

"A WARRIOR'S TALE"

An original screenplay

by

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WGAW-registered

FADE IN:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT (ENGLAND, 13TH CENTURY)

A blazing fire, a starry night. A wagon with a bright canopy is parked nearby, horses and a fat pony tethered to a tree.

HENLEY O'GRIFFIN (25), a handsome, vital red-headed Irishman, sits on a log, washing up the dishes.

ROBBIE (10), a pale slender English boy, leans against Henley's back, his arms draped around the big man's neck.

ANNIE (almost 5) is asleep on a blanket nearby, covered but for her fluffy red hair.

HENLEY

(singing in Gaelic)

Folamh anocht Dún Chearmna do Ráith
Teamhra is cúis bhaoghail; méad
uaigneasa an dúin dreachglain--
beart do bheartaibh an tsaoghail.

A SHADOWY FIGURE watches from the woods. A hint of GOLD glints on his chest, a flash of silver off a DAGGER.

ROBBIE

Of what do you sing, Henley? 'Tis mortal sad, I think.

HENLEY

Aye, 'tis, Robbie. For a great king died fighting the Norsemen, and his castle is empty, his queen alone.

ROBBIE

Henley, Cathy says you will not fight again. Why not?

Henley stops what he's doing, ponders. He glances at the little boy whose face is pressed near his.

HENLEY

Are ye old enough, Nephew?

Robbie nods solemnly. Henley resumes his chores.

HENLEY (CONT'D)

Have ye not heard the Legend of the Skinwalkers?

Robbie shakes his head.

HENLEY (CONT'D)

Well, 'tis not surprising. 'Tis not of your people, the English, but of mine, the Celts. 'Tis like this. Every thousand years or so, the gift--or curse--of becoming an animal manifests among us. When in animal form, ye cannot be killed, except by one of your own family, which is unlikely.

ROBBIE

Then 'tis a blessing, not a curse! T'would make you a great warrior.
(his face falls)
Unless you became a chipmunk, I suppose.

Henley laughs.

HENLEY

A great warrior! But if ye stay too long in animal form, ye lose all sense of time and even of self, so I've heard. Ye sometimes cannot find your way back to yourself.

Robbie's eyes grow wide.

HENLEY (CONT'D)

These special ones are called "The First Born of the Goddess," for it is She who has created them. And sometimes the gift of skin-walking, or shape-shifting as some call it, passes on to their First Born, and sometimes even to their Second Born, though 'tis very rare. Not since back in the mists of time have I heard of such a thing.

ROBBIE

What brings it on? I mean how does it happen, the shift?

The SHADOWY FIGURE steps into the clearing.

BRAXTON

'Tis usually a great passion brings it on, though never before five years of age.

Henley rises. Pushes Robbie behind him.

BRAXTON O'GRIFFIN (43) is a powerful man with a scarred face and a milky eye. He wears a battle AXE strapped across his back, a jewel-handled dirk and short sword at his belt.

HENLEY

What do you want?

BRAXTON

I have sought you for many a year, boy. I did not expect to find you living among the cursed English.

HENLEY

They are not my enemy, Father.

BRAXTON

Everyone who fails to obey me is my enemy...Son.

Braxton circles. Henley watches, keeping Robbie behind him.

BRAXTON (CONT'D)

I have gained much since we drove the French out of the north. Lands, peoples, wealth.

HENLEY

I have heard.

Braxton strokes a heavy gold necklace draped across his chest. Each link a SERPENT with a blood-red ruby eye, each link "squirming" in the firelight.

BRAXTON

But with you at my side again--

HENLEY

I have made my life anew, Father. I want nothing from you, or with you.

BRAXTON

These islands will unite under us, my son, and then we can take the French in their own land! For it is written, "He who controls the First Born controls the World."

HENLEY

I will not help you. I fought the invaders, killed them when I must, but I did not enjoy it...

Henley stares at Braxton with loathing.

HENLEY (CONT'D)

Their blood-lust made them mad. As yours does you!

Braxton laughs.

BRAXTON

I do only that which the Goddess requires of me.

HENLEY

She requires nothing of the sort! Hers are the ways of peace.

BRAXTON

Then join me, lad, and you shall constrain my "lust." Join my rule and peace will cover the land.

