

EXT. VALLEY - DAWN

Atop a lush hill is FLÒRAIDH (45) - gruff and scarred - a lone figure standing tall and stoic under a banner of deep green. An ornately decorated horse and rider come to a halt with a WHINNY at the bottom of the hill. CAITROINA (43) - the spitting image of Flòraidh, clad in shining armour and blue robes - raises a hand in greeting.

CAITROINA
Hail, Flòraidh!
(dismounting)
Chieftain of the Southlands!

Caitroina's golden sabaton-boots THUD and CLINK onto solid ground.

Flòraidh looks down at Caitroina with cold eyes.

Caitroina trudges up the hill and behind her is her horse's trail through the grass: leading to an overwhelming army camp: rows and rows of tents that stretch to the horizon.

CAITROINA (CONT'D)
Daughter of giants! Mother only to death!

Caitroina summits the hill.

Her sabatons squelch into wet mud, halting her stride.

Flòraidh's eyes now stare level at Caitroina's

CAITROINA (CONT'D)
Is there no welcome party?

Flòraidh draws her sword and holds it at the ready. She stands alone, and behind her the Swamplands are in stark contrast to Caitroina's army. Huts dot the marshes but precious few are still standing, with most being swallowed by the swamp.

FLÒRAIDH
Welcome home sister.

Caitroina brushes aside Flòraidh's sword and walks past her - SQUELCHING through muck - to gaze over the Swamplands. She takes a long, deep breath: sampling the air.

CAITROINA
I never forgot the smell.
Putrid.

Flòraidh's mouth twitches as she fights back a smirk.

Caitroina turns back to Flòraidh with a scroll in her hand.

CAITROINA (CONT'D)
 And so quiet. What would you give
 to hear the Swamplands sing again?
 (she offers the scroll)
 The Queen names us two as stewards
 of the Swamplands.

Flòraidh regards the scroll with suspicion.

CAITROINA (CONT'D)
 If you only surrender.

Flòraidh's eyes snap up to Caitroina.

FLÒRAIDH
 You insult me.

CAITROINA
 I know. I would prefer it to
 killing you.

Flòraidh's eyes and sword waver, just a little.

Caitroina's eyes plead with Flòraidh to take the scroll.

Flòraidh stares, tempted.

CAITROINA (CONT'D)
 So many years have passed since we
 were parted.

Caitroina steps closer, the scroll now crossing with
 Flòraidh's blade.

FLÒRAIDH
 (whisper)
 A lifetime.

CAITROINA
 As stewards we could rebuild our
 home the way it was and greater
 still. Our songs old and new would
 shake the ground from here to the
 sea. And you would never face an
 army alone.

Flòraidh's hands tremble.

CAITROINA (CONT'D)
 I would know you again, sister.

Flòraidh tears her eyes from the scroll and stares down Caitroina.

Flòraidh tightens her grasp of her sword.

FLÒRAIDH
My sister knew that chieftains
cannot surrender.

CAITROINA
Flòraidh...

FLÒRAIDH
Kill me now or turn your army
homeward.

Caitroina steps forward, bearing the scroll as a pointer.

CAITROINA
Do not be a child, Flòraidh, this
army is not mine. It answers to the
Queen.

FLÒRAIDH
Then what good can a Queen's
steward do for her Swamp?

Caitroina steps back and snarls in irritation. She draws her own sword and raises it.

Flòraidh's eyes close and her sword calmly lowers, ready for the blow.

Caitroina freezes.

The two sisters stand as still as statues under the banner, silhouettes against the dawn's cold light. Eventually Caitroina's arm moves and...

Caitroina STABS her sword into the ground.

She walks past Flòraidh, towards her waiting horse.

Flòraidh opens her eyes and bows her head in disappointment, glancing back over her shoulder.

Caitroina pauses halfway down the hill. She turns back as if to speak, but finds no words.

Caitroina rides away from the hill, Flòraidh standing with her sword drawn under the banner.