm more surprised to see you here, or that I never got your name. This is so embarrassing. And what were you...?
- P: It's such a beautiful building; I wanted to come see it in the daylight.
- Technically not a lie.
- P: I hid the second I heard you; I'm sorry.
- M: It's quite alright—
- P: And Percy.
- Michael flinches.
- P: My name is Percy.
- M: Ah! Thank you. Percy. I shan't make that mistake again.
- My heart pounds like a war-drum.
- P: Uh, what're you doing here?
- M: Oh, I was actually looking for someone.
- P: I reckon they weren't here.
- M: No, no.
- A worried expression drags his gaze down.
- M: I tried the tavern, the chapel, the market.
- P: Who are you looking for?
- M: A woman, Ms. Gallagher.
- P: May I help?
- He smiles at me, patting my shoulder.
- M: That's very kind of you. And on many an occasion, I'd take you up on that offer.
- M: Unfortunately, I'm not terribly eager for the conversation she and I must have. It wouldn't be appropriate to have you there.
- P: I understand. Did something happen?
- Michael takes in a sharp exhale, then lets it out in a sigh.
- M: Her child went missing. That's really all I feel comfortable saying.
- P: I see.... Well. If you ever need help, I'm more than happy to oblige.
- M: I'll remember that. Thank you. (+1 TRUST)
- He makes his way down the hill, leaving me standing alone, heart still pounding.
- The heat only feels worse. I should head home....
-
- I shut the door behind me; the foyer hardly offers any respite from the heat.
- Ms. Hardwicke looks around the corner.
- MH: You didn't take long.
- P: The weather is hardly sporting.
- MH: Aye. The Good Lord sends a little bit too much of his warmth at times, but we're grateful nonetheless.
- MH: Just you wait a few months, then you'll really have something to complain about.
- P: I'll gladly let autumn take its leisurely time.
- MH: Hah!
- She walks back into her shop.
- MH: Would you like any tea?

- P: Too hot.
- MH: Spruce beer?
- ... Spruce... beer?
- P: What?
- MH: You'll like it. Come in.
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- My stomach begins to turn at the thought–
- MH: What are you waiting for?
- P: Nothing! I'm sorry. I'm nervous about trying new foods.
- MH: It's not gonna kill you!
- I hope not.
- Here goes.
- *Sip*
- ...
- Woah.
- WOAHH.
- I jolt, a shiver erupting across my body as the flavor barrages my mouth.
- P: Heugh. Ahh.
- MH: Enjoying it?
- I'm not sure if it's good. But it has character. No doubt about that.
- P: Uh. Delicious.
- I take another sip; it's more tolerable this time around, though it's still giving me a run for my money.
- MH: I have to get back to work, but feel free to take it upstairs with you.
- P: Thanks, Miss Hardwicke.
- P: By the way, may I ask an odd question, perchance?

- MH: Aye.
- P: Have you heard any talk of disappearances, or the like?
- She stops dead in her tracks.
- MH: That... I... why are you asking?
- P: I spoke to that pastor, Michael. He mentioned it in passing.
- MH: Ahh... A good lad, that one. No, I can't say I have, but it does happen every so often.
- MH: It's unfortunate.
- P: Why?
- MH: Why what?
- P: Why do people go missing?
- MH: Wolves, or... they get lost. Frontier life is a dangerous thing, son, you best learn that.
- MH: Don't forget to be careful.
- That sounds vague, but I guess I understand.
- P: Will do.
- P: Oh, and thanks for the spruce beer.
- MH: Should you ever crave anymore, you know where to find me.
- P: Without a doubt.
- We exchange smiles, then I make my way upstairs.
- I uncover the book I'd had hidden and sit it on my bed.
- I want to look through it, but the heat has me fatigued.
- A nap will do. The book and I get tucked into bed as the late afternoon light only grows warmer and warmer in hue.

—

(Story merges again)

- ...
- ...
- Am I awake?
- The world is silent, but I'm not sure if my eyes are shut.
- I rub my eyes, lifting my eyelids only to find if I'd had any to begin with.
- What time is it?
- I have... no idea.
- ...
- ...
- My vision begins to adjust. Moonlight trickles in through the window. At the foot of the door, I see a platter with food.
- God bless.
- P: She didn't have to do that...
- I rise, stumbling from under the covers, dragging them along with me.
- Shambling to the food, I crouch and dip my finger into what I assume is a bowl of soup.
- Cold.