HENLEY

Death will cover this land if you rule. I will not help you!

Braxton swells, his face purpling with rage.

Henley shoves Robbie toward the cart. The frightened boy runs, climbs inside.

ANNIE stirs, turns over in her sleep.

BRAXTON sees...and smiles.

BRAXTON

Ah, that pale little English boy cannot be yours, but this one is. The gift of the First Born may pass on once. That also is written!

Fear crosses Henley's face. He moves to Annie's side.

HENLEY

She does not have the gift. She takes after Lady Catherine, her mother. Love is her only gift.

INT. WAGON - SAME

Robbie trembles, breathing hard, listening hard.

BRAXTON (O.S.)

You will not know that until she is five and by then she shall be mine.

(MORE)

BRAXTON (O.S.) (cont'd)
(shockingly loud)
ARAKA MASADA BELOX!

A HUMAN HOWLING erupts, as of a man going into battle. An inhuman scream follows, a SHRIEKING-WIND SOUND.

Robbie cowers. He covers his ears and eyes. He rocks himself.

The horses add their SCREAMS, leaping and BUFFETING the wagon with their hooves.

In a sudden LULL, Annie SCREAMS. Robbie jerks up.

ROBBIE
Annie! Annie!

Robbie scrambles onto the wagon seat.

EXT. CAMPSITE - SAME

The EMBERS of the campfire are scattered. Annie's BLANKET is torn. The ground is FURROWED, empty.

Suddenly from high above, a SHRIEKING WIND SOUND.

A massive WINGED CREATURE tumbles and twists, tormented. It clutches SOMETHING to its chest, as a MAN swings wildly, desperately to a chain around its neck.

And then it disappears behind a cloud.

Robbie shakes uncontrollably.

EXT. CASTLE COURTYARD - DAY

SUPER: "Seventeen years later"

GRISTLE (17), tall and slender, and DORN (8), sturdy and feisty, engage in a rowdy training session, with wooden swords, helmets, chest protectors, and shields.

A Great Dane, TARIQ, leaps about their feet, BARKING.

Their uncle, ROBERT ("Robbie," now 27), elegantly dressed, watches. He laughs, and must occasionally be quick on his feet or be knocked off them by one of the combatants.

Gristle fights with verve and joy, but is of necessity holding back against the much-younger Dorn.

ROBERT

Dorn, your guard, lad! No, no,
parry, parry. Good, keep your
poise, keep your poise. Let not
Gristle ruffle you.

Dorn struggles to hold his own. The dog is a decided disadvantage.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Tariq, come! Out of the way and be
silent!

Tariq reluctantly obeys.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Gristle, easy on your brother, easy
now, give him a chance! He is not
half your age!

Gristle stops abruptly, holding the panting Dorn off at sword point. Gristle bows in exaggerated fashion to Robert.

Then resumes swordplay in such a lazy, foppish manner that the enraged Dorn makes wild and foolish moves.

Robert groans.

Within moments, Dorn is on his back, a triumphant Gristle standing over him.

Dorn pulls off his helmet. Tariq leaps over to lick his face.

The little boy shoves the dog away and looks up at a high window, "concern" clouding his face.

DORN

Did you not hear Mother calling
you, Gris?!

Gristle pulls off her helmet and looks up, a coil of thick, auburn hair tumbling out. For the first time, we realize that Gristle is a young woman.

With a laugh, Dorn scuttles away and lambastes Gristle in the seat of the pants with the flat of his sword.

Gristle yelps, laughs in return.

GRISTLE

No mercy it is, then!

In seconds, Dorn is flattened once more on the ground, with Gristle's sword point firmly planted in his chest.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)

Have you no sense of chivalry, my lad? Is it a base brigand you intend to be when grown to ugly manhood?

Dorn squirms under this speech, punctuated as it is with painful little sword thrusts to his breastbone.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)

Upon my life, you shall not! Pledge your undying fealty to me, Dornell of Darley, and take your place among my lesser vassals. Or else...breathe your last!

DORN

Ha! You are only a girl, Gristle, you cannot be anyone's liege lord! And you have not a single vassal, lesser or otherwise!

Gristle's green eyes BURN at his words. She places her foot on his chest and raises her sword high above her head.

Dorn's eyes grow wide.

GRISTLE

No mercy it is, then...

