

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD - Book 1 - PRINCES OF IORDEN

Chapter 2 - "Life in a Corner"

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EPISODE ONE:

1

Int. The Bloody Rat - Middle of the
1

Night

NARRATOR

Aerona Regan had just had five men she didn't know try to kill her, and survived with the help of one man, one elf, one woman, and three children whom she also did not know. Also some flaming brandy. Sadly, this was not nearly as surprising to her as the news her new acquaintances brought.

REGAN

I'm a fucking princess?

BRENNEN

More than a princess. Sole heir to the High Throne.

REGAN

And this is the first time anyone thought to let me know?

BRENNEN

Don't play the child. You understand legitimacy.

REGAN

Yeah. It means I grew up hungry just because someone didn't wanna admit to his friends where he'd been sticking his royal cock.

BRENNEN

Mind your filthy tongue.

REGAN

Or what? I'm royalty, right?

YELLOWYYN

Part of being royalty is acting as becomes your title.

REGAN

Go fuck yourself, splinter-pole. Oh wait, that wasn't very ladylike. Excuse me. Hark! Verily I hereby decree that you all shall fuck yourselves. How's that?

YELLOWYYN

(TO BRENNEN)

You're certain she's the one?

REGAN

I'm gonna need that decree honored if you want me to believe this story you're telling.

BRENNEN

I'm offering you a new life. You'll want for nothing.

REGAN

Sorry, not buying it. Who says wherever you take me half the city guard isn't waiting for me?

BRENNEN

I've only my word to offer.

NARRATOR

In Regan's experience, a man offering her only his word invariably intended to rob her blind and murder her. With a look of contempt, she rose to leave.

NIA

It must be exhausting, sister. Always waiting for the next betrayal. Come with us, and look over your shoulder just long enough to find out if the General speaks true. Stay, and look over your shoulder for the rest of your life.

NARRATOR

As Regan weighed Nia's words, *she* saw, with a tinge of regret, a wasted, charred piece of meat on the floor, her table knife still protruding from it. And next to it, with much more regret, she saw a steak she didn't finish.

REGAN

Let's say I go along with this. I'd have to pop out some noble asshole's shitty kids, right?

BRENNEN

Not immediately. But, for the Th'ar lo-Hyyl to protect your rule throughout your life, yes. You would need to produce an heir.

REGAN

Fuck that.

BRENNEN

Think of the influence you would have.

NIA

Queen Dagmar, peaceful be her rest, did a great deal of charity in this very city. Educating and feeding the unfortunate. Children like yourself.

REGAN

If they're willing to suckle the royal tit for a few little drops, they're not like me.

YLLLOWYYN

Then think of power. You're the kind who takes rather than asks. I can tell. And by yourself, you've taken a modest little living, down in this gods-forsaken hole. Imagine what you could take with a few thousand swords at your command.

NARRATOR

Regan was beginning to recognize the appeal of this offer when Yllowyyyn was startled by a sound too faint for his companions to hear.

YLLLOWYYN

Someone's coming! Armed men, about a score.

REGAN

Fuck! City guard. Was this the plan, assholes?! Keep me talking until they showed up?

NIA

If we had planned this, why would the elf warn you they were coming?

BRENNEN

Everyone remain calm. The King's Crest will stay the city guard.

REGAN

Good idea. Why don't you just walk over and talk to them.

NARRATOR

Brennen appeared to have misunderstood Regan's sarcasm, as he strode to the door expecting just such a conversation. The guards initiated conversation by lobbing an incendiary device at the door of the tavern. The fire spread rapidly, igniting the sawdust that covered the floor.

BILLY

Holy shit! Fire!

BRENNEN

Behind the bar! Get beer!

BILLY

Your plan is to start drinking?!

BRENNEN

For the fire, you idiot! Gods damnit, where did Regan go?

NELSON

Places like this always have a trap door or a secret exit or something. I bet the rogue snuck out.

JEN

Dammit Nelson! This isn't one of your games! These aren't characters, that's a real fire and we're all really going to die!

NIA

Galadon's mercy...the boy was right! Everyone, climb in here!

2

Int. Underground Aqueduct - A

Minute Later

2

NARRATOR

There was indeed a trap door, located in the floor behind the bar. Billy jumped in, feet-first, without regard to what lay within. I suppose he assumed that nothing could be worse than the fire above. In fact, many things lurking in the sewers of Armstrungard were much, much worse than the fire, but luckily, only one of them was present in this sewer at this moment...

Jen and Nelson followed clumsily. Nia, being more practical, noticed a ladder carved into the wall of the trench and climbed down. Yllowwyn, always pleased to demonstrate the superior physical prowess of elves, leapt into the sewage with unbelievable gracefulness. Brennen landed heavily, and then reached up to close the trap door behind them.

BRENNEN

Is everyone alright?

REGAN

(O.S.)
How'd they like the King's Crest?

PARTY

[*STARTLED GASP*]

NARRATOR

The aforementioned thing lurking in the sewer emerged from the shadows carrying a mud-cruste bedroll.

An explosion from above shook the tunnel.

REGAN

That'll be the the last of this year's brandy going up in flame, so I guess the gods really are dead.

BILLY

Were you gonna tell us about that trap door?!

REGAN

I still wasn't convinced you hadn't called in the cavalry on me. Plus, I figured you probably couldn't lead me to "a lifetime of wealth" if you couldn't survive a dance with the city guard.

YELLOWYYN

You're quick to accuse the city guard, yet you never saw our attackers.

REGAN

Burning down a whole building on the off chance I'm in it? Gotta be city guard.

BILLY

Man, I thought Philly cops were pricks.

NELSON

You thought Philly cops were pricks?

REGAN

(TO BRENNEN)

If I wanted to check out your story, where would I be headed?

BRENNEN

Castle Guernatal. And no one else knows who you are, so you'll need us to accompany you.

A BEAT.

REGAN

Guess we should get moving then.

NARRATOR

With that, Regan turned and strode confidently down the dim tunnel. Actually, "strode" may be too strong a word, as the height of the ceiling demanded a fair amount of stooping and shuffling. Still, Regan was substantially more surefooted than those in the group not practiced in the art of sneaking through sewers.

NIA

Do that many people really want you dead?

REGAN

The bounty on my head usually changes between substantial and obscene. I'd guess it's on the upswing right now.

YELLOWYYN

Ah, but city guardsmen can't collect a bounty, can they?

REGAN

Not according to the law.

YELLOWYYN

Precisely my point.

NIA

I think she's implying that they collect bounties anyway.

YELLOWYYN

Lawmen breaking the law? That would be perverse and repugnant.

REGAN SCOFFS.

REGAN

I take it none of you knows anywhere we could hide out for a while, huh? The road would be a bad idea for now.

BRENNEN

As a matter of fact, I may. Can you get us out on the east side of the city?

REGAN

Shouldn't be a problem.

NELSON

Do people try to kill you every day?

REGAN

No one upstairs knows what I look like, unless an asshole like the late Keith Kelly decides to point me out. Most don't.

NELSON

Oooh, I bet you're the leader of some kind of guild of rogues, right? Honor among thieves?

REGAN

I don't know what you heard about thieves' honor, kid, but I'm still alive because everyone knows what happens when you fuck with me.

NARRATOR

Our story will now take a brief interlude back to Castle Guernatal. Arlene Redmoor, the sister of Lord Ardel Redmoor, was resting in her modest bedchamber. Of course, by "modest," I mean that the gold therein could have fed the underworld of Armstrungard for a mere three months.

Arlene stared out her depressingly narrow window with concern at a thin pillar of smoke on the horizon. Gwen, her handmaiden, entered the room, carrying breakfast on a tray.

GWEN

Your breakfast, m'lady.

ARLENE

Thank you, Gwen. You can set it down over there. Remind me what I ordered.

GWEN

Quail's eggs, toasted bread with honey, and boiled oats with cream, m'lady.