- This is what you get for having a late afternoon, Percy.
- I set the tray on my bedside table, then meander over to the window.
- The world is still; moonlight carves a scene of shadows from a dim, blue marble, chiseling out the town below.
- It's about as still as when I'd first arrived. Though, I'm willing to bet everyone is asleep.
- The window slides open with a firm pull, proceeded by a gush of cool, nocturnal air,
- Carrying with it the musings of insects, humming their night-time lullaby for none to hear,
- Save for me.
- But the night is sweet, and I want to enjoy it. A few moments of this is far better than a dreamless sleep.
- I lean my head on the window sill, closing my eyes and smelling the air.
- Autumn is on the horizon.
- "O, season of mists and mellow fruitfulness," I recall a friend describing.
- Dry leaves rustle in the night as the scent of their decay lingers with each breeze, crisp and enlivened with the scent of apples.
- What a place.
- I open my eyes and gaze at the indistinct horizon, before steering my gaze below to the streets.
- Movement.
- I'm not sure what, but... something just moved.
- It was fast. Was it a person? Was it big?
- It clung to the shadows, dashing down the road into an alley to the right.
- *Pit-pat pit-pat pit-pat pit-pat*
- I look down; someone's running.
- Down the road, in front of the house, and to the right.
- They freeze.
- Like a marble statue in moonlight, the figure is wreathed in darkness, save for a pale sliver of light on their back.
- They look to be short and thin, staring ahead without a single flinch.
- I lean my head out the window, trying to catch a glimpse further down the road.
- Come on, just a little more.
- Fingers dig further into the window sill, my chest beginning to hover above, I'd say...
- 20 feet of air?
- Don't fall. You can do this.
- *Pit. Pat. Pit. Pat.*
- Damn, come on!
- They begin to walk away, continuing down the road at an agonizingly slow pace.
- A beam of moonlight flashes—
- Light brown fur.
- Black-tip tail.
- A stoat?
- P: SHIT!
- My feet slip—
- Stomach digs into the sill.

- I lurch–
- Arm outstretched.
- *Back! Back!*
- I whack one hand into the wood; the other grips the sill for dear life.
- The other arm dangles out.
- *PUSH!*
- P: Urghhhh....
- I fall back into the room.
- P: To hell with me....
- In, out... In, out... Breathe.
- I slowly get off my backside, rising to my feet.
- I turn to the door. I have to know what just happened.
-
- (Foyer)
- Each step threatens a monstrous creak; my hands grip the stair rail, holding up my weight.
- Just a couple more to go....
-
- (Outside)
- The door slips open; a slice of cool air cuts through indoors.
- The dirt clings to the soles of my feet as I make my way outside, creeping to the middle of the road.
- Nothing.
- The road stretches on between houses and alleys; the forest looms far away.
- Dammit to hell, I saw something. That person, but...
- Also that thing. The shadow.
- The alley looks empty.
- Below, the ground is trampled with a thousand footprints, worn well over the years.
- *Sigh*
- I concede defeat. There's nothing.
- Turning back and stepping towards the house, the crunching of dirt is all I hear.
- No, wait.
- That's not right.
- I stop.
- ...
- Cross my heart, and hope to die,
- I swear I heard insects earlier.
- By the window while I was resting.
- ...
- Nothing. There's nothing now.
- Not even the rustling of leaves.
- Only the slightest breeze makes its way along the empty roads, as though the world were almost breathless.
- *sniff*

- *sniff sniff*
- Something sour. Something sweet.
- It's faint, but it's there; I swear to God it's there.
- I know that smell, but from where....
- I thrash my Gaze around. Where the hell is it coming from!?
- No, no....
- I feel sick. I don't want to be out here anymore.
- A shiver grips my body. I should just go back to bed.
- This is silly.
-
- (Bedroom)
- I shut the window and return to bed; the covers offer a soothing embrace.
- *Yawwwwn...*
- ...
- This pillow doesn't feel right.
- I turn to my other side.
- Better...
- I hate waiting for sleep.
- Closing my eyes only feels boring, but leaving them open delays the inevitable.
- On the opposite bedside table sits an oil lamp.
- P: That would've been helpful minutes ago.
- An oil lamp...
- I begin to remember.
- Gosh, how old was I? 8?
- Cecily was still much taller than me.
- Something was beneath the floor boards. It drove mother mad.
- It skittered about at odd hours; she feared we had mice.
- But it was too big to be mice. It was a singular thing.
- For a week, it went on. Only a few days after the sound stop did she ask one of us to please check what was under there.
- I was the man of the house. Naturally, it'd be me, oil lamp in hand.
- Along the backside of our house was what looked to have been a small burrow, caved in by our home's rock foundation.
- Wooden boards lay above the stone.
- I pried open a rotten plank and peered in, the fire's warm light reflecting cobwebs and a myriad of flies.
- And the smell...
- Yes.
- I think I remember the smell.
- It was death.
-
- (Day 3)
- I dream of nothing.