Dorn looks to his uncle for help.

DORN

Uncle Robert!

Robert just grins and holds onto Tariq.

DORN (CONT'D)

Ah, G-G-Gris, I was just teasing!

Gristle raises the sword even higher. Just before it seems she will pierce him where he lies...

DORN (CONT'D)

I pledge, I pledge! You are my liege lord, now and forever!

Gristle grins and reaches out a hand to help Dorn up. She is startled by a sharp SHOUT from the upper window.

CATHERINE (O.S.)
Griselda!

A harassed LADY CATHERINE (37) looks out. A squalling BABY BOY squirms in her arms.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
Griselda Catherine, stop that foolishness and come up here at once. I have need of you.
(muttering)
Why did I get all "boys"!

Just as suddenly, she is GONE.

Gristle slumps, her joy punctured. Dorn smiles slyly. Robert stares at the now-empty window and SIGHS.

Gristle regains her composure, nonchalantly tosses her sword to her brother.

DORN
Hey!

Dorn starts to toss it back.

Gristle turns on him a bleak, fierce look. Dorn immediately starts to pick up their helmets and shields, too.

As Gristle passes her uncle, Robert gently touches her arm.

GRISTLE
Cannot I be a warrior and a woman?

She YANKS her arm away and marches off.

INT. CASTLE STOREROOMS - DAY

There is a great BUSTLE going on, with Lady Catherine in the midst of the storm. SERVANTS leap to do her bidding.

CATHERINE
Clarissa, Cook requires ten bushels of potatoes, seven of carrots, and five of onions. See that she has them at once.

The elderly CLARISSA bobs a curtsy and immediately sets lesser servants to fulfill the order she will oversee.

Catherine turns to a YOUNG GIRL.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 Grace, tell Mistress Ritter I shall
 inspect the guest wing within the
 hour. There should not be a speck
 of dust anywhere!

The young girl bobs a curtsy and is out the door.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 And fresh rushes on the floor,
 Grace! Tell her fresh rushes--
 (but Grace is gone)
 Oh, I shall never understand my
 husband!

GRISTLE (O.S.)
 About what, Mother?

A subdued Gristle, auburn hair in a braid down her back and
 dressed in a simple gown, stands in the doorway.

Catherine scowls, still in her thoughts.

CATHERINE
 Child, are we not in our summer
 residence?

GRISTLE
 We are, my Mother.

CATHERINE
 And does it not lack in every
 possible amenity for entertaining?

Gristle hasn't got a clue.

GRISTLE
 No. I mean, yes--

CATHERINE
 How is it then, pray tell me, that
 my dear husband informs me he has
 invited a great French lord to stay
 with us. Tonight!

Gristle's eyes light up.

GRISTLE
 Is Father home?

Catherine spies MATTHEW, a beefy servant, pushing a
 wheelbarrow across the courtyard.

CATHERINE

Not yet, not 'til midday, he sent a rider on ahead--

Catherine brushes Gristle aside, heading to the door.

GRISTLE

And if we're to have a French lord tonight, surely that means a joust on the morrow with lances and real swords and lots of blood--

CATHERINE

Yes, yes--

Catherine steps outside.

EXT. CASTLE STOREROOMS - CONTINUOUS

An eerie, low SHRIEKING-WIND SOUND surrounds Catherine. It ruffles her hair and dress. Leaves Matthew untouched.

It unnerves Catherine. She looks around, smooths her hair and dress. Then she is back to her duty.

CATHERINE

Matthew, ten baskets of fresh bream! Set the men to work at the ponds at once.

MATTHEW

(tipping his cap)
Yes, Mi-lady!

He hurries off.

INT. CASTLE STOREROOMS - CONTINUOUS

Gristle sits in a corner with two potato-men -- garlic heads, twig arms -- in noisy combat. Servants side-step her.

CATHERINE (O.S.)

Don't just sit there, Griselda!
Make yourself useful.

Gristle drops the potato-men, leaps up.

Catherine turns to a BAKER, portly, flour-streaked. They step aside to talk.

Gristle stands in the middle of all the activity, lost.

INT. UNCLE ROBERT'S STUDY - DAY

Robert sits cross-legged on the floor before a low table. He studies a spread of TAROT CARDS.