NARRATOR

Arlene smiled warmly at Gwen. In fact, all signs of her previous brooding had vanished when Gwen arrived.

ARLENE

Funny that I would order quails eggs. I've never liked them.

NARRATOR

The smile which Gwen returned to her lady was of a more mischievous variety. It became downright cheeky as Gwen plucked a quail egg from the tray and popped it into her own mouth.

ARLENE

Come. Sit.
(WHISPERS)
Have you heard anything?

GWEN

(WHISPERS)
I wouldn't have thought anything of it if you hadn't told me to listen, but I overheard from Helga in the kitchen--

ARLENE

(WHISPERS)
--Helga?

GWEN

(WHISPERS)
Sorry, m'lady. She is handmaiden to Arabella Corelan.

ARLENE

(WHISPERS)
The daughter of the court philosopher?

GWEN

(WHISPERS)
The same, m'lady. Helga says Maid Corelan, the poor dear, has been plagued with nightmares as of late. Something about soldiers.

ARLENE

(WHISPERS)
See if you hear any more about Lord Corelan.
(NORMAL VOLUME)
Thank you, Gwen.

GWEN

I live to serve m'lady.

NARRATOR

The formality of her words was for the benefit of potential eavesdroppers, but the gentle touch of Gwen's hair and the small kiss on her forehead were for the benefit of the two women alone.

4

Ext. Briarhelm Vineyard - Late

Morning

4

NARRATOR

Our party of travelers had by this point escaped from the tunnels and the city of Armstrugard without detection. A light snow fell on their heads as they strolled down a narrow path between two fields, barren for the winter.

YLLLOWYYN

(TO BRENNEN)
You say your friend owns these lands?

BRENNEN

A man I knew in the army. He was the owner when last I was in Armstrugard.

YELLOWYYN

And if he is no longer the owner?

BRENNEN

We'll very politely explain our right to commandeer property to the new owners. One way or another, we need to stay out of sight for a few days.

NARRATOR

As they traveled, our group naturally tended to segregate themselves, as Nelson, Jen, and Billy lagged behind the rest of the group. This was partially due to the fact that, as much as Jen and Billy considered themselves "athletes", this claim was proving increasingly ill-founded. Nelson never made any claim to physical prowess. It was also due to Jen's disinclination to be anywhere near Aerona Regan.

(SOUND MIXER: DURING THIS NEXT PASSAGE, THE KIDS SHOULD TEND TOWARDS ONE AUDIO CHANNEL AND THE GROWNUPS TOWARDS THE OTHER.)

NELSON

So I've been thinking about party roles and how our arrangement is not ideal.

JEN

Nelson, what part of our situation is ideal?

NELSON

Ideally the party would have exactly one of each role.

REGAN

(TO BRENNEN)

You sure you can trust this friend of yours?

NELSON

Brennen is clearly the Paladin...

BRENNAN

He is loyal. Nearly to a fault.

NELSON

...Regan is the rogue...

REGAN

Dogs are loyal, until someone else dangles a bigger slab of meat in front of them.

NELSON

...Nia is the cleric...

NIA

You know, if you want to have any kind of a good life, at some point you'll need to put faith in something.

BILLY

...Nelson, what the hell are you babbling about?

REGAN

Well you keep worrying about a good life, preacher-lady. I'll worry about *keeping* my life.

NELSON

...And Yllowwyn is the ranger.

YLLLOWYYN

Even if you've no concern for honor or dignity, foresight is advantageous.

BILLY

Is there a point you're trying to make here?

REGAN

Foresight? I'm the only one here without a whole bunch of bullshit about "honor" and "duty" clouding my eyes.

NELSON

Yeah. Billy, your fighting style is clearly going to be based on physical strength...

BILLY

Damn straight. Wait, what?

NELSON

...because it's not gonna be based on intelligence.

NELSON

But Brennen is already the physical fighter.

BRENNEN

Are you so willing to dismiss the cornerstones of civilization?

REGAN

No, Brennen. I'm willing to dismiss civilization.

NELSON

And I'm clearly predisposed to magic, but Nia does magic.

NIA

Without civilization man reverts to his beast-like instincts.

REGAN

Beast-like? A hound fucks a bitch without shame, and then sticks around to help feed the litter. Men could use some more beast-like instincts.

NELSON

Though I suppose if need be I could focus on dark magic.

NIA

Don't joke about such things, child!

NELSON

And Jen, I really have no idea what your role is in all this. Your agility and overly-revealing outfit kind of peg you as a rogue.

JEN

You told me to wear this outfit.

NELSON

Good point. You're not really as self-reliant as most rogues.

BILLY

Why don't I self-rely your teeth into your throat, you little--

REGAN

--All that outfit marks her as is an easy kill.

NARRATOR

The blunt assessment of Jen's mortality struck the three children hard, especially Jen herself. After a tense moment of silence, Jen stormed off ahead of the group.

BILLY

Honey...

(BACK AT THE GROUP)

What the fuck is wrong with you people?

NARRATOR

Billy ran after Jen. Yllowyyn moved to follow--

(SOUND MIXER: CONVERSATION SHOULD NOW BE SEPARATED INTO NIA/NELSON, BRENNEN/REGAN/YLLOWYYN, AND BILLY/JEN.)

BRENNEN

--Let them go. But keep them in sight.

(TO REGAN)

Was that necessary?

REGAN

What? It's shitty armor.

BRENNEN

Have you no heart at all? The girl's terrified of you.

BILLY

Don't let her get to you, babe. She's probably just on the rag.

JEN

She almost killed me!

REGAN

Why? I didn't even cut her.

BRENNEN

She's not like us, you can't just--

REGAN

-Woah there, Grandpa. What "us?" I'm not anything like you.

NIA

(TO NELSON)

You're not very close with your traveling companions.

NELSON

They're not really my companions, we just kinda wound up together.

NIA

They don't treat you very kindly, do they?

NELSON

Jen's okay on her own, but if Billy gets on a roll she doesn't do much to stop him.

BILLY

I was right there, Jenny. I wasn't gonna let anything--

JEN

--Billy stop. Just leave it be, okay?

BRENNEN

You and I don't take every blade at our throats personally. Most people do.

REGAN

Most people are badly mistaken about what kind of world we live in.

BRENNEN

And why does that bother you so?

5

Ext. Briarhelm Farmhouse - Around

Noon

5

NARRATOR

The remainder of the trip passed in a rather awkward silence. Eventually, the group reached their destination, which turned out to be a large, run-down farmhouse. One of my friend sprites insists that this particular farm house was once beautiful and prosperous. Its present state led me to believe this friend is a liar.

REGAN

Well, well, well. The king's man knows how to slum it. Not for anything, General, but this doesn't seem like any place to bring a princess.

SOUND: THREE FIRM KNOCKS ON A WOODEN DOOR

BOWEN BRIARHELM (50'S) HAS THE ACCENT WE'D
ASSOCIATE WITH WALES.

BOWEN

(BEHIND AN OPENING DOOR)

I told you, gods damn you, after the next harvest--

NARRATOR

The bellowing voice, it turns out, belonged to the owner of the farm, a man by the name of Bowen Briarhelm. Briarhelm had been fit...once. He had been wealthy, once. He had been drinking, recently. He had arrived at the door wielding a woodcutter's ax. Upon seeing Brennen, he lowered the weapon...although he did not loosen his grip on the handle.

BRENNEN

Good morning, Captain Briarhelm.

BOWEN

Oh, Garedien bugger me.

6

Int. Briarhelm Farmhouse Dining
Room - A Few Minutes Later

6

NARRATOR

The group soon found themselves seated around a cracked table in the farmhouse. There were not enough seats for everyone, so Briarhelm stood in a corner.

BOWEN

When I prayed last night, I swore I'd rather see anyone at my door than another tax collector. I guess I lied.

YLLLOWYYN

Have you no sense of duty to the realm?