- The gentle pattering of civilian life carries on, muffled, outside.
- My body hardly wants to move, but I really ought not let the day slip away like I had yesterday.
- The wood floor is cold against my bare feet. I see last night's dinner is still on my bedside table.
- Did last night happen?
- I know I wasn't dreaming. That was real. That shadow. That smell....
- Meandering to the window, I gaze outside; a blanket of grey stretches across the sky. Below, a couple men pace down the road.
- Tomorrow I meet with the Shepherd.
- My stomach twists into a knot. For whatever reason, my mind can hardly imagine where our talks ought to begin.
- I can't imagine many other diplomats have dealt with rogue colonies that went unnoticed (and unchecked) for nearly two decades.
- There's a first for everything, isn't there.
- I think I need some fresh air.
-
- (Outside)
- Dressed and ready for the day, I step outside.
- The morning is crisp, with a chill nip to boot.
- I want to go somewhere, do something, and get my mind off things.
- I can't help but feel a little isolated. Ms. Hardwicke is perfect good company, but even then....
- A walk will do.

:Go Left: :Go Right:

—

Left:

- My stomach twists further. I don't quite feel comfortable looking to the right.
- I'll stick to the familiar.
- And speaking of which, I see a familiar face approaching from the left.
- M: Percy?
- P: Michael? Hello.
- M: Good day! How are you?
- P: I'm quite alright. I was just about to talk a walk.
- M: Oh? Where to?
- P: Heh, well...
- P: I'll be honest, I'm not sure.
- P: Probably into town, or along the river. I still haven't seen much of the town as of yet.
- M: Ah. Well, I can accompany if you'd like.
- P: I'd hate to take time out of your day, if you're busy.
- M: No. Praise be, I've few responsibilities to attend to today. I'm fine.
- P: Then I don't see why not.

- He smiled, his cheeks positively glowing.
- M: Great! Let's be on our way.
-
- The town is calm today. Stern faces past us by; the river flows gently, with a sea of grain just on the other side.
- P: I apologize if you just came from this way.
- M: No, no. It's fine.

—

Right:

- An eerie feeling washes over me.
- Last night, I looked in the same direction; now in the midst of day, the visage is as average as any.
- I haven't been down this way yet anyways. Am I wrong for feeling a tad bit curious?
- M: Percy?
- I turn my gaze.
- P: Michael?
- M: Good morning! How are you?
- P: Quite well, quite well. Uh, how about yourself?
- M: Heh, I'm alright. Just on a stroll is all.
- P: As am I, to be honest. I can't say it hurts to see a friendly face.
- M: I should hope not! Would you care to accompany me?
- P: I'd hate to take any time out of your day.
- M: Nonsense. Praise be, I've only a few responsibilities to attend to today.
- M: I insist.
- P: Can't argue with that. Sure.
- He smiled, his cheeks positively glowing.
- M: Great! Let's be on our way.
-
- (Walking)
- M: I come this way quite often on my walks.
- M: Especially around this time of year, during the harvest; the fields to the north are absolutely beautiful.
- M: The graveyard, too. It's remarkable this time of year.
- P: Graveyard?
- M: Aye. There's only one. Behind the chapel hill.
- P: Interesting...
- P: Why one?
- Michael shrugs.
- M: I'm not sure. But... there is something strangely calming about it.
- M: All of Eden's dead, the progenitors of this land, all resting in one place.
- P: Mmm....

- ...
- M: Do you want to see it?
- P: Okay.
-
- (Graveyard)
- He was not lying. This place is big.
- I've seen larger back in Ethland, but never one so concentrated, or orderly.
- Rows of graves stretch on over the backside of the hill; on the edge is the forest,
- An imposing wall of wood just waiting to be sacrificed for Providence's dead.
- We toured a couple rows; ornate carvings of angels and other heavenly iconography decorated the gravestones.
- It doesn't feel so much like a memento mori, but instead a promise of something better, more peaceful.
- That's likely exactly what they're trying to inspire.
- P: How many originally came from Ethland, do you know?
- M: Some 700, if I recall correctly.
- P: There are hundreds of graves here, Michael. If I may ask... why?
- He continues to walk beside me, a pensive look engraved across his face.