His room, drenched in firelight and shadows, has FRESCOES on each of its tall walls:

On one, a CLOAKED WOMAN (SEREN), her lovely features and long hair mostly hidden by her cloak.

On a second, a FALLEN KNIGHT (Robert at 23). A Crusader's red cross on his tunic, a gold-handled sword in his hand.

On the third, a STYLIZED GRYPHON. Fierce bird-head and wings on a lion's body. (The fireplace is set in this wall.)

On the fourth, a WHEEL OF TAROT CARDS, spinning slowly round and round. (The door to the room is set in this wall.)

THE DOOR OPENS softly...

Gristle stops in the doorway. Looks around, awed at her uncle's strange room.

GRISTLE

Uncle?

Absorbed, Robert doesn't stir.

Gristle notices a BRASS BASIN next to her on a stand. Mischievously, she tosses it into the room with a CLATTER.

Robert jerks up with a start.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)

If I had been an Infidel, you would have been dead, Uncle!

There is a low GROWL from beneath the bed, as Tariq emerges. His eyes RED, his teeth bared.

ROBERT

If you had been mine enemy, Niece, you would have been dinner for a dog.

Gristle shudders, as Robert speaks to the dog.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Baruqu caselva duit!

Tariq immediately relaxes and curls back up under the bed.

Robert grins and waves Gristle in. Ruefully, she picks up the now-dented basin.

GRISTLE

Forgive me, Uncle. My "unbridled passions and ungoverned will" -- Mother's favorite phrase -- often get the better of me.

Robert laughs, as Gristle kneels by the table.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)

What is it that you do, Uncle?

ROBERT

Sit on my other side, child, that I may hear you out of my good ear.

Gristle jumps up and sits on his right side.

GRISTLE

What is it that you do, Uncle?

Robert looks troubled.

ROBERT

I ponder the future.

GRISTLE

Whose, Uncle?

He sighs.

ROBERT

I thought 'twas mine. But apparently...tis yours.

GRISTLE

Mine! How? What does it say?

INSERT ON EACH OF FOUR CARDS (AS ROBERT HANDLES THEM)

Robert hesitates, then taps the HANGED MAN CARD.

HANGED MAN CARD (a man tied upside down on a wooden cross)

ROBERT

This one is mine. I am paralyzed.

He points next to the FOOL CARD.

FOOL CARD(a dopey innocent walking cheerily on a rural road)

ROBERT (CONT'D)
This is you, taking what I thought
was my journey.

GRISTLE
(scowling)
You see me as a fool, then, Uncle?

Robert laughs.

ROBERT
No, as an innocent who behaves
foolishly at times.

Robert picks up the DEVIL CARD. Studies it.

DEVIL CARD (a horned demon with eye-patch and battle axe)

GRISTLE
(muttering)
It should have been a Warrior card,
if 'twere a TRUE reading--

She is cut off by a brief, piercing SHRIEKING-WIND SOUND.

Gristle starts. Turns to her uncle. He continues to study the
CARD in his hand, unaware of the sound.

Confused, Gristle looks around. She halts at the Gryphon
fresco. Does it "watch" her with its cruel black bird-eyes?

ROBERT (O.S.)
You shall face a mighty demon...

Gristle's attention pops back. Robert sets the DEVIL CARD
next to the DEATH CARD.

DEATH CARD (a grinning skeleton wearing a helmet)

ROBERT (CONT'D)
And one of you shall die...
(tormented)
But which one?!

Gristle laughs.

GRISTLE
Well, it shall not be me, Uncle.
For I intend to fight men, not
goblins or fairies.

Robert stares unseeing.

ROBERT
 "By blood alone can blood of
 Fiercest Beauty be poured out."

Looks down.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
 I always thought 'twould be my
 blood. Not hers...

A chill runs through Gristle, then she laughs once more.

GRISTLE
 You take this too much to heart,
 good Uncle! 'Tis just imagination
 and nerves. Mother says--

ROBERT
 'Tis not! 'Tis your destiny,
 Gristle. I just cannot read it.

Shocked by his intensity, Gristle impulsively messes up the cards.

GRISTLE
 Now what does it say, Uncle?

Robert's eyes shoot sparks. He gathers the deck of cards. Shuffles, opens at random:

THE DEVIL CARD (horned demon with eye patch and battle axe)

Gristle scowls.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)
 That is a trick, is it not? A magic
 trick? How did you do it?