BRENNEN

(TO YLLLOWYYN)

Leave this to me, Kalth'yr.

(TO BOWEN)

We are sorry to impose on you like this. We have coin to compensate you for the use of your property. And if you are having trouble with your debts--

BOWEN

You'll pay exactly what I'd charge a boarder, no less, no more. Piss on your charity, Brennen. You can stay in the barn.

BILLY

A barn? You're shittin' me.

BRENNEN

(TO BILLY, STEELY)

Shut up.

(TO BOWEN)

Do you still keep an armory?

BOWEN

I don't maintain most of it, but yes.

BRENNEN

We'd like to purchase some of your arms as well, to train my squires here.

NELSON

Wait, for real?!

BOWEN

You have girl squires now?

BRENNEN

Camp followers.

NARRATOR

Briarhelm weighed his incredulity at this statement against his history with Brennen.

BOWEN

Let me go fetch the armory key.

SOUND: BOWEN PLODS UP SOME CREAKY STAIRS

NIA

I thought you said he was your friend.

BRENNEN

I said I knew him in the army. Everyone out. Meet me by the barn. We'll not be ungracious guests.

BILLY

(UNDER HIS BREATH)

Fuck this, man. At least you get a mattress in Pennsylvania.

NARRATOR

Billy's protests aside, the group trudged out. As the rest of the group left the room, Brennen pulled Regan back for a private word with her.

BRENNEN

(QUIETLY, TO REGAN)

All things considered, I think it's best if Captain Briarhelm--

REGAN

--I don't care what you tell your little friend there, Brennen. As long as nobody else finds out I'm here, we don't have a problem.

NARRATOR

Regan left, and Brennen returned from upstairs.

BOWEN

I don't believe for a second that they're squires and camp followers.

BRENNEN

Bowen--

BOWEN

Save your breath. King's secrets, I know. But if there's any more trouble here, it will ruin me. If any trouble is going to find them...If what we've been through together means anything to you, tell me now.

NARRATOR

The two men stared at each other for quite some time, as Brennen considered the best way to lie to the man whose history did in fact mean something to him.

BRENNEN

There's nothing to worry about.

A BEAT.

BOWEN

Good. I can give you the barn for a week. Then I need to make preparations for planting.

BRENNEN

That will be fine.

BOWEN

My armory's in the cellar behind the house. Here's the key.

BRENNEN

Thank you, Bowen.

END OF EPISODE ONE.

EPISODE TWO:

7

Ext Briarhelm Farm - EarlyAfternoon

7

NARRATOR

It was now early afternoon, and our party found themselves in the fields of the Briarhelm farm. For the first time in quite a while, nobody present was actively attempting to slaughter our heroes. As such, the group took the opportunity to "relax" in the cool afternoon sunlight. Billy and Jen walked away from the group, to engage in more private conversation.

JEN

I'm sorry I was bitchy to you before.

BILLY

It's alright. But I'm the only one who's always got your back, so just watch your temper, you know?

JEN

I know, I know. I'll make it up to you later?

NARRATOR

Jen leaned in to kiss Billy, but just as their private conversation was about to become a good deal more private and less conversational, Nelson ran to catch up with them.

NELSON

Hey, guys, so I'm starting to think--

BILLY

--Nelson shut the FUCK UP, I'm talking to my girl!

NARRATOR

Jen quickly took a step away from Billy, using the excuse of looking through her handbag. She found a device known as an "iPhone."

BILLY

Oh no shit, honey, your phone still works?

JEN

It's still got a charge, but I can't get any kinda signal.

NELSON

So Apple Maps will be pretty useless here, huh?

JEN
Yeah.

NELSON
At least that's one thing that's like home.

8

Int. Arlene's Bedchambers -
Simultaneous

8

NARRATOR
Meanwhile, back at Castle Guernatal, Arlene Redmoor was preparing for a formal evening of court functions. As was common for the highborn of Iorden, this preparation was accomplished with the assistance of her handmaiden, Gwen.

Ardel Redmoor burst into the room, without warning or regard for his sister's state of relative undress. By this point in our story, it probably does not surprise you that Ardel wasted no breath on greetings or pleasantries with his dear sister.

ARDEL
Read this story to your wench.
(TO GWEN)
You. You are to memorize this story as though it were your own dream.
(TO ARLENE)
Tonight, the two of you will wake the Bishop, and she will recount the dream to him.

ARLENE
Brother, she's not trained as a thespian.

ARDEL
I'm sure sure she can manage one story. You'd be very well-advised to see that see does.

NARRATOR
And without another word, Ardel turned and left the room, leaving the two women to ponder on the oddity of this request.

9

Ext. Briarhelm Farm - Afternoon 9

NARRATOR
Back at the farm, the party had its first opportunity to take in the beauty of the Iordic autumn.

Unfortunately, they were interrupted by Brennen. He returned from the house with a large heavy bundle, which he dropped on the ground at Jen and Billy's feet. The bundle made a rather telling clank as it hit the
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

ground. The children anticipated what was coming, Billy and Jen with dismay, Nelson with unabashed excitement.

BRENNEN

Everyone listen. We need to stay here a few days, and I want to take the chance to teach you young ones the basics of armed combat, in case you need to defend yourselves.

JEN

You know, if we just looked for a way to get us home, no one would have to teach us anything.

NELSON

Are those real swords?

BRENNEN

They're blunted. But before you start swinging them at each other, let's have a demonstration of experienced fighters. Kalth'yr?

YLLLOWYYN

Gladly.

BRENNEN

Regan?

REGAN

Huh?

BRENNEN

Would you like to spar with Yllowwyn?

BILLY GIGGLES.

BILLY

My mom says it'll make you blind.

REGAN

Spar?

BRENNEN

A pretend fight.

REGAN

Is there any *actual* thing in it for me?

BRENNEN

May I have a word? In private?

REGAN

Not to be a stickler for tradition, but shouldn't you be calling me 'Your Highness?'

BRENNEN

Would you please excuse us for a moment, children?

BILLY

Hey no more of this "sending us away while the grownups talk" shit. Say what you want.

BRENNEN

[SIGHS]

(TO REGAN)

If we all had to fight, how do you think our young companions would fare?

REGAN

I'd say almost as well as some boiled horse shit.

BILLY

Hey, fuck that. I--

JEN

(SCARED)

--Billy!

BRENNEN

(TO THE KIDS)

I hope you won't be insulted,

(TO REGAN)

but I can't very much argue.

NELSON

No, it's true. We all need to level-up a bunch.

BRENNEN

(TO REGAN)

My primary mission is to bring you back to claim your throne.

(RE: THE KIDS)

But I've also been ordered to keep them safe, which at the moment means keeping them near us. Which means if there's a fight, they'll be fighting alongside you.

REGAN

Is that negotiable?

BRENNEN

No. So, it is in your interest to concern yourself with their training.

NARRATOR

Regan carefully studied the children for a moment. To her disgust, she reached the same conclusion as Brennen. With a sigh, she reluctantly stood and walked to face Yllowwyn.

REGAN

Give it your best shot, splinter-pole.

NARRATOR

With the arrogance that only an adolescent elf could muster, Yllowwyn charged head-on towards the rogue. Regan stood, unflinching, almost lazily, in the elf's path. But at the final possible moment, with unbelievable quickness, she nimbly stepped aside, grabbed Yllowwyn by the shoulder and waist, and used his own speed to throw him to the ground. The elf hit the ground. Hard.

BILLY

Weenie, you just got your ass handed to you by a girl.

JEN

(DISHEARTENED)
You're rooting for her?

BILLY

Don't tell me you're rooting for Weenie.

NARRATOR

In an instant, Yllowwyn was back on his feet. This time, he studied his opponent for a moment before charging. His approach appeared identical. Only this time, when Regan went for the same grapple, her hands grasped empty air. A cat-like dodge allowed Yllowwyn to dodge Regan's grab, and set the rogue off-balance. A sharp, open-handed blow the sternum put the thief queen of Armstrungard on her back. Yllowwyn turned his back to his fallen opponent, a smirk on his face, and addressed the children.

