

THE GARDEN AGE

Written and Developed by

Matthew Acuña

plpgma@gmail.com  
(301)-873-8783

**EXT. GRASS FOREST - MORNING**

Just beyond the cricket city of WOODFALL, MARNIE (16, CRICKET) examines various pieces of HUMAN TRASH. There is a PENNY, a THUMB TACK, a POTATO CHIP and a WAD OF GUM on the ground. She approaches the wad of gum and pokes it. She pulls out a BOOK made from leaves and writes in it.

MARNIE

Very adhesive.

(SNIFF)

And smells like grapes. Definitely a keeper.

She closes the book.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

I could use this to fortify Woodfall's defenses and cover up the cattlepillar manure smell! Win, win yet again, Marnie!

She looks down at the wad of gum.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Now the question is... how to get it back?

Marnie digs her hands into the wad of gum and starts trying to lift it. It's really stuck on the ground. As she lifts, the dirt around it starts to crack.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Just... a little bit... more!

The dirt crumbles, and Marnie tumbles down below into an unseen ravine.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Ack!

She regains her composure and realizes some of the gum got in her hair.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Oh, come on, I just washed my hair!

She starts pulling the gum out before she sniffs the air.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

That's not grape.

She looks up and sees a small pool of rainbow liquid - GASOLINE.

MARNIE (CONT'D)  
It can't be.

She flips open her book to a page detailing the liquid.

MARNIE (CONT'D)  
Rainbow liquid.

She sniffs again and winces.

MARNIE (CONT'D)  
Putrid smell.  
(BEAT)  
This is from Mom's research.  
There's no doubt about it, this is  
the blood of the Great Devourer.

Marnie's face is filled with wonder, before a look of fear washes over her. She quickly jots down notes, but her concentration is broken by the sound of a HORN in the distance.

MARNIE (CONT'D)  
Sap! I'm late!

She shuts her book and starts running off. She stops and turns to the gasoline.

MARNIE (CONT'D)  
I'll come back for you!!

**EXT. WOODFALL - CASTLE GRYLL DAE**

Establishing shot of CASTLE GRYLL DAE, a castle made from an old flower pot flipped upside down, with the cricket town of WOODFALL in front. Ice is melting on top of the various buildings. Marnie makes her way to the back of the castle and enters.

**INT. CASTLE GRYLL DAE - HALLS**

The walls of the hall are adorned with grand tapestries depicting the royal cricket family of Clan Gryll Dae. Two rolled up tapestries cling to the walls at the edge of the hall. A cautious scan, then Marnie creeps down the hall. She runs into her older twin sisters AILITH and HILDA.

AILITH  
Marnie.

HILDA  
Marnie.

MARNIE  
AH! Don't do that!

The twins speak in rapid succession of each other.

AILITH

You know, we have a perfectly good front gate.

MARNIE

Well, the thing is-

HILDA

So strange that you'd use the back door.

MARNIE

I just-

AILITH

You'd think you'd want to walk through the festival.

MARNIE

Will you let me-

HILDA

You know, the one we put together for your Kindling Ceremony.

AILITH

Do you remember our Kindling Ceremony, Hilda?

HILDA

Aye, I do, Ailith. Though, I remember actually being at ours.

The twins both sarcastically rub their chin contemplating this.

MARNIE

Yeah, well, maybe I don't want to have everyone gawking at me during some stupid festival, alright?!

ROOT (O.S.)

Some stupid festival?

Ailith and Hilda part to reveal Marnie's older brother ROOT (27) standing behind them towards the end of the hall.

MARNIE

Sap.

He makes his way down to where they are.

ROOT

This stupid festival is a celebration of you, Marnie. Today you turn 16 and become a warrior of Clan Gryll Dae.

Marnie sulks as she gets lectured. She's used to it.

MARNIE

I know, I know, it's a sacred experience and I'll become one with the flame and family. It will light my soul on fire and blah, blah, blah.

ROOT

If you know so well, you must have gathered the sacred powder while you were out, right? The powder you'll put into the flame tonight?

MARNIE

The... powder...?

AILITH

She doesn't even remember.

HILDA

Unbelievable. Is what I'd say if it wasn't completely believable.

MARNIE

Will you two butt out?!

ROOT

You had one task while you were gone! What distracted you this time? Stealing artifacts from the Giants? Drawing your little doodles?

MARNIE

It's not that! It's just-

Marnie pulls out her book and shows off her notes.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

I've found something that can teach us more about the Great Devourer!