SOUND OF PEELING TRUMPETS (OFF)

Gristle jumps up with a grin.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)
 Father's home! Come, Uncle, he
 shall expect us to welcome him.

Robert shakes his head. Gristle's face drops.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)
 Oh, why do you dislike him so,
 Uncle?

(MORE)

GRISTLE (CONT'D)

He is arrogant, 'tis true, but what man is not?

(quickly)

Present company excepted.

Robert laughs at this.

TRUMPETS PEEL AGAIN (OFF), more insistently.

ROBERT

'Tis a long story, Gris. Hurry, now. Your stepfather will not like it if you keep him waiting.

Gristle hesitates, then hurries out.

Robert turns. Angrily tosses the DECK OF CARDS into the fire place. Watches them burn...

THE DEVIL CARD LAST...

SEREN (O.S.)

(soft, tender)

Robert... Robbie...

Robert refuses to look up.

ROBERT

She is too young. She is not ready!

SEREN (O.S.)

We have run out of time...

At this Robert looks up at the Cloaked Woman on the wall. His face full of longing and anguish.

Only her EYES are truly visible in the fire-lit room. Pale, beautiful, arresting...they are set off by a delicate green CIRCLET OF CELTIC KNOTS tattooed round her forehead. And a delicate TRIPLE-SPIRAL tattooed high on each cheekbone.

The unmistakable signs of a High Priestess of the Goddess...

SEREN

My failure is almost upon us. Our world plunged into blood and chaos once more. Robbie, I need her NOW!

Robert sags against the wall, shaking his head.

SEREN

You must send her to me!

He looks up at her then, defiant. REFUSAL in his eyes...

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In seconds, Dorn is flattened once more on the ground, with Gristle's sword point firmly planted in his chest.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)

Have you no sense of chivalry, my lad? Is it a base brigand you intend to be when grown to ugly manhood?

Dorn squirms under this speech, punctuated as it is with painful little sword thrusts to his breastbone.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)

Upon my life, you shall not! Pledge your undying fealty to me, Dornell of Darley, and take your place among my lesser vassals. Or else...breathe your last!

DORN

Ha! You are only a girl, Gristle, you cannot be anyone's liege lord! And you have not a single vassal, lesser or otherwise!

Gristle's green eyes BURN at his words. She places her foot on his chest and raises her sword high above her head.

Dorn's eyes grow wide.

GRISTLE

No mercy it is, then...

Dorn looks to his uncle for help.

DORN

Uncle Robert!

Robert just grins and holds onto Tariq.

DORN (CONT'D)

Ah, G-G-Gris, I was just teasing!

Gristle raises the sword even higher. Just before it seems she will pierce him where he lies...

DORN (CONT'D)

I pledge, I pledge! You are my liege lord, now and forever!

Gristle grins and reaches out a hand to help Dorn up. She is startled by a sharp SHOUT from the upper window.

CATHERINE (O.S.)
Griselda!

A harassed LADY CATHERINE (37) looks out. A squalling BABY BOY squirms in her arms.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
Griselda Catherine, stop that foolishness and come up here at once. I have need of you.
(muttering)
Why did I get all "boys"!

Just as suddenly, she is GONE.

Gristle slumps, her joy punctured. Dorn smiles slyly. Robert stares at the now-empty window and SIGHS.

Gristle regains her composure, nonchalantly tosses her sword to her brother.

DORN
Hey!

Dorn starts to toss it back.

Gristle turns on him a bleak, fierce look. Dorn immediately starts to pick up their helmets and shields, too.

As Gristle passes her uncle, Robert gently touches her arm.

GRISTLE
Cannot I be a warrior and a woman?

She YANKS her arm away and marches off.

INT. CASTLE STOREROOMS - DAY

There is a great BUSTLE going on, with Lady Catherine in the midst of the storm. SERVANTS leap to do her bidding.

CATHERINE
Clarissa, Cook requires ten bushels of potatoes, seven of carrots, and five of onions. See that she has them at once.

The elderly CLARISSA bobs a curtsy and immediately sets lesser servants to fulfill the order she will oversee.