YLLOWWYYN

(TO THE KIDS)
Now you see, proper training and good breeding will always win out in the end. The General and I can provide the former. As for the latter--

NARRATOR

Yllowwyn's pontificating was interrupted by his sudden acquaintance with the rocky ground. While he had been busy describing his victory, Regan tripped her opponent, pinned him to the ground, and unsheathed his hunting knife, all in one adept motion. Regan's right

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

hand grabbed a handful of Yllowyyns hair, and used it to yank his head uncomfortably. Her left hand brought the knife to Yllowyyn's throat. Also uncomfortable.

REGAN

Yield.

YLLOWYYN

(QUIETLY)

Fine.

REGAN

What was that?

YLLOWYYN

(FURIOUS)

I YIELD!!

REGAN

Rule number two for surviving a fight to the death: No fucking speeches. If you absolutely must make a speech, wait until you're sure the other guy is done.

NELSON

What's rule number one?

NARRATOR

Only now did Regan release her captive elf.

YLLOWYYN

Try that again, you silt-sucking--

BRENNEN

--Let me.

NARRATOR

As mad as Yllowyyn was, one look at Brennen quieted him. Brennen stood in front of Regan, and slowly stretched his neck left, then right. He cracked his knuckles, loudly, and then slowly reached for his battle axe.

REGAN

Let's dance, grandpa.

NELSON

You never said what rule number one was.

NARRATOR

Nelson's question was ignored as the two combatants squared off for the fight. Each stared menacingly at the other. Regan shifted her weight from side to side,

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

as if looking for an opening. Brennen stood still as a statue, looking as imposing and immovable as a mountain. The children, although they did not realize it, had been holding their breath for an interminable moment. The tension grew deeper, as neither combatant seemed willing to make the first move. Suddenly, Regan looked beyond Brennen, off towards the horizon. Her fighting stance relaxed, her face showed surprise and worry.

REGAN

I think the lessons are gonna have to wait.

SOUND: SCORE SWELLS

END OF--

REGAN

[EXERTIVE GRUNT]

SOUND: HARD HIT, SCORE CUTS OUT

BRENNEN

[PAINED GROAN]

NARRATOR

What Regan had seen was an opportunity to kick Brennen, as Billy would later go on to describe it, and I quote - "square in the nuts." She delivered the kick as soon as Brennen had turned his back. Just like the elf before him, the big man hit the ground hard and soon had Regan's knife at his throat.

BRENNEN

(SQUEAKS)
Yield.

YLOWYYN

You cheating mongrel git!

REGAN

(TO THE KIDS)
Rule number one for surviving a fight to the death: don't expect your enemy to follow any rules. He'll do anything to stay alive and so should you.

NARRATOR

Her lessons imparted, Regan finally released Brennen. He immediately fell to his side and vomited profusely. Regan threw down Yllowyyyn's blade and calmly strode back towards the barn, leaving the children to reflect on the outcome of the bout. In fact, the adults partook in some reflection as well.

NIA
Fighting without honor leads to a disordered soul.

BILLY
I'll take that over a disordered nutsack.

NIA
She may win fights, but she'll never know peace.

YELLOWYYN
Dishonor also sows distrust among allies, and that has
lost many a battle.

BRENNEN
(SHORT BREATHS)
Having no principles makes it easier to preserve your
life, but impossible to know if your life is worth
preserving. We'll resume training tomorrow.

NIA
(QUIETLY, TO BRENNEN)
I'll make you some ice.

GWEN
(PRE-LAP)
It was horrible, your Eminence.

10

Int. Castle Guernatal Tabernacle -
Night 10

NARRATOR
The Tabernacle was a sanctuary within Castle Guernatal
devoted to the worship of Galadon. The room was
extravagantly adorned. Sun shone through the large
stained glass windows, casting concentric circles of
red and gold onto the floor. These circles overlapped
with the circles of gold inlaid into the marble floors
and walls.

Of all the beautiful rooms in Castle Guernatal, I'm
told that this one was the favorite of the late Prince
Uther. Presently, however, it was occupied by Arlene,
Gwen, and the ancient head priest.

GWEN
It was the most beautiful bird I've ever seen. But then
the man with the golden circle on his head, he...he bit
its poor little head right off.

ARLENE
When I remembered General Brennen's dream...I hope we
haven't wasted your time, your Eminence.

HEAD PRIEST

Of course not, my child. Now is a time to err on the side of caution.

GWEN

Does it mean anything, your Eminence?

HEAD PRIEST

My child, dream analysis is an art more than a science. Your dream could mean any of a million and one things, or it could just be a dream. Maid Redmoor was wise to bring it to our attention, but you needn't worry your little heart about it any further.

ARLENE

Gwen, would you please wait for me outside?

GWEN

As you wish, m'lady.

ARLENE

Your Eminence, I understand if you don't want to worry the serving girl. But is there anything *I* should be worried about?

HEAD PRIEST

No, my child. Have a cup of brandied tea, and try to sleep.

ARLENE

I don't mean to presume, or to question your wisdom, your Eminence. But if you mean to spare me worry on account of my sex, I assure you, it will worry me more to not know whether my brother is in any danger.

NARRATOR

As if summoned by the speaking of his name, Ardel appeared at the door to the Tabernacle and strode in.

ARDEL

There you are. I awoke in the night with a peculiar feeling, and was worried when you weren't in your chambers. Are you well?

ARLENE

Yes, brother. My handmaiden had a nightmare and insisted upon seeing the Bishop.

ARDEL

Yes, I know how superstitious commoners can get.

ARLENE

Under the circumstances...

ARDEL

Yes, of course. As long as you're all right.

HEAD PRIEST

Lord Redmoor, I wasn't going to call on you at this hour, but as long as you're awake and here, perhaps I could have a word.

ARDEL

Of course, your Eminence. Arlene, run off to bed now, my dear.

HEAD PRIEST

Come, let us walk.

NARRATOR

Ardel Redmoor was well aware of the pace of the Head Priest's talking, and of his walking, for that matter. He hid his impatience well, however, and took the old man's hand. Meanwhile, Arlene found Gwen waiting in the hallway outside the shrine.

11

Tabernacle - Continuous Int. Corridor Outside the

11

GWEN

(WHISPERS)

I'm sorry m'lady. I didn't know how to warn you.

ARLENE

(WHISPERS)

That's alright. As far as he knows I was just doing as he told.

GWEN

(WHISPERS)

Did the Bishop reveal anything?

ARLENE

(WHISPERS)

No, my brother came in before I could ask him much.

GWEN

(WHISPERS)

First Maid Corelan's dream, and then this story.

A BEAT, WHILE ARLENE PONDERES.

ARLENE

(WHISPERS)

Do you know anyone who could discreetly fetch us some things from the Royal Library?

12

Ext. Briarhelm Barn - Simultaneous

12

NARRATOR

The moon and aurora had risen over the Briarhelm farm. Yllowyyn stood guard at the barnyard door, rhythmically sharpening his hunting knife.

13

Int. Briarhelm Barn, Ground Floor -

Continuous

13

NARRATOR

Within the barn lay a neat row of bales of hay, the only mattresses available for the barn's guests. Nia slept soundly atop the first bale. Nelson likewise slept on the second; his armor and weapons were of course neatly folded and arranged by his side. The remaining bales, however, were unoccupied.

14

Int. Briarhelm Barn, Second Floor -

Continuous

14

NARRATOR

There was a ladder up to the second floor of the barn, which Jen and Billy had ascended in hopes of finding some privacy. As Jen kissed Billy, he in his smallclothes and she in her recently purchased armor, she became very aware of his well-formed muscles. When Billy reached down and unfastened a single strap on Jen's waist, the entire lower part of her attire slid free.