ROOT

Oh, Giants, not this again. Marnie, we've had this talk. The beast doesn't exist.

Marnie flips through the pages trying to find something to convince Root.

MARNIE

But I've actually found the Beast's blood! It real, Root! See?

Marnie opens up the canteen to give him a whiff. He's immediately taken aback.

ROOT

Ugh! Did you get this from the cattlepillar stables? You're too old for pranks, Marnie.

MARNIE

Why won't you take me seriously? Mom and Dad gave their *lives* to stop the beast!

ROOT

No they didn't! They went off to mess around with some fairy-tale and left us all behind!

Root sees the pain in his sisters eye and tries to calm down.

ROOT (CONT'D)

It's important for us to look to the old ways in times like these, together.

Root puts his hand on Marnie's shoulder, but she shrugs it off. Root sighs.

ROOT (CONT'D)

I'm going to have to move things around for you to get the powder later. For now, just get to town square for the Meeting of the Elders.

AILITH

Also known as...

HILDA

The Pinching of Cheeks.

Marnie apprehensively rubs her cheeks.

MARNIE

Fine...

Marnie reluctantly walks off towards town square. Root longingly looks at a tapestry of their parents.

ROOT

Am I being too hard on her?

AILITH

You're babying her. Let her make her mistakes.

HILDA

She'll keep making them if you don't.

**EXT. WOODFALL - TOWN SQUARE - DAY**

The Kindling Ceremony is in full swing in Woodfall. The atmosphere is jovial, and activities line the streets: food stalls, river dancing and weapon shops.

Marnie sits in the middle of the town square on her THRONE. Her elderly relatives are pinching her cheeks while she awkwardly smiles at them.

ELDERLY CRICKET

Ah, I remember when you were just a pupa! Your parents would be so proud of you.

At the entrance to town square OWEN (17, SNAIL) arrives, looking wide-eyed and full of excitement.

OWEN

Ah, smell that festival air, stomach! Today we're finally eating food that isn't covered in dirt!

Owen dances around the festival, taking in the sights like a hipster backpacker. He pulls out his DULCIMER, made from a sunflower seed, and plays along with the music. He catches the glimpse of a food stall selling SPICED ELDERBERRY.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Spiced Elderberry?!

He *slowly* rushes over. The SHOPKEEPER is busy helping other customers. Owen helps himself to one of the berries on the counter. He eats in bliss. The shopkeeper notices.

SHOPKEEPER

Hey!! What do you think you're doing?!

A few festival goers notice the commotion and watch on.

OWEN

Not to worry, my good man! I have  
your payment right here!

Owen pulls out his dulcimer and plays a song. The shopkeeper  
looks confused and angry.

OWEN (CONT'D)

(SINGING)

*There's no place like Woodfall,  
home of Clan Gryll Dae! The  
Crickets are lovely and have legs  
for days!*

Owen winks at an ELDERLY CRICKET. She looks incredibly  
unamused. He shimmies away from her while still playing his  
dulcimer.

OWEN (CONT'D)

I believe that should cover it.

Root approaches.

ROOT

What's going on here? Jigs are  
relegated to the designated jiggling  
areas.

SHOPKEEPER

This little thief is passing off  
his annoying song as payment!

OWEN

You don't have to be rude about it!  
I paid fair and square, but I can  
see an encore is in order!

Owen starts to strum, but he's getting nervous. Marnie  
notices the commotion from her throne.

OWEN (CONT'D)

(SINGING)

*In Meadowlark, the land of bugs,  
there roamed a beast of metal.*

Marnie's feelers immediately perk up at this.

MARNIE

Beast of metal...

ROOT

That's it, your jig is up. Guards!



Guards approach. Owen sings faster, in a panicked state.

OWEN

(SINGING FASTER)

*It ate the world a thousand times,  
right down to the very last petal!*

(BEAT)

Ahh, how does the rest of it go??

The guards are about to grab Owen to arrest him, but Marnie quickly interjects.

MARNIE

Oh!! There you are, I've been  
looking everywhere for you!

ROOT

Marnie, you know him?

MARNIE

Of course! This is my new  
attendant, um...

OWEN

Owen, loyal attendant! And I went  
to get her some Spiced Elderberry!

ROOT

You know my sister is severely  
allergic to elderberries, right?

OWEN

...I do now.

Root looks suspicious. Marnie smiles nervously.

