

SCENE III. Dressing Room

EM sits, plaiting her hair in a basic braid with SELBY hovering, jumping in awkwardly and often, trying to be useful.

EM
For years I've done this plait! Does it offend you so?

SELBY
No! My lady, not at all! It is my honor to serve!

EM continues, eventually becoming too exasperated at the chaos at the back of her head.

EM
I will assume that by "honor" you mean "duty," and gladly relieve you of it for the moment!

SELBY sits on a nearby stool and picks up some mending. EM takes out the misshapen braid, uncomfortable in the silence.

EM
I am sorry. Truly. I am not used to a "waiting lady."

SELBY
(Gently correcting) But I am proud to be your Lady-in-waiting.

EM
Yes. That. I was not taught to rely on others for work easily done myself, so your presence is a puzzle.

SELBY
I see that, my lady. If it is not to be my duty, then let it be a simple offer to assist?

EM sits a moment, then hands over the brush.

SELBY
You are more warrior than woman, and I have never before been quite so frightened by another female. *(Tumbling out)* To accompany Cook to market and - like lightning - turn his own hook on that old leech of a butcher-

EM's gaze jerks sharply to SELBY and she gasps and lowers her head only to feel EM's hair shaking in her hands from laughter.

EM
He shat himself. I'd take a clang to the helm if I'm wrong on that.

SELBY
Oh my lady! I'm not sure what to make of you! But I do mean honor. I am no spear spinner, nor do I have any grand design of my future. I am content within the safety of these walls. The food is good, I have many friends, I harbor no taste for the men's world like you. My gifts seem plain but it is a joy to use them. You have lost much, my lady; life is not wrong to lend a little care.

EM cracks wide open at the gentleness. SELBY is finished braiding and guesses correctly-

SELBY

If I may, I shall take my leave to prepare a tea?

EM nods and watches her go, composing herself, then walks to the balcony.

EM

Come, Augakrâke, I beg thee to my side,
Oh! If I know my chain still holds one link,
I'll shoot my fallen soul aloft again!

Augakrâke, her crow, appears.

Ah me, he hears! Draw nearer, eye divine,
I have need of sight beyond my stature!
Climb, at once, and scan the murky land
To find the band of three I've lately lost,
And bring them to this broken heart and hands!

Augakrâke is old, but does his best.

So, one link doth remain to wing a dream!
I'd given all for lost, yet morning light
englows the hoary frost; I'll glow til death
To light my sisters home, or if I be
Alone, then deathly prayers will swiftly come
To stop my keening heart and close my womb!

Distant squawks.

A snapt response!

Augakrâke returns, croaking wildly.

All three? My heart returns!

The SISTERS crest a hill, stumbling because they're looking up, following a damn bird. EM checks the coast is clear and measuredly walks down to greet them before all four collide in a joyful hug, keeping tucked behind a hillock.

GEFA

Praise to Odin for my run!

RÚNA

Oh, how she flies on youth alone!

EM

What is this new stooping of your frames!

GEFA

A fine disguise to hide our face!
Though, I confess, I'd wish a brace!

JÓÐHILDR

Here, step aside avoid the path!
Or face encroaching horsemen's wrath!

GEFA

We three have saved you! Loose your brow!

RÚNA

From past we make our present now!

JÓÐHILDR

To scrub your bowl of bitter sauce
And ease the stinging of your loss.

GEFA

To steal your future mother milk
From that meek half a flap-wit's ilk.

RÚNA produces a vial of the tonic they made earlier.

RÚNA

(wary of GEFA listening) This tonic will address his fount

GEFA

(She's not supposed to know this, but she does!) If he has tried his luck at mount!

RÚNA

I'd spit in wind to show his gills!
The dund-head cod!

JÓÐHILDR

The poxheart brill!

GEFA

The blounder's pole star!

EM

Hearty ayes to these!
She is most blest that has herself such sisters,
Thus I weep most for thoughts of daughters lost;
Ah me, so high a price to hem in sons,
Yet, in this wicked world with half-heart fathers
Not one should stretch his line beyond his time!
My false beloved charts our course in glancings
Toward my belly, yet his mem'ries breach-
In shame, he turns his sight to wide horizons,
And seeks to shine his name with conqueror's beams.
So what to do to damn so utterly
No matter where he sets his eyes he sees?

RÚNA

There's tricks for this-