JEN

[BREATHES HEAVILY]

REGAN

Free advice.

JEN & BILLY

[STARTLED GASP]

JEN

Holy shit!

BILLY

What the fuck is your problem?!

NARRATOR

Regan emerged from the shadows of the barn and casually strode into the dim light, trimming her fingernails with her knife.

REGAN

If he can fuck you after undoing one strap, you're not wearing armor.

(TO JEN)

I got you something.

NARRATOR

Regan sheathed her knife, and then kicked a large bundle of cloth across the floor towards Jen. Jen stared at it suspiciously; Regan nudged it closer to Jen and nodded. At this encouragement, Jen opened the package to find a suit of heavy leather armor studded with steel bands. The armor clearly was designed to cover all of a woman's vital organs, not just the ones that teenage boys consider vital.

REGAN

The design should keep you mobile, except, you know, also actually protect you.

JEN

You got me armor?

REGAN

Pieced it together best I could. You'll want an actual smith to toughen up those rivets first chance you get, but it'll do you a lot more good than the shit you been wearing.

BILLY

Hey! She likes the old--

REGAN

--I'm talking to her.

JEN

Why do you care about my clothes?

REGAN

For starters, our fates, unfortunately, seem to be intertwined for the time being. So I'd much rather you dressed like a fighter than a dead meat sausage in a whore casing.

JEN

Jesus, are you always this flattering?

REGAN

And rule number three for surviving a fight to the death: settle your debts before the fight starts. People do stupid things when they think you owe them something.

JEN

Excuse me?

REGAN

We're even now, right?

JEN

You said you would, quote, "fucking gut me like dinner," and now you give me some clothes and we're supposed to be even?

REGAN

I didn't draw blood.

JEN

But you would have!

REGAN

I would do what everyone does, which is anything I fucking need to to survive.

JEN

Well, then...

REGAN

I'm sorry, I thought I was talking to a woman, not a little girl. My mistake.

NARRATOR

Without waiting for a response, Regan turned and descended the ladder, leaving the two children alone. Jen stood wordlessly for a moment, staring uncomprehendingly at the rogue's gift.

BILLY

What a cunt.

15

Simultaneous

Int. Castle Guernatal Tabernacle -

15

NARRATOR

Quite some time had passed at Castle Guernatal, meaning Ardel's conversation with the Head Priest had only just begun.

ARDEL

What do you think this dream means?

HEAD PRIEST

Divining the meaning of a dream is not like, say, mixing a potion. The purposes of the elements can vary depending on the circumstances.

ARDEL

You've said as much. But surely you consider some possible meanings more likely than others.

NARRATOR

The head priest suddenly stopped walking and stared off into the empty space in front of him for a long moment. Ardel waited, slightly concerned that the ancient man may have suffered a stroke mid-conversation. Eventually, however...

HEAD PRIEST

Ah, yes. That did it.

ARDEL

Did what, your Eminence?

HEAD PRIEST

I find that walks can be very helpful in evacuating the bowels. Don't you?

ARDEL

Beg your pardon?

HEAD PRIEST

Helpful for evacuating the bowels, I say. Would you be so kind as to accompany me to the privy, Lord Redmoor?

ARDEL

I would think one of your subordinates--

HEAD PRIEST

--No, no. You said yourself - privacy is vital.

ARDEL

Well, surely it can wait until--

HEAD PRIEST

--No, your sister spoke truth. These are not times for taking things lightly.

Few Minutes Later

HEAD PRIEST
[STRAINED GROAN]

NARRATOR
(SLIGHT OVERLAP HEAD PRIEST)
Ardel helped the old man reach a privy. For all the lethargy of their conversation to this point, the priest seemed impatient to discuss Gwen's dream, and refused Ardel's request to leave him to his privacy. You will forgive this particular wood sprite for enjoying the repulsion and discomfort evident on Ardel's face as he stood beside the old man and his gilded chamber pot.

HEAD PRIEST
O! The research I could do if I weren't always carrying out some ritual or another to keep my bowels moving. Truly, regular bowel movements are wasted on the young. No offense, Lord Redmoor.

ARLENE
You were saying, your Eminence, about the dream?

HEAD PRIEST
Ah yes. Until I can speak with more certainty, I would not alarm anyone with - HHHNNNNNNNNHHHHH! - hasty, irresponsible prophesying.

ARDEL
Your Eminence, the servile classes are prone to three things: superstition, gossip, and panic. If one has a nightmare, they'll start to talk soon enough, and then we'll have to prevent a panic. But if I know in advance what the rumors are likely to be, we can better prepare to maintain control of the situation.

HEAD PRIEST
I see your point, Lord Redmoor. I must once again stress that this should not be taken as my official reading of the young girl's dream, but if I had to essay as to how it might likely be read...it could lead some to think that the King is a traitor.

NARRATOR
Despite his discomfort, Ardel managed to make a passable feint at shock. Inwardly, however, he couldn't be more pleased.

END OF EPISODE TWO.

EPISODE THREE:

17

Dream sequence: Int. EndlessBanquet Hall - Time Unclear

17

NARRATOR

Brennen dreamt of an infinite table. Well, we've already covered the limitations of the human mind, et cetera et cetera. He dreamt of an incomprehensibly long table. The table was like one that might be found at a banquet, narrow enough so that guests sitting along one long edge of the table may converse with those sitting along the opposite long edge. This particular table was set for an, ahem, infinite number of guests, but only three figures sat around the table. Brennen sat alone on one side.

Across from him sat a young girl. Her appearance was exactly the same as it was in Brennen's previous dream, down to the eerily serene look and gaping puncture wound. Beside her sat a figure composed entirely of white light, a golden halo sat on its head. Between Brennen and the two figures sat a large, ornate silver platter, which one would expect to hold the main course of the banquet. This platter held the beautiful bird. The bird was splayed out on the silver as if stuffed and roasted, yet clearly still lived. It lifted its graceful red-and-gold neck and looked directly at Brennen. The bird's obsidian eyes caught Brennen's brown ones for a brief moment, before the bird weakly lowered its head. The girl spoke.

YOUNG GIRL

There are seven things you must know to save me. The second thing is: the King has loved my enemy.

NARRATOR

Brennen remained silent. Perhaps he was considering his response, perhaps he tried to collect his confusion into a question to ask the dream forms. If so, he never got the chance. From the darkness behind the girl and the creature of light, a third figure materialized. This was the nightmare demon, the indescribable horror. Neither the girl nor the figure of light could see the demon behind them. In the fashion of nightmares, Brennen found himself unable to act, unable to warn the girl, unable to tear his eyes away from the demon. Almost casually, the demon extended a clawed hand and tore out the throat of the figure of light.

The horror carefully lifted the golden halo off of the light and placed it on his own head. As soon as the gold touched the dark skull, the figure of light

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

disappeared, its luminosity rapidly fading to nothing. The demon lifted the bird off of the table, its red and gold wings protesting weakly. As the demon tore off the bird's head with its teeth, the golden halo turned red, and blood poured down the demon's face.

18 Morning Int. Location Unclear - Early 18

(OMIT)

19 A Few Minutes Later Int. Briarhelm Barn, Ground floor - 19

NARRATOR

The sun had barely appeared over the horizon the next morning when Brennen entered the barn.

REGAN

Good morning old man. Have you seen your charming dear friend? He seems to have disappeared.

NARRATOR

Regan was sitting the final watch by the door; the rest of the group still slept soundly on their hay bales.

BRENNEN

You're aware that farmers do actually have business to attend to sometimes?

REGAN

This early? Keith Kelly had business to attend to.

BRENNEN

Keith Kelly...

REGAN

The one back at the Rat, that sold me out. Whose face I set on fire before I drowned him in his own blood.

BRENNEN

I've been killing men since before your mother was a coin in some street urchin's pocket. Captain Briarhelm served under me in four campaigns.

REGAN

I bet he did.