ROOT

I don't remember approving an  
attendant for you.

MARNIE

I decided it was finally time to  
get one myself. After all, today I  
become a warrior, right?

Root contemplates this for a moment before relaxing.

ROOT

Well... it's good you recognize  
your time is valuable.

MARNIE

That's something we can agree on.

ROOT

You can take a short break from greeting family to get more acquainted. We don't want a repeat of this allergy mix-up.

Root nods at the two of them and departs. The shopkeeper glares at Owen and gets back to business. Owen turns to Marnie.

OWEN

Wow, I don't know how I can repay you.

(BEAT)

How about with a song?

Owen starts playing a song. Marnie quickly stops him.

MARNIE

Or how about no singing until we get to my workshop?

Owen zips his lips and the two move through the crowd. He begins strumming his dulcimer.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

And no dulcimer either!

**INT. CASTLE GRYLL DAE - MARNIE'S ROOM - DAY**

Marnie's room is filled to the brim with items left behind from humans, along with the inventions she creates out of them. Bottle caps, quarters, candy wrappers and thumbtacks fill the shelves around her room.

OWEN

Wow. Now *this* is really something.

Owen picks up a thumbtack. He goes to touch the pointy bit before Marnie swipes it from him, placing it back on the shelf.

MARNIE

Are you some sort of idiot?

OWEN

I'm more of a lover, myself.

MARNIE

Music isn't money. That's how you get arrested.

OWEN

That's how my parents taught me! It always seemed to work when they did it. I guess music is worthless around here.

MARNIE

I wouldn't say that. That song you sang just now, where'd you learn it from?

OWEN

Oh that? Just something my grandfather taught me.

MARNIE

So he knows about the Great Devourer?

OWEN

The great what now?

MARNIE

The mechanical leviathan? The beast of metal?! You just sang about it!

Marnie pulls a curtain back on her wall, revealing a large MURAL, which is actually just a ripped out piece of a lawnmower instruction manual. The crumbled and stained paper shows the machine and all its parts labeled.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Only one insect has ever seen the beast, thousands of years ago. It's said that when the ice melts and the flowers bloom, it will return to consume all that we know.

Owen's stomach grumbles.

OWEN

Man, I'd love to consume all that I know right now.

MARNIE

This isn't a joke, you know. My parents gave their lives to prove it's real.

OWEN

Lady Marnie... I didn't know, please forgive me.

MARNIE

Nobody in my family believes it exists, and especially not that the Giants created it. But... maybe hearing your song could convince them!

OWEN

Sorry, Lady Marnie, but... I don't know the rest.

Marnie sits and puts her head in her hands.

MARNIE

You can go now.

OWEN

I don't really have anywhere to go. I was hoping I could stay with you.

MARNIE

What? Oh no. I do not need an attendant.

OWEN

But you said all that stuff to your brother!

MARNIE

Uh, yeah, I was lying.

OWEN

But the next town is so far!

MARNIE

Well, guess you'd better get a head start then.

OWEN

Wait, I remember now!

Marnie's feelers perk up.

MARNIE

You do...?

OWEN

Yes!

(BEAT)

I remember that there's more to the song!

Marnie's look of intrigue turns to annoyance.

OWEN (CONT'D)

But I'm on the cusp of it! Just  
give me the day, I'm sure it'll  
come to me!

MARNIE

Fine. I'll give you the rest of  
today to figure it out, but then  
you're out of here.

Owen picks up a MARBLE and rolls it around his shoulder.

OWEN

Understood! And while I'm here,  
I'll be the best attendant you've  
ever had!

Owen drops the ball, literally. The marble rolls into a  
shelf, knocking all the trinkets off of it.

MARNIE

Or the worst.

OWEN

Well, technically I'm both, since  
I'm your first.

(BEAT)

Right, I'll clean that up.

Marnie face palms.

**END OF ACT ONE**

ACT TWOEXT. MEADOWLARK PLAINS - DAY

In the fields outside of Woodfall, a covered WAGON is pulled along by two CATTLEPILLARS, which are a combination of caterpillars and cattle. Walking alongside the wagon are various GUARDS sporting the insignia of the Garden Empire.

MEDORA (O.S.)

Stop!

The wagon comes to a sudden halt. The doors swing open, revealing MEDORA (17, Orchid Mantis), the princess of the Garden Empire.

GUARD

Are you sure we should stop here, Princess Medora? The Empress was very clear about not wasting time.

