

NO HEROICS IN THE GARDEN

Campaign 2 · Session 10 · July 8th, 2026

The Weeping Mercy, from the Promenade to the Conservatory



The Blue Bloods discover that the Mercy does not have an audience. It has an instrument.

The second wave of applause landed as one. Every palm struck on the same beat, every silver glass caught the same lantern light, and the Weeping Mercy leaned toward the stage like a single animal waiting for its cue. The Blue Bloods had ten minutes of rehearsal, four stolen instruments, one brass pole, and exactly the wrong amount of confidence. It was time to perform.

RAISE YOUR MUGS

The opening became thunder, sparks, and poor impulse control. Ferrick wrapped fire around the pole. Balbi conjured drums and burst the table flowers into pollen. Irofine drew a tavern song from the floating cello while candlelight flickered to the rhythm. Below them, a band of identical blue-furred musicians in tiny tuxedos followed a count that wandered through numbers no musician had requested.

Then the Blue Bloods found the song. *Raise your mugs and sing along. The road is hard. The night is long.* It had verses for old wounds, hard roads, and the things best left in the past. The party had practiced once, which was apparently enough. The nobles rose. The clapping tight-

ened. Every separate person in the Promenade became a hand, a mouth, and a pair of eyes belonging to something larger.

*"Raise your mugs and sing along.
The road is hard. The night is long."*

THE BLUE BLOODS, SOMEHOW A REAL BAND

HE SAYS HELLO

Art slipped invisibly toward a narrow service door as the last note fell. The audience stopped together. They stood together. They lifted their glasses together. Then every face turned toward the exact place where invisible Art was waiting.

"He says hello," the entire room said in one breath. From below the stage, a deeper voice answered: *"Come see me."*

Ferrick reached into one polished officer's thoughts and found no applause, pleasure, or music. Only a trapped scream. A dispelling spell struck the man, removed his expensive magical nose job, and accomplished nothing else. Mistress Vale called the performance beautiful, called the invitation a privilege, and had four members of staff unlock the door below.



After the first landing, the Mercy stopped pretending to be a ship.

THE WAY BELOW

The stairs began in lacquer, black paint, and polished brass. After the first landing, the walls started to sweat. Roots threaded through the boards, thin as veins at first, then thick enough to wrap pipes and carry a second, patient rhythm under the applause above.

The signs remained professionally cheerful. **Smile before entering guest view. Never interrupt a synchronized moment. Unscheduled grief to the Sommelier. No open flame below the cellars.** The final rule had been scratched into something more useful: **No heroics in the garden.**

At the bottom waited a pale wooden door that breathed in time with the ship. Its little brass plaque asked only: *Please do not disturb the garden.*

SUSPECT GARDENING

Balbi studied the vines and found the first honest thing aboard the Mercy: this garden was wrong. Each leaf looked healthy. Every stem appeared beautifully tended. None of them belonged together. It was an ecosystem stitched by a hand that understood how nature looks, but not how it grows.

Irofine sent Hot Rod ahead. A giant flytrap swallowed him immediately. Darkness remained visible through his eyes, which was comforting only in the technical sense. The party charged the door. Art bounced off it. Someone else tried the handle. It opened.



The Gardener returned Hot Rod like a blockage squeezed from a living tube.

THE GARDENER

The Conservatory was laboratory, glasshouse, and impossible sky. Plants swallowed desks and whiteboards. Stars showed through windows that could not exist below the hull. At the center, a tall, fine-boned man in cream silk and dark green calmly pruned a bush.

He found the vine carrying Hot Rod, squeezed the stem upward like a tube of paste, and popped the mouse back into Irofine's hands. He seemed gentle. He seemed sincere. He seemed almost human.

The almost did terrible work. His skin was waxy and too smooth. Purple-black veins branched beneath his wrists, throat, and jaw. His head turned too far. His nails looked like polished sunflower seeds. When he spoke, several voices arrived together, and the whole room breathed with him.

"You play beautiful music," he said. "We loved it." Around him, the vines moved closer. He called them his children. He was thinking of naming them **the New Choir**.

WHAT HE ASKED FOR

- **Balbi's vial:** the core Warmest Regret strain Jamal gave him.
- **Old stock:** Black Lotus now found outside Westgate in only one man, Art.
- **An injection tool:** long, narrow, and built around a small compartment.
- **Big Poppy:** who arrived smoking despite having no lungs.

ONE VOICE ESCAPED

The Blue Bloods had met the Gardener before. In Chalaratha's back room, he had been one scream inside a cube of flesh. He had no language, no authority, and no way to separate himself from the brothers and sisters screaming with him.

Then the party burned his cage. The cube died. One consciousness escaped, regenerated, and learned how to hold the outline of a man.

"When the screaming stopped, I could hear that, if taught, the same voices can sing."

THE GARDENER

His new growths were not another cube. Each root-ball and flesh form was a separate, intentional being. He had gone back to the first garden beneath Westgate and found a city sealed around its sickness. The Night Masks, he said, had closed a fever inside a wall and called that mercy. He intended to reverse the strains, cure the infected, and open the city again.

PAYDAY

The 150 guests upstairs were never merely waiting to be paid. They were the test population. Each had taken Warmest Regret for an unfair advantage over someone else's feelings. The Gardener considered that consent enough for what came next. The ship sat on a quiet lake. No one at shore would hear them scream.

He offered the party a cure for Art and a route home to Westgate. The price was the trial. When the Blue Bloods asked for a humane method, he answered with perfect calm: **"The time for humanity is over."**

Art refused. The Gardener seized him. Art placed one hand against that careful human shell and cast **Blight**.



The human shape opened. The flesh cube had learned to stand.

BLIGHT IN BLOOM

The Gardener's skin split without blood. The waxy shape peeled away, and seven feet of braided flesh uncoiled from inside. He had no neck, only warped shoulders climbing into a chin. Three or four closed faces lay stitched into his body. His voice no longer fit the mouth that made it.

Art would not trade the people upstairs for Westgate, or for his own four months. The Gardener admitted he would take another 150 if these failed. Perhaps only ten would die. Perhaps he needed only two. He had all 150.

The others argued for supervision, another method, the research, anything that might still become a cure. On the laboratory wall, Chalaratha's missing notebook and drawings waited in plain sight. The first illustrated step showed a person bound to a table by vines.



"All right. Top left." The first vine missed. The rest were ready.

TOP LEFT

Art walked out alone. The door shut behind him. He reached for Elaris, his old sword and older patron, and a small voice answered. She was only visiting. She was only sent back when things were about to become very bad.

Art said he could live with dying if the alternative was becoming part of this. Elaris took one quiet moment to process that, then said: **"All right. Top left."**

Art ducked. A vine cut through the place his head had been. Thirty or forty more peeled away from the walls. Some had barbs. One carried a mace. Two squared up like old prizefighters. Behind the sealed door, the party was still debating the cure. In front of it, the garden had decided there would be no easy way out.

✦ **NEXT SESSION: THE GARDEN OBJECTS**