BRENNEN

You think you can frighten me with threats of violence? Or him?

REGAN

So do you two still fuck?

BRENNEN

You impudent little whoreswhelp, you know nothing--

REGAN

--I don't care what you put your cock in, Brennen. I'd just rather know beforehand. Secrets and spurned lovers are a bad combination.

BRENNEN

Secrets and disrespectful children are even worse.

REGAN

(RE: THE KIDS)

Good luck training your fierce warriors up there.

NARRATOR

With that, Regan turned and left the barn. Brennen stood in silence for a moment, marinating in his anger. After a deep breath, he turned to the task at hand.

BRENNEN

EVERYONE UP! THREE MINUTES TO GET DRESSED AND ARMED!

20

Ext. Briarhelm Farm - Twenty

Minutes Later

20

NARRATOR

Some twenty minutes later, the group stood in their best guess at a military formation in the field outside the barn. Their best guess was woefully inadequate. Billy was wearing an odd mix of his old football gear and his new mail, with the extra pieces in a heap at his feet. Jen's hair was dreadfully tangled in her new armor. Even Nelson's armor was disheveled, in that some buckles were belted to the third hole, and some to the fourth.

BRENNEN

You should all understand that, had we been ambushed, you would all be dead right now.

NELSON

It's my understanding that knights would usually have squires to help them put on armor.

BRENNEN

We don't. Plan accordingly.

NELSON

I'm just saying I think we did pretty well for a first attempt.

NARRATOR

As if to defy Nelson's claim, the codpiece of Billy's armor chose this moment to clatter loudly to the ground. With a sigh, Brennen set to work. The first lesson was in the use of sword and shield.

BRENNEN

Nelson, try to strike Billy. Billy, try to block it.

NARRATOR

Nelson needed both hands to even get his sword off the ground. With a great heave, he managed to swing the weapon towards Billy. The motion spun Nelson's entire body in a circle, and he nearly fell from the effort. Billy hefted the weight of the sword more comfortably, but no more correctly. As Nelson's swing slowly approached Billy, Billy managed to move his own sword into the path to block the blow. The swords clashed. Rather, they would have clashed if either combatant had any strength or skill behind their blows. Instead, the swords made a rather dull thud.

BRENNEN

Wrong! How do you think they blunted those swords? Block with your shield, that's what it's for. If you absolutely must block with your sword, try to deflect the blow. Come, Billy.

NARRATOR

Abandoning hope for training Nelson with a sword, Brennen took up the task of training Billy personally. The old general made an exaggeratedly slow swing of his own sword directly at Billy's shield. Billy smiled at his perceived success.

BRENNEN

Better. Again.

NARRATOR

Brennen took another swing at Billy, and then another and another. Billy's use of the shield was surprisingly not abysmal, until the weight of the metal and the shock of the blows began to drag on his shield arm. In a few seconds, he was struggling to even hold the shield, but Brennen would not relent. The old general continued to batter Billy's shield until he dropped it entirely. One sharp tap to the top of the helmet and Billy was flat on his back on the ground, breathing heavily.

BRENNEN

I thought you said you were an athlete.

NARRATOR

Brennen quickly realized the futility of teaching the finer points of swordsmanship at this moment, and assigned them the task of working on their arm strength instead. Billy found a suitable beam inside the barn and set to repeatedly hefting his own weight against it in a tactic he called a "pullup." Nelson and Jen were resting behind the barn when Nia approached.

NELSON

Are we gonna learn any magic?

NIA

The General wants you to learn some basic fighting skills quickly. You won't get far with magic in just a few days.

NELSON

Well I don't exactly think we're cut out for broadswords.

JEN

I dunno, I might be able to get it if I work out a little more.

NELSON

Let's face it, Jen. Neither of us is what you picture when you think of "famous swordsman."

NIA

I see your point. Have a seat.

NARRATOR

And so the day of training continued. In the nearby forest, a rabbit -- in fact a distant descendant of the venerable Mr. Fluffy Toes -- did honor to his ancestor by participating in the noble task of creating new rabbits. This is not particularly relevant to our story, but is more interesting than describing ten hours of practice with sword and shield. The children worked hard and slept well. The next morning, they reacted to Brennen's three-minute wake-up call in a mere eight minutes.

BRENNEN

Getting better. Today you might have even had time to beg for mercy before your enemy delivered his killing strike.

NARRATOR

Thus convened another rather boring day of training. The children's skills slowly improved. The progeny of Mr. Fluffy Toes continued to strive towards providing the world with more of his own descendants. Brennen continued to drill the children in basic swordwork. Their skills slowly improved from "embarrassing" to simply dreadful. They earned a break for lunch, and then in the afternoon Nia began to teach the children about her abilities.

NIA

We are in Iorden, the physical world. Selbirin is the spiritual world. Everything in the Iordic plane - the wind, the sea, the rocks, everything - has a counterpart in Selbirin, almost like a reflection. Each Iordic object is bound to the will of its Selbiric counterpart. Or, more accurately...nevermind, let's stay sketchy. The Iordic ocean is wet because the Selbiric ocean wills it to be so. To use what you call magic is to bend the will of other things to your own. In the tavern, I wanted the beer to be cold, so I reached out to its Selbiric essence and bent its will to my own.

NELSON

Awesome. What spells can we cast right now?

NIA

You mustn't try spellcasting without extensive study beforehand. It would be extremely dangerous.

NELSON

But what if one of us was the Anointed One like in Brennen's dream?

NIA

...I can't claim to know.

JEN

You're saying water...has a will?

NIA

Yes, but it's not that simple. Imagine cutting a drop of water in half. Imagine cutting the halves in half. Imagine cutting a drop of water into parts so small, that smaller parts would not be water.

JEN

Molecules.

NIA

Oslits, they are called. Each oslit in drop of water has a will. Together they comprise the will of the drop. And the wills of all the drops of water comprise the will of a sea.

JEN

So what about those rabbits over there? Or...or even a person? People are made of mol- oslits. Can you ... force people to your will the way you forced the beer?

NIA

Living things certainly have a Selbiric essence, but it seems their wills cannot be bent. The scholarship disagrees on why, though this is actually the subject of my research. Some have suggested that enough oslits bound together may form a sort of wall, greater than the sum of its parts. Scripture calls it the uncorruptable soul.

JEN

Incredible...

NELSON

That's what I've been trying to tell you guys about the rich mythology--

JEN

--No I mean that they've developed basic atomic theory and an emergent theory of consciousness.

NELSON

...An emergency of what-now?

JEN

It's a footnote in the bio textbook.

NARRATOR

That evening, having been dismayed by what she saw earlier, Regan took her turn at instruction. She fought with her own sword, a modification of the Mooncrest style. The blade was thin and razor-sharp on one edge. Billy actually managed to get his shield in the way of each strike.

REGAN

Not bad. You're bleeding though.

BILLY

What? Where?

NARRATOR

Billy dropped his shield, using his now-free arm to feel around for a cut. Regan took that opportunity to flick her blade, almost too fast to see. A drop of blood welled up on Billy's left cheek.

REGAN

Your cheek.

NARRATOR

Regan called Nelson in for his lesson just after dinner. Nelson returned with a cut on his left cheek, and also a peculiar stumble to his gait, a telltale sign of Regan's preferred fighting style.

JEN

What happened to you?

NELSON

(SQUEAKS)

I was unscrupulously deceived.

REGAN

(TO JEN)

Your turn, girly.

NELSON

(SQUEAKS, TO NIA)

Can you make me some ice please?

NIA

Of course, child.

NARRATOR

Jen only shook slightly as she went off into the woods with the armed woman. But when Regan began swinging her blade, Jen held her own with the shield.

REGAN

Not bad. You're bleeding though.

JEN

Nice try.

REGAN

Good girl. I thought you were smarter than you let on...Billy, put your clothes back on!

JEN

Huh?