MEDORA

I'm to be your future Empress. You would call my mission a 'waste of time'?

GUARD

N-No, that's not what I meant, I-

MEDORA

You are forgiven. But do not forget to whom you speak.

She pulls out a map.

MEDORA (CONT'D)

I've followed the legends. This is exactly where the flame should be.

VIVI, a monstrous bug, exits the wagon. She wears a concealing black cloak, hiding what type of bug she is.

VIVI

I don't see any flame.

MEDORA

Well, I didn't mean literally right here.

VIVI

You've gotten us lost. And I've lost my patience.

Vivi turns to the guards.

VIVI (CONT'D)  
I'm enacting Order 25.

MEDORA  
You *what*?

VIVI  
*In other words*, as one of the four  
Generals of the Garden, I override  
your authority.

MEDORA  
You can't do that, Vivi!

VIVI  
Empress Anju sent *me* on the mission  
to locate the flame. You just  
decided you wanted to play politics  
at the last minute.

Medora looks down at her map once more.

MEDORA  
I will prove myself to the people  
of the Garden.

VIVI  
We're doing things *my way* now.  
Understand, princess?

Medora angrily stares at Vivi before giving in.

VIVI (CONT'D)  
The flame is obviously in some bugs  
possession. Whoever is hiding it  
from me must be very cunning.

**EXT. WOODFALL - TOWN SQUARE - DAY**

SMASH CUT TO Owen guzzling a mountain of Spiced Elderberries  
as Ailith and Hilda cheer him on.

AILITH  
Chug! Chug! Chug!

HILDA  
Chug! Chug! Chug!

He stops for a brief moment.

OWEN  
A-Are you sure it's the attendant's  
job to take her place in the berry  
eating contest?

AILITH  
Less talking, more eating!

Marnie runs up and stops him.

MARNIE  
Leave him alone!

AILITH  
Fine, but he was about to beat  
Moirra's record.

Ailith and Hilda walk away.

MARNIE  
Did that trigger any memories?

OWEN  
Yeah, but mostly from that one  
weekend I had food poisoning.

A horn is heard.

MARNIE  
Time for the next tradition.

She looks at Owen and pulls out her book.

MARNIE (CONT'D)  
Time to multi-task.

BEGIN MONTAGE

Marnie goes through the various traditions she has to take part in, much to her chagrin.

-- The first being the Sparring of the Young, where Marnie is going through the motions, "swordfighting" with her young siblings.

-- She looks over to see if Owen is reading her book, but instead finds him playing with the younger siblings. The little cricket she's sparring with sees this as the opportunity to strike her down.

-- The next tradition is Flowing of the Feelers, which is reminiscent of group river dancing. Marnie is dancing with Root, who is very into it.

-- She looks around and sees Owen on the sidelines. She pulls him in and opens her mouth to speak, but ends up slipping on his slime and falling down.



--The final tradition is the Running of the Crickets, a sport event very similar to Cricket (not the bug!). Marnie is the striking batsman, while Owen is the umpire.

--She opens her mouth to speak again, not paying attention to the game. The ball hits her upside the head and then falls into Owen's mitt.

END MONTAGE

**EXT. WOODFALL - SACRED FLAME ALTER - AFTERNOON**

Marnie sits on a rock, exhausted from all the festival activities from earlier. Owen fans her with a leaf.

MARNIE

That was a lot of falling down.

OWEN

But you kept getting back up!  
You're very admirable, Lady Marnie!

MARNIE

Thankfully there's only one more  
tradition to do before tonight.

She turns her head towards a large building with no roof.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Talking to my family.

OWEN

But you've been doing that all day!

MARNIE

Yeah, the living ones.

The two make their way into the building. Cricket guards stand at the entrance, allowing Marnie in but pointing their spears at Owen.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

It's okay, he's with me!

They allow him in. Owen awkwardly smiles as he scoots past them.

**INT. WOODFALL - SACRED FLAME ALTER - AFTERNOON**

The interior is laid out like a small coliseum, with seating all around the sides. Sitting in the middle is a grand alter with the SACRED FLAME, a massive continuously burning ember.

MARNIE

Well... Meet my family.

OWEN

That doesn't look like any cricket  
I've ever seen.

MARNIE

When a member of Clan Gryll Dae  
dies, they become one with the  
Sacred Flame. And tonight at my  
Kindling Ceremony, I'll devote my  
life to my family, and the flame.

