

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

Chapter 5 - "The Worthiest Knight"

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Based on the Teleplay by Christian T. Madera

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ACT ONE:

1

EXT. Small Creek - Morning

1

NARRATOR

King Gunther's body floated to the center of a still, nameless lake. Brennen stood and watched as his King, his friend began his final journey to a watery rest, to reside for eternity in Selbirin. The morning was silent, save for the crackling flames of the King's pyre barge. A man of Gunther Guernatal's status deserved an elaborate barge, painted and carved. He deserved to be sent off directly into the Sea of the Ancestors, attended by dignitaries from all corners of the world. Instead, he was attended only by Brennen and Regan, on what might generously be called a raft. The silence stretched on.

BRENNEN

I was hoping some fitting words would come to me. Gunther was so good with words.

REGAN

Sometimes there aren't any good words. That's why they invented steel.

A BEAT.

Um...Brennen...not to be heartless but...

BRENNEN

You're right, we should move.

NARRATOR

With a final look towards the King, Brennen rose and turned. The two strode away in silence for a few moments.

BRENNEN

That reminds me, what have you named them?

REGAN

Depends on whether I'm with a man or a woman, 'cause--

BRENNEN

--Your swords, Your Grace.

REGAN

There a problem with 'sword?'

BRENNEN

They've been blooded in service of the throne. They deserve names.

REGAN

Never really thought about it. Guess people take that shit seriously once you're queen, huh?

BRENNEN

Very much so, Your Grace.

REGAN

Yeah, that still weirds me out. Call me something else, will ya?

BRENNEN

Whatever Your Grace wills.

2

EXT. Madame Bailey's - Morning

2

NARRATOR

Back in Armstrungard, you'll recall, Jen the cheerleader had just stabbed an officer of the law. A corrupt officer who used his status to molest children, but an officer nonetheless.

NIA

(O.S., DISTANT)
Jen?

SOUND: SHORT, RAPID FOOTSTEPS STOPPING AT THE NEXT LINE

NIA

Galadon help us.

YELLOWYYN

What have you done?

BILLY

Oh, shit!

NIA

We need to leave.

YELLOWYYN

And flee the scene of a crime? That would be unlawful and dishonorable.

BILLY

You wanna just wait here for the fucking cops to show up? C'mon Jen, we gotta bail.

YELLOWYYN

Now wait just a minute.

NIA

You've never lived in this city. No good can come of involving the city guard.

YELLOWYYN

Honor is bigger than what's good for her. Or you, or me.

NARRATOR

Nia turned to Yllowyyyn, rage fighting with fear behind her wide eyes. Nia stared the elf square in the eye, and addressed him in perfect Elvish.

NIA

Urrk lo Tyymo, Hyylyet--

NARRATOR

--Oh, pardon me, I'll translate. Ahem.

NIA

About honor, sibling woodsman, lecture me dare you not! My life to seeing honor done and order maintained have I pledged. To give her up to the city guard, naive, or else cruel, you must be. And for naiveness, or cruelty, to be cloaked behind honor, I can not abide!

NARRATOR

Billy, unable to understand Elvish, had little patience for their incomprehensible argument.

BILLY

Fuck this, man.

NARRATOR

And with that, he was running down the street, all but dragging Jen by the wrist. Nelson was close behind.

YELLOWYYN

(TO NIA)

If priest you hope to be, faithful you must stay, even when convenient is it not.

NARRATOR

This next was back in the common tongue of men.

NIA

Honor your gods-damned post and protect those children.

NARRATOR

Nia turned and ran after the children, not waiting for a response. Yllowwyn hesitated a moment, but just a moment, before following.

SOUND: RUNNING, THROUGH TO THE END OF SCENE

NELSON

(PANTING)

We should jump in that hay pile! Like Assassin's Creed!

NIA

(ALSO PANTING)

And then? Just wait for them to stop investigating?!

NELSON

Well when you say it like that...

3

INT. Arlene Redmoor's Bedchambers -
3

Morning

NARRATOR

At Guernatal Castle, Arlene and Gwendolyn lay close on the lady's bed. You'll recall that Gwen recently had something of a confrontation with Aeron Regan. Her first, which is of course one too many for genteel folk.

ARLENE

You must have been so frightened.

GWEN

I only did as I had to, m'lady.

ARLENE

Would that I were as brave as you.

GWEN

Come now, m'lady. You're the brave one.

ARLENE

What did you say to her?

GWEN PAUSES A BEAT.

GWEN

She asked why I cared. Why I was willing to risk my life. And I said...well, I said--

SOUND: DOOR FLIES OPEN

NARRATOR

As Ardel entered the room, the two women dove apart from each other.

ARDEL

You. Wench. Come.

NARRATOR

If he noticed their improper closeness, he made no mention of it. In fact, Ardel Redmoor was smirking, a cruel twist at the corner of his mouth. Arlene had seen that smirk before.

ARLENE

Where are you taking her?

ARDEL

The Captain of the Guard wants to debrief her about last night's horrid turn of events.

ARLENE

Brother, she was only searching the pantry when the bandit came through.

NARRATOR

Though Ardel's next words were grave, his self-satisfied smirk continued.

ARDEL

I'm not sure you understand the enormity of what has transpired. The High King, on the eve of trial for treason, was slain by a highly skilled assassin in the employ of a lauded General. And with him perished the Guernatal line. This is a momentous atrocity. We must leave no stone unturned in our investigation.

ARLENE

Well then I must insist on coming with her. She's not accustomed to talking to Officers.

ARDEL

Oh I'm afraid you can't. It could take some time, and you need to prepare for tonight's feast. I'll send my man to help you.

ARLENE

What feast?

NARRATOR

Ardel's smirk broke into a wide grin, as his sister's face went ashen.

ARDEL

House Mooncrest is coming to celebrate our joint victory over Felghir. Don't you want to look beautiful for your betrothed?

4

INT. Interrogation Room In Castle
Guernatal - A little later

4

NARRATOR

And so Gwen found herself in a dark room, deep in the heart of the castle. One might wonder, why would a simple discussion with a servant warrant a dark room with a sickly stench and a rotting table? The reason, as you might imagine, was simply Ardel Redmoor's whim.

ARDEL

What did the assassin say to you?

GWEN

She said to get out of her way or she would kill me, m'lord.

ARDEL

And how did you respond?

GWEN

I said I couldn't allow her to leave, m'lord.

ARDEL

Yes I'm sure you summoned such bravery in the face of a mortal threat. Commoners are known for that.

GWEN

She didn't leave straight away, did she?

ARDEL WAITS A BEAT.

ARDEL

If you address one more sentence to me that doesn't end in 'my lord,' I'll have your tongue out, do you understand?

GWEN

Yes...m'lord.

ARDEL

Now what's this nonsense about her not leaving straight away?

GWEN

Well, m'lord, they announced His Majesty's death just before 10 bells. And I was in the pantry just after 7 bells, m'lord. I've brought enough food to the barracks

(MORE)

GWEN (cont