NARRATOR

Jen turned to see what sort of stupidity Billy was now getting himself in to. As you might have guessed, Billy was nowhere to be seen. Instead, Regan grabbed Jen's hair, pulled her close, and nicked her left cheek with the tip of her blade.

REGAN

More free advice: Lose the hair, and your little gamecock. One of 'em will get you killed.

NARRATOR

At the end of the fourth day of training, Billy's skills had progressed enough that he could nearly keep pace with Brennen's drills.

BRENNEN

Block! Bash! Strike! Recover! Block! Bash! Strike! Recover!

NARRATOR

Eventually, however, he still flagged. At the end of one particular drill, as Billy's shield arm slowed, Brennen changed the pattern slightly by throwing a mailed fist directly at Billy's face. The punch stopped a mere whisper's length away from Billy's still quite broken nose.

BRENNEN

There's skill to armed combat. Form matters. But at the end of the day, you're still just breaking a man's body until he's dead. Never forget that, lad.

21

Ext. Behind the Briarhelm Barn -

21

Evening

NARRATOR

Meanwhile, Jen and Nelson had resumed their instruction with Nia.

NELSON

So how do you bend the wills of other things?

NIA

You must commune with Selbirin. Some, like myself, find this easier with the aid of a holy object.

NARRATOR

She held aloft her staff.

NIA

Others may use song. Summoners employ a familiar from Selbirin.

JEN

Okaaaay, but none of this--

NELSON

--Wait. You're telling me I'm not only in a place where I can become an *actual* wizard, but I can do it by communing with demons and spirits and shit?

JEN

(SOTTO VOCE, TO HERSELF)
Demons.

NARRATOR

Something about the word 'demon' nagged at Jen's memory. It somehow related to a nearly-forgotten lecture from Valley Central High School.

NIA

Summoning is not to be undertaken lightly. There are dark and chaotic forces in Selbirin, as well as benevolent ones. Summoners train for years before their first conjuration, to make sure they only contact the forces they want.

NARRATOR

As Nelson became enraptured by the talk of spirits, Jen recalled something about a philosopher named Maxwell. She focused intently on a patch of dry grass.

NIA

And there are some summoners who intentionally contact the forces of destruction. I say truly, they lose their souls in the process.

NELSON

What about incantations?

NIA

Some mages find them useful for focusing their minds.

NARRATOR

Through her concentration, Jen thought she could detect a tiny wisp of smoke rising from the dry foliage--

BILLY

--Nelson, are you still up the teacher's ass?

NARRATOR

Jen's concentration was immediately broken, and the wisp of smoke, if indeed it existed, was gone.

BILLY

What are you doing over here, Jenny?

NELSON

She's telling us about emergent theories of consciousness.

BILLY

Huh?

JEN

(EMBARRASED)

Something I saw on *CSI*.

BILLY

Oh, yeah, that show's gay.

22

Int. Briarhelm Barn, Second Floor -

Night

22

NARRATOR

Later that evening, Jen and Billy had once again retreated to the privacy of the hayloft. Billy was vigorously applying saliva to Jen's face. Jen's her facial expression indicated her mind was elsewhere.

JEN

How would you feel if I cut my hair?

BILLY

What?

JEN

Like if I cut my hair short?

BILLY

We have to talk about this now?

JEN

I was just thinking about it a lot today.

NARRATOR

Billy, for once, sensed that there was no recovering the amorous mood. Frustrated, he disentangled himself from Jen.

BILLY

Like how short? Like lesbian short?

JEN

I dunno, like, Regan short.

BILLY

Is that where this is coming from? You wanna be like Regan now?

JEN

No, God no. I don't wanna be like her. But she knows how to survive around here. Maybe short hair is smart.

A BEAT OF SILENCE.

JEN (cont'd)

I'm scared, Billy!

BILLY

I don't make you feel safe?

JEN

No, I didn't mean--

BILLY

--Fine cut your hair then.

NARRATOR

With a sigh, Jen turned and stormed down the ladder, as much as one can storm down a ladder.

BILLY

What? Cut it.

JEN

I need some fresh air.

23

Ext. Behind the Briarhelm barn -

Night

23

NARRATOR

Jen, indeed needing some fresh air, walked out of the barn and towards the empty expanses of fields. Alone, she paced under the moon and stars. She paced and paced, and the full moon climbed from the horizon up to its apex. Finally, she stopped pacing. Jen grabbed her hair in a fist, and pulled it in front of her face. She stared at her beautiful locks for a long moment. With a sigh, she drew the knife from the hilt at her waist, and brought the blade up to the base of her ponytail. She was just about to chop it all off, when a dirty hand grabbed her wrist. A second hand roughly covered Jen's mouth, preventing her from screaming. With frightening skill, the one hand twisted Jen's wrist until her grip on the knife loosened. The hand then grabbed the knife and placed it firmly at Jen's throat.

SELLSWORD

'Ello, lovey.

END OF EPISODE THREE.

EPISODE FOUR:

24

Ext. Briarhelm Barn - Night

24

SELLSWORD

You don't need'a get hurt. I just need'a know where Aeron Regan is. Scream and I'll kill you, though. Understand?

NARRATOR

Jen had found herself once more abruptly at the uncomfortable end of a knife. The knife was held by a rather grimy looking man.

SELLSWORD

Where is she?

JEN

I didn't see her when I got out of bed.

SELLSWORD

You're making yourself expendable.

JEN

Okay, if I were Aeron Regan, what would I be doing right now?

NARRATOR

Suddenly, Jen's eyes focused past the grimy man's shoulder, as she gestured wildly with both hands, pointing behind the man.

JEN

I'd be running away behind you!

SELLSWORD

What?!

NARRATOR

The grimy man turned his back on Jen. Jen, as you may have guessed, had recalled Aeron Regan's preferred fighting style, and took the opportunity her lie had created to kick the man, as Billy would say, "square in the nuts." Her assailant doubled over in pain, dropping the knife in the process. Jen grabbed the blade and ran towards the barn.

JEN

WAKE UP!! WAKE UP!!

NARRATOR

Brennen had been on watch at the door of the barn. In no time at all, he was running to Jen. He took a quick

(MORE)

28

EXT. BRIARHELM BARN - CONTINUOUS 28

NARRATOR

While Nia was shepherding the children upstairs, Brennen and Yllowwyn drew their weapons and ran out of the barn. They ran directly into a semicircle of men, who had been watching the entrance to the barn with their own weapons raised.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN

This don't 'ave to be a bloodbath. Just tell us where Aeron Regan is.

BRENNEN

I wish we knew.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN

Well you're gonna help us look. Or we'll kill you all.

NARRATOR

All the armed men wore a blue bandana around their left arms, indicating their affiliation to the same mercenary company.

YLLOWYYN

You sewer trash. Have you any idea whom you're threatening?

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN

Don't really give a sod.

NARRATOR

The men all snickered at this, as though it were a clever joke.

29

Int. Briarhelm Barn, Second Floor -
Continuous 29

NARRATOR

Nia and the children found a small window that looked out over the barn entrance. From this vantage they could see the excitement outside, and just barely hear the conversation

YLLOWYYN

(FAR-OFF, FAINT)

Does His Majesty's royal crest mean nothing to you, you poxy cur?

BILLY

(WHISPERS)

This is bullshit.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN

(FAR-OFF, FAINT)

Ohhhh, you serve the High King, do you? Why didn't you say so?

BILLY

(WHISPERS)

People keep trying to kill us, and we gotta be pussies about it.

NIA

(WHISPERS, URGENT)

Be. Quiet.

30

Ext. Briarhelm Barn - Continuous 30

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN

We can't kill you then. It'd make us outlaws.

NARRATOR

The men all burst out laughing.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN

Start talking 'fore I put this knife up your arse.

MAN'S VOICE

What in Selbirin are you doing out 'ere?!

NARRATOR

At that moment, a second group of extremely dirty, heavily armed men came running out of the woods. These men all had red bandanas around their right arms.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN

Rickard?