Catherine turns to a YOUNG GIRL.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 Grace, tell Mistress Ritter I shall
 inspect the guest wing within the
 hour. There should not be a speck
 of dust anywhere!

The young girl bobs a curtsy and is out the door.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 And fresh rushes on the floor,
 Grace! Tell her fresh rushes--
 (but Grace is gone)
 Oh, I shall never understand my
 husband!

GRISTLE (O.S.)
 About what, Mother?

A subdued Gristle, auburn hair in a braid down her back and
 dressed in a simple gown, stands in the doorway.

Catherine scowls, still in her thoughts.

CATHERINE
 Child, are we not in our summer
 residence?

GRISTLE
 We are, my Mother.

CATHERINE
 And does it not lack in every
 possible amenity for entertaining?

Gristle hasn't got a clue.

GRISTLE
 No. I mean, yes--

CATHERINE
 How is it then, pray tell me, that
 my dear husband informs me he has
 invited a great French lord to stay
 with us. Tonight!

Gristle's eyes light up.

GRISTLE
 Is Father home?

Catherine spies MATTHEW, a beefy servant, pushing a
 wheelbarrow across the courtyard.

CATHERINE

Not yet, not 'til midday, he sent a rider on ahead--

Catherine brushes Gristle aside, heading to the door.

GRISTLE

And if we're to have a French lord tonight, surely that means a joust on the morrow with lances and real swords and lots of blood--

CATHERINE

Yes, yes--

Catherine steps outside.

EXT. CASTLE STOREROOMS - CONTINUOUS

An eerie, low SHRIEKING-WIND SOUND surrounds Catherine. It ruffles her hair and dress. Leaves Matthew untouched.

It unnerves Catherine. She looks around, smooths her hair and dress. Then she is back to her duty.

CATHERINE

Matthew, ten baskets of fresh bream! Set the men to work at the ponds at once.

MATTHEW

(tipping his cap)
Yes, Mi-lady!

He hurries off.

INT. CASTLE STOREROOMS - CONTINUOUS

Gristle sits in a corner with two potato-men -- garlic heads, twig arms -- in noisy combat. Servants side-step her.

CATHERINE (O.S.)

Don't just sit there, Griselda!
Make yourself useful.

Gristle drops the potato-men, leaps up.

Catherine turns to a BAKER, portly, flour-streaked. They step aside to talk.

Gristle stands in the middle of all the activity, lost.

INT. UNCLE ROBERT'S STUDY - DAY

Robert sits cross-legged on the floor before a low table. He studies a spread of TAROT CARDS.

His room, drenched in firelight and shadows, has FRESCOES on each of its tall walls:

On one, a CLOAKED WOMAN (SEREN), her lovely features and long hair mostly hidden by her cloak.

On a second, a FALLEN KNIGHT (Robert at 23). A Crusader's red cross on his tunic, a gold-handled sword in his hand.

On the third, a STYLIZED GRYPHON. Fierce bird-head and wings on a lion's body. (The fireplace is set in this wall.)

On the fourth, a WHEEL OF TAROT CARDS, spinning slowly round and round. (The door to the room is set in this wall.)

THE DOOR OPENS softly...

Gristle stops in the doorway. Looks around, awed at her uncle's strange room.

GRISTLE

Uncle?

Absorbed, Robert doesn't stir.

Gristle notices a BRASS BASIN next to her on a stand. Mischievously, she tosses it into the room with a CLATTER.

Robert jerks up with a start.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)

If I had been an Infidel, you would have been dead, Uncle!

There is a low GROWL from beneath the bed, as Tariq emerges. His eyes RED, his teeth bared.

ROBERT

If you had been mine enemy, Niece, you would have been dinner for a dog.

Gristle shudders, as Robert speaks to the dog.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Baruqu caselva duit!

Tariq immediately relaxes and curls back up under the bed.

Robert grins and waves Gristle in. Ruefully, she picks up the now-dented basin.

GRISTLE

Forgive me, Uncle. My "unbridled passions and ungoverned will" -- Mother's favorite phrase -- often get the better of me.

Robert laughs, as Gristle kneels by the table.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)

What is it that you do, Uncle?

ROBERT

Sit on my other side, child, that I may hear you out of my good ear.

Gristle jumps up and sits on his right side.

GRISTLE

What is it that you do, Uncle?

Robert looks troubled.