OWEN

That's exciting! ...Right?

Marnie stares deeply into the ember.

MARNIE

It used to be.

OWEN

What happened?

MARNIE

I don't know. One day I questioned  
it. And then each day I believed  
less and less... until it was gone.

OWEN

You'll find it again, I know you  
will!

MARNIE

I don't know if I want to.

(BEAT)

Does that make me a horrible  
cricket?

OWEN

I don't think so.

Marnie smiles slightly at this.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Pretty ember.

Owen's eyes widen.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Ember... Ember! That's it! I  
remember the rest of the song!

Owen pulls out his dulcimer.

OWEN (CONT'D)

*The ember born from light above, a  
key to the beast's demise. Lies  
waiting for a hero to come, lest  
all the world shall die.*

(BEAT)

Kind of a bummer ending. You'd be  
surprised how many of these folk  
songs end that way. Death and all  
that.

Marnie stares wide-eyed at Owen.

MARNIE

Could it be...? I need to test  
something!

She looks back and forth before grabbing a small LANTERN that  
sits next to the flame, allowing her to take a small piece  
out.

OWEN

Is that allowed?

MARNIE

Technically using the flame for  
anything is slap in the face of our  
beliefs, but what they don't know  
won't hurt them!

Another horn is sounded.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Oh no... I forgot I have to go get  
the powder! I won't have time to do  
my test!

Her eyes shift over to Owen.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Unless... Owen! My dear, sweet,  
lovely attendant!

OWEN

Aw, Lady Marnie, flattery will get  
you everywhere!

MARNIE

I need you to get the powder for  
me.

OWEN

Isn't that a little sacrilegious?

Marnie hands him a sack and a chisel. She walks away as she explains all this.

MARNIE

Nonsense, it'll be fine! Just head  
30 paces out of town, turn right at  
the gnarled dandelion and then  
chisel the magnesium under the  
largest toadstool!

Marnie runs off to take care of this mysterious task. Owen is left, confused.

OWEN

Magnesium. I'm on it.

(BEAT)

Hey, what's magnesium?

**EXT. MEADOWLARK PLAINS - EVENING**

A MERCHANT WAGON barrels down the path as the frantic MERCHANT cracks the reigns on his cattlepillars. Not too far behind him is the Garden Empire wagon, with Vivi ferociously pursuing him. Medora sits next to her looking uninvested.

MERCHANT

Please, leave me alone!!

VIVI

TELL US WHERE THE FLAME IS!!

Vivi cracks the reigns, pushing their exhausted cattlepillars too far. One of them breaks free and stampedes away, causing the wagon to completely crash, with the merchant wagon getting away. The two stand up, rubbing their heads in pain.

MEDORA

Who could have foreseen this?

VIVI

I don't need your wisecracks! He  
was this close to telling us!

MEDORA

Sure.

VIVI

Where do you think you're going?

MEDORA

To fix your mess.

Medora goes off to find the lost cattlepillar. A guard follows her, much to her annoyance. She wanders off towards the edge of the grass forest where she follows its tracks and takes note of the broken foliage around the area. She finds the cattlepillar being calmed down by a familiar face - Owen! He's playing his dulcimer.

MEDORA (CONT'D)

That song is beautiful.

OWEN

Finally, company that appreciates my music! This guy especially likes it.

The cattlepillar stands up and gives Owen a lick.

MEDORA

Thank you so much! I'm no good with larvae.

OWEN

Well, that's the thing, you can't think of them like that! You gotta think of them as friends, just like you and me.

MEDORA

Friends? But you don't even know my name.

OWEN

You haven't given me any reason to think you're not a friend. My name's Owen.

MEDORA

Medora. Can I repay you, Owen?

OWEN

Hm... Well, do you know what magne-  
nees-ee-um is?

MEDORA

Oh, magnesium? Hm... Oh! My earrings are made of them. Please take them, I have so many other pairs.

OWEN

Oh, perfect! Thank you!

Owen places the delicate earrings on a rock and smashes them with another rock. He shoves the powder into his pouch.

MEDORA

Um. You're welcome.

VIVI (O.S.)

What's taking so long?!

MEDORA

Ah, I've got to go.

OWEN

Well hey, maybe this is forward of me, but there's this great festival happening tonight in Woodfall! Lots of great food, dancing, and this crazy bright light!

Medora pauses at the mention of the bright light.

MEDORA

Bright... light...?