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN 2

Anders? Is that you?

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN

I suppose we's out here for the same thing.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN 2

Not every day someone tells you where to find the thief queen of Armstrunguard.

NARRATOR

At this, Brennen paid careful attention.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN

I thought I was the only one crazy enough to believe that buggering old pauper though.

NARRATOR

In the part of a man's mind that makes horrible truths unavoidable once made plain, Brennen immediately realized to whom this comment referred.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN 2

How d'you suppose we resolve this?

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN

I think that's obvious. We was here first.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN 2

...No you wasn't! We was waiting in them woods all day to ambush her. You just come running out first!

NARRATOR

Yllowyyn swung his bow back and forth between the leaders of the two groups, unsure of which was the more urgent target.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN

Well we ain't going anywhere!

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN 2

Neither are we. Which means we can either cut each other to pieces and wait for Aeron Regan to finish us off, or we can split the bounty. Be honest. Fifteen men against Aeron Regan's a gamble anyway.

A BEAT.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN

...Alright, you sneaky bastard. You've got yourself a gods damned deal.

NARRATOR

The two crews of mercenaries, who had turned their weapons toward each other earlier, now turned their swords towards their common purpose--Brennen and Yllowyyn. Thirty men now stood against the old soldier and the young elf.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN 2

You finish off these two, I'll try around back, and we'll sort out the money later.

BILLY

(FAR-OFF, FAINT)

Sounds like a night at your mom's house!

NARRATOR

That quip, of course, came from the infinitely clever mind of Billy. He had been listening to the whole

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)
 conversation from above, and decided to ignore Nia's warnings. The sellsword's response, however, was entirely unexpected.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN 2
 (TO SELLSWORD CAPTAIN 1)
 You backstabbing sod! I told you my family history in confidence!

31 Int. Briarhelm Barn, Second Floor -
Continuous. 31

(OMIT)

32 Ext. Briarhelm Barn - Continuous 32

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN
 I never told no one!

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN 2
 You lie!!

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN
 How dare you?! It's not my fault your mum'd drop her breeches for a half piece!

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN 2
 How's about we bring up your drunkard of a father?

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN
 Don't you dare!

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN 2
 Can't say I blame him. I'd drink myself stupid too, if I'd stuck my cock in your sow of a mum and all I had to show for it was you.

SELLSWORD CAPTAIN
 I'LL WEAR YOUR EGGS FOR A NECKLACE, YOU SHIT!!

NARRATOR
 All of a sudden, the two mercenary captains were fighting each other, their swords clashing loudly. The rest of each company followed suit, and within moments an all-out brawl between the red-arms and the blue-arms had commenced. Brennen and Yllowyyn stood not two feet away, utterly forgotten by the mercenaries.

BRENNEN
 (QUIETLY, TO YLLOWYYN)
 I need to see to the children. Can you clean up what's left here?

YLOWYYN
 (QUIETLY)
 Shouldn't be a problem.

33

Int. Briarhelm Barn, Second Floor -
Nearly Continuous 33

NARRATOR
 Brennen went into the barn and found the rest of the party in the loft.

BILLY
 The fuck's going on out there?

BRENNEN
 Nia, that was quick thinking with Regan. But I need to know where she is now.

NIA
 Quick thinking?

BRENNEN
 Saying you hadn't seen her.

NIA
 I *haven't* seen her.

BRENNEN
 (TO THE KIDS)
 Any of you?

NARRATOR
 Brennen had another moment of horrible realization, and rushed back down the ladder.

34

Ext. Briarhelm Barn - Continuous 34

NARRATOR
 Outside, Yllowyyyn watched, with the expression of a fanatic at sporting event, the two mercenary leaders locked in single combat, the corpses of their followers strewn at their feet. The Red Armband saw a opening and pushed forward, only to slip on a pile of gore from one of his fallen comrades. Blue Armband did not waste his opportunity, smashing his mace into his opponent's face. Red Armband crumpled, and Blue Armband raised his hands in celebration. His celebration was rather short-lived, though, as an arrow pierced his left eye. For good measure, Yllowyyyn put another into Red Armband as well.

Brennen sprinted past.

NARRATOR

Brennen found Bowen Briarhelm sitting alone at the head of his table, lit only by moonlight. Empty bottles were strewn around the former soldier.

BOWEN

Now we're square.

BRENNEN

Those men could've killed any of my charges. Even the innocent ones.

BOWEN

An' you killt me the second you brought her here. I astyou, Brennen. I astyou if she was trouble. I came the closest I'll ever come to begging. An' you lied.

BRENNEN

I could have protected you if you hadn't betrayed us.

BOWEN

From some snot-nosed bounty killers, sure. What about the bankers?

BRENNEN

I offered you money, just like I did when--

BOWEN

--I'll be damned 'fore I take a coin of your fuggin' allowance from Gunther.

BRENNEN

Then that's your pride, damn you. I'm not innocent but don't dare lay this all at my feet.

BOWEN

You've some nerve to talk to me about pride, you son of a whore. After all your talk about "what's expected of a man."

BRENNEN

Honor isn't the same as pride.

BOWEN

No. Pride's when you refuse to break rules you set for yourself. Honor's when you let everyone else set the rules for you.

BRENNEN

Honor is all we have when we can't be trusted to set rules for themselves.

BOWEN

It's so easy for you, isn't it? So easy when you can hide what you want behind honorable things.

BRENNEN

It's never been easy. That's why they call it honor.

BOWEN

Was it easy to ruin me with a lie?

BRENNEN

Was it easy for you to betray us?

BOWEN

You first.

BRENNEN

My hands were tied, Bowen. My orders--

BOWEN

--Gods damn you, you're lying again. Don't hide behind orders or honor or duty...How is his majesty?

BRENNEN

Old, sick, and under siege.

BOWEN

Me too...To answer your question, yes. When I overheard those sword-clanging pissants in the bar and realized, several brandies into the day, that you lied, yes. Betraying you was the easiest thing I've ever fuggin' done. Well, maybe second easiest. It's dealing with it after I done it that's hard.

A BEAT OF SILENCE.

BOWEN (cont'd)

You came here to kill me before she does, didn't you?

BRENNEN

Bowen...

BOWEN

Lying to a dying man's a curse on your house.

BRENNEN

...Aye.

BOWEN

But now that you're lookin' me in the eyes, you ain't got the piss in you to do it, have you?

BRENNEN

No.

BOWEN

But you can't stop her, can you?

BRENNEN

30 years ago, maybe.

BOWEN

If what I've heard about her is true, you let a mad bitch off the chain.

BRENNEN PAUSES A BEAT TO REFLECT.

BRENNEN

I don't think she's mad. I think she's spent her whole life trapped in a corner.

BOWEN

Haven't we all?

NARRATOR

Then, Bowen Briarhelm let out a soft groan. Blood burbled out of his mouth, and his eyes rolled sickeningly. Regan twisted her sword sword between Briarhelm's neck and shoulder, and then yanked it free. Blood sprayed from the body, covering the rogue and a large portion of the room.

BRENNEN

I suppose it would have been naive to ask you to show him mercy.

REGAN

That was mercy.

A BEAT.

REGAN (cont'd)

What did he want done with his body?

NARRATOR

Brennen said nothing. Had Regan been anyone other than she was, the blankness on Brennen's face would have terrified her. She left him alone to his emotions, but returned a few moments later dragging the corpse of one of the mercenaries behind her. This mercenary, notably, was built similarly to the late Bowen Briarhelm. Moreover, he had had his face carved off.

REGAN

You're gonna help me get this guy into your friend's clothes. Then you can do whatever you want with his body. But make damn sure you bury him deep enough that no one'll find him. And Brennen?

NARRATOR

He stared deeply into her eyes, his face still betraying none of his grief or anger.

REGAN

Now we're square.

END OF CHAPTER.