ROBERT

I ponder the future.

GRISTLE

Whose, Uncle?

He sighs.

ROBERT

I thought 'twas mine. But apparently...tis yours.

GRISTLE

Mine! How? What does it say?

INSERT ON EACH OF FOUR CARDS (AS ROBERT HANDLES THEM)

Robert hesitates, then taps the HANGED MAN CARD.

HANGED MAN CARD (a man tied upside down on a wooden cross)

ROBERT

This one is mine. I am paralyzed.

He points next to the FOOL CARD.

FOOL CARD(a dopey innocent walking cheerily on a rural road)

ROBERT (CONT'D)
This is you, taking what I thought
was my journey.

GRISTLE
(scowling)
You see me as a fool, then, Uncle?

Robert laughs.

ROBERT
No, as an innocent who behaves
foolishly at times.

Robert picks up the DEVIL CARD. Studies it.

DEVIL CARD (a horned demon with eye-patch and battle axe)

GRISTLE
(muttering)
It should have been a Warrior card,
if 'twere a TRUE reading--

She is cut off by a brief, piercing SHRIEKING-WIND SOUND.

Gristle starts. Turns to her uncle. He continues to study the
CARD in his hand, unaware of the sound.

Confused, Gristle looks around. She halts at the Gryphon
fresco. Does it "watch" her with its cruel black bird-eyes?

ROBERT (O.S.)
You shall face a mighty demon...

Gristle's attention pops back. Robert sets the DEVIL CARD
next to the DEATH CARD.

DEATH CARD (a grinning skeleton wearing a helmet)

ROBERT (CONT'D)
And one of you shall die...
(tormented)
But which one?!

Gristle laughs.

GRISTLE
Well, it shall not be me, Uncle.
For I intend to fight men, not
goblins or fairies.

Robert stares unseeing.

ROBERT
 "By blood alone can blood of
 Fiercest Beauty be poured out."

Looks down.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
 I always thought 'twould be my
 blood. Not hers...

A chill runs through Gristle, then she laughs once more.

GRISTLE
 You take this too much to heart,
 good Uncle! 'Tis just imagination
 and nerves. Mother says--

ROBERT
 'Tis not! 'Tis your destiny,
 Gristle. I just cannot read it.

Shocked by his intensity, Gristle impulsively messes up the cards.

GRISTLE
 Now what does it say, Uncle?

Robert's eyes shoot sparks. He gathers the deck of cards. Shuffles, opens at random:

THE DEVIL CARD (horned demon with eye patch and battle axe)

Gristle scowls.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)
 That is a trick, is it not? A magic
 trick? How did you do it?

SOUND OF PEELING TRUMPETS (OFF)

Gristle jumps up with a grin.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)
 Father's home! Come, Uncle, he
 shall expect us to welcome him.

Robert shakes his head. Gristle's face drops.

GRISTLE (CONT'D)
 Oh, why do you dislike him so,
 Uncle?

(MORE)

GRISTLE (CONT'D)

He is arrogant, 'tis true, but what man is not?

(quickly)

Present company excepted.

Robert laughs at this.

TRUMPETS PEEL AGAIN (OFF), more insistently.

ROBERT

'Tis a long story, Gris. Hurry, now. Your stepfather will not like it if you keep him waiting.

Gristle hesitates, then hurries out.

Robert turns. Angrily tosses the DECK OF CARDS into the fire place. Watches them burn...

THE DEVIL CARD LAST...

SEREN (O.S.)

(soft, tender)

Robert... Robbie...

Robert refuses to look up.

ROBERT

She is too young. She is not ready!

SEREN (O.S.)

We have run out of time...

At this Robert looks up at the Cloaked Woman on the wall. His face full of longing and anguish.

Only her EYES are truly visible in the fire-lit room. Pale, beautiful, arresting...they are set off by a delicate green CIRCLET OF CELTIC KNOTS tattooed round her forehead. And a delicate TRIPLE-SPIRAL tattooed high on each cheekbone.

The unmistakable signs of a High Priestess of the Goddess...

SEREN

My failure is almost upon us. Our world plunged into blood and chaos once more. Robbie, I need her NOW!

Robert sags against the wall, shaking his head.

SEREN

You must send her to me!

He looks up at her then, defiant. REFUSAL in his eyes...