OWEN

Anyway, I've got to skedaddle too. Hope to see you and, your er... friend there!

Owen gives a pat to the cattlepillar before he departs. Vivi comes up behind Medora.

VIVI

Bright light, huh?

Medora looks at Vivi, worried. Vivi smiles menacingly.

VIVI (CONT'D)

How very interesting.

#### **EXT. GRASS FORESTS - EVENING**

Marnie stands in front of the pool of gasoline. She takes out her book of notes.

MARNIE

Mom had so many notes about the blood, but could never figure out its properties.

Marnie puts the book away and pulls out the lantern.

MARNIE (CONT'D)  
But she didn't have Owen's song.

Marnie holds out the lantern over the blood, ready to drop it in. She hesitates, mulling over if she really wants to do this. The moment feels like an eternity, but she eventually pulls it back.

MARNIE (CONT'D)  
Why?!

She stares at the flame.

MARNIE (CONT'D)  
Why can't I let you go?

She sighs. Another horn is heard.

MARNIE (CONT'D)  
Ugh!!

She reluctantly storms off.

**INT. CASTLE GRYLL DAE - FEAST HALL - EVENING**

The feast hall of CASTLE GRYLL DAE is packed to the brim with CRICKETS and various other bug ATTENDANTS. Marnie sits at the head table, wearing traditional ceremony garb. She looks completely bored and disinterested. Root approaches and notices Marnie's disinterest. He sits next to her.

ROOT  
Pretty festive, eh? Might make a cricket want to dance?

MARNIE  
Neither you nor I have had enough nectar for that.

ROOT  
Fair enough.

There's a pause.

ROOT (CONT'D)  
We won't have much one-on-one time after the feast, so... I wanted you to take this moment to give you this.

Root hands Marnie a wooden sword.

MARNIE

This is... Moms...

ROOT

Aye. It was always meant to be yours. I just didn't think I'd be the one to give it to you.

MARNIE

Root... Thank you.

ROOT

I know this hasn't always been easy for you. Especially having to deal with me. But I'm so proud of you.

MARNIE

There's something I need to tell you.

Marnie pauses.

ROOT

What is it?

MARNIE

Never mind. This is wonderful. Thank you.

She hugs her brother. A loud horn is heard. The room quiets down. One of the elders speaks.

ELDER

The time has come. Let us move towards the Sacred Flame to begin the Kindling Ceremony of Marnie Gryll Dae.

Marnie looks nervous.

OWEN (O.S.)

Psst!

She looks over at Owen who gives her a big thumbs up and holds up the powder.

OWEN (CONT'D)

I got the powder!!

(BEAT)

Um, I mean I grabbed the powder from your room that you gathered yourself!



He gives a wink. Marnie looks around at the elders and Root who are waiting for her. She gives an awkward laugh.

**EXT. WOODFALL - SACRED FLAME ALTER - NIGHT**

Royal, noble, and common crickets all watch on from the surrounding seating, as Root prays to the flame. He then turns and ushers Marnie on stage. She looks apprehensive.

ROOT

The memories of our loved ones...  
They dance together in the Sacred  
Flame. All through our lives we can  
feel the warmth of their love, and  
the faith they share for the  
Giants. My brothers and sisters,  
tonight Marnie will become one with  
the flame. Tonight she will become  
a true warrior of Clan Gryll Dae!

The crowd CHEERS. Marnie stands before the flame, its size and heat imposing. She looks back to Root, who nods. She picks up an elongated rock with dried vines wrapped around the end and sticks it into the flame, bringing a small fire out with her. She plants it into the pedestal.

ROOT (CONT'D)

Now add the powder you ground from  
the earth yourself, and become one  
with the flame.

Marnie removes a small pouch from her side and sprinkles it over the flame. The flame sparkles with bright white flickers.

ROOT (CONT'D)

Go on. The prayer, just as we  
rehearsed.

Marnie looks out towards the crowd. She stops.

MARNIE

I can't do this. Everyone, I need  
to tell you something about the  
beast!!

The crowd murmurs. The proud look on Root's face immediately turns to that of disappointment. Ailith is seen handing Hilda money, as if they had a bet going on when Marnie would ruin the ceremony.

CRICKET

Here we go...

CRICKET 2

Again with this?

MARNIE

Owen's song here says something about our flame! The two must be connected, if we could just work together, we could-

ROOT

Stop! STOP!!

ELDER

Root, what is the meaning of this?! You trained her, did you not?

ROOT

Yes... I take full responsibility for her actions.

Root turns to Marnie.

ROOT (CONT'D)

You have forsaken our family.

Suddenly an arrow is shot into Root's shoulder.

MARNIE

Root!!

She runs to his side. They look towards where the arrow fired and see a Garden Guard holding a bow, far back behind the crowd. The camera pans out to show more guards approaching. The crowd erupts into a panic. The guards part to allow Vivi to walk forward. She looks up, menacingly, from under her hood.

VIVI

That snail was right. This is some party.

**END OF ACT TWO**

ACT THREEEXT. WOODFALL - TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

The entire town is shocked and terrified. Owen is saddened to see Medora. Marnie overhears him from the alter.

OWEN

Oh no... Medora...

MARNIE

Medora?!

OWEN

I met them while I was out getting the powder... this is all my fault!

Vivi and the Garden guards stand before the crickets of Woodfall. Medora stands by her side, furious.

MEDORA

What was that?! I had a plan, we could have convinced them to part with the flame!

VIVI

They *worship* that thing. They would never give it up without a fight.

MEDORA

It didn't have to be this way, nobody needs to get hurt!

VIVI

You want to prove yourself to the Empress? Then watch what needs to be done.

Vivi turns to the crowd.

VIVI (CONT'D)

You all seem like smart bugs. So let's all do the smart thing and surrender the flame. That way nobody *else* needs to get hurt.

As Cricket Guards take up arms against the soldiers, Vivi smiles, as though she was hoping for this to happen.

VIVI (CONT'D)

Then again, I've always been a poor judge of intelligence.

Vivi pulls off her cloak, revealing that she is an incredibly imposing WHIP-TAILED SCORPION. She towers over the other bugs.

VIVI (CONT'D)

Let's play.

Root pulls the arrow out of his shoulder abruptly. The pain barely phases him. An attendant approaches the pedestal where Root and Marnie stand.

ATTENDANT

My lord!

He tosses Root his lance. He jumps into the chaos and pursues Vivi.

MARNIE

Root!

Owen approaches.

OWEN

My lady!

Owen pathetically tosses Marnie her new sword. It lands a few feet back. She glares at him. He shrugs. A few Garden Guards approach. Marnie quickly grabs her sword and holds it up defensively. As the chaos of the fight ramps up, Owen gets separated from Marnie in the crowd. We cut to Vivi who's knocking down guard after guard. Root approaches from behind, lance in hand.

VIVI

You crickets are dropping like flies. No, even flies put up a better fight!

ROOT

You will not harm my family.

Root lunges, while Vivi counters with her massive claw. CUT TO Marnie, who is preparing to fight the guards that are approaching.

MEDORA

Stand down!

The guards stop as Medora approaches Marnie.

MEDORA (CONT'D)

You must be Marnie. I didn't want it to turn out like this.

MARNIE

Your guards almost killed my brother, and you're trying to steal my family's history!

MEDORA

I heard your speech. You don't believe that, do you? No, you know what the flame *truly* is.

Marnie looks back at the flame.

MEDORA (CONT'D)

We both want to use it to help others. I need the flame to gain the trust of my people.

MARNIE

I don't care!!

MEDORA

If you knew what's at stake, you'd give that flame up in a heartbeat.

MARNIE

I don

Marnie readies her sword once more. Medora furrows her brow. CUT BACK TO Root and Vivi engaging in a brutal fight. Root is able to hold his own against her with his lance, but doesn't account for her whip tail, which ultimately defeats him.

ROOT

How... How did you know about the flame?

VIVI

You've got a chatty snail amongst your ranks.

Roots eyes widen at this.

VIVI (CONT'D)

Good bye, Root of Clan Gryll Dae.

Root watches helplessly as Vivi raises her tail to finish him off. Back with Marnie and Medora, Marnie sees what's about to occur.

MARNIE

No... ROOT!!

Medora turns around and sees Vivi. She quickly looks back and forth between the flame and Vivi and makes her decision.

Right as Vivi's tail is about to strike, Medora appears and counters with her DUAL BLADES.

MEDORA  
I said NO KILLING!!

Vivi looks furious, but notices that the flame is completely unguarded, save for Marnie.

VIVI  
Then I'll be the one to bring the  
flame to the Empress.

Marnie manages to fight off one beetle, but another charges in. She sees Vivi approaching.

VIVI (CONT'D)  
I'm not here to talk like Medora.  
Step. Aside.

Marnie looks back at the flame. She holds up her sword.

VIVI (CONT'D)  
Do you really believe that flame is  
your mommy and daddy?

Marnie's sword hand trembles. She sees Owen hopping up in the crowd.

OWEN  
Don't give it up, Lady Marnie!  
Remember the song!!

Marnie backs up. The warmth of the flame on her back becomes intense.

VIVI  
MOVE!!

OWEN  
Don't!

MARNIE  
I... I...

Marnie doesn't realize how far she's retreated backwards until she bumps into the pedestal for the flame itself. She looks back at it.

VIVI  
Argh, enough of this!

Vivi lunges forward. Marnie attempts to fight back, but Vivi's massive claws knocks her down. Vivi picks up the flame's base.

VIVI (CONT'D)  
Hurk! Heavier than I thought! But  
nothing I can't handle.

Vivi begins walking away. Marnie quickly kicks at her legs, tripping her, causing the flame to fall to the ground. Vivi scrambles for it, but in a moment of panic, Marnie kicks the flame's base backwards, falling below into a small moat of water surrounding the altar.

VIVI (CONT'D)		ROOT
No !	NO ! ! !	

The flame falls backwards into the water, extinguishing it completely. It creates a large amount of steam and smoke, engulfing all of Woodfall.

MEDORA  
(to Vivi)  
Look at what you've done.

A look of humiliation and anger washes over Vivi as she retreats into the smoke and steam. A guilty Medora looks at Marnie, who is intently staring down at the water, hand covering her mouth with tears welling up in her eyes. Owen makes eye contact with Medora, who disappears into the smoke and steam. As we follow her, she opens her cloak to reveal that she stole one of the lanterns, and with it the last existing piece of the Sacred Flame. As Owen turns back to Marnie, he sees she has disappeared as well.

**EXT. WOODFALL - OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT**

Owen wanders around the edge of town, looking for Marnie.

OWEN  
Lady Marnie...?

Owen finds Marnie hiding behind a grass tree, crying to herself.

MARNIE  
(SOFTLY TO HERSELF)  
I... didn't mean to, I-

She suddenly notices Owen there and instantly turns away from him, not letting him see her cry.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

I'm fine!

Owen sits next to her.

OWEN

Marnie, I'm so sorry. This is all my fault.

MARNIE

I said I'm fine! I just-

Her throat gets tight and she stops talking.

OWEN

The flame is gone... but your families love for you isn't.

Marnie's feelers perk up at this. She looks at Owen, tears streaming down her face. She wipes them away.

MARNIE

I'm sorry I got you mixed up in this.

OWEN

You don't need to apologize at all. It's my fault.

Root is heard calling out through the smoke.

ROOT (O.S.)

Marnie?! Marnie, where are you?!!?

OWEN

It's time I face the music. I'll tell Root about what I did.

Marnie hesitates for a moment before grabbing Owen's arm and pulling him with her. Root enters the scene, looking around. Ailith and Hilda approach.

AILITH

We've looked everywhere, but...

HILDA

She's nowhere to be found.

ROOT

We must find her. That snail she's with... he's poisoned her mind. He is a *spy* for the Garden!

Tears well up in Root's eyes before he blinks them away.



ROOT (CONT'D)  
Oh Giants... Marnie...

**EXT. MEADOWLARK FIELDS - MORNING**

Marnie runs through the forest as morning light starts to break through the treetops.

MARNIE  
Quickly !!

OWEN  
But-

She stops to catch her breath. Owen finally catches up.

MARNIE  
I think... I think we've put enough  
distance between us and Woodfall.

She looks back.

OWEN  
My lady... Why?

MARNIE  
Despite everything, you believed  
me.

They smile at each other. Marnie turns around and notices a vast plain out ahead of them, showcasing the beauty of all of Meadowlark.

OWEN  
Ah, the open road. With no food or  
money. Just us and the journey.

He sighs. Marnie is at a loss for words.

MARNIE  
It's beautiful.

OWEN  
You've never been out of Woodfall,  
have you?

MARNIE  
I haven't...

Owen opens the map upside down.

OWEN

Looks like we have our work cut out for us. I don't even know where to start!

MARNIE

Maybe try holding the map the right way?

Owen gets an "ah-ha" moment. He flips it, and they smile at each other.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

There must be a way to stop the beast. And only we can find it.

The two set out into the beautiful vista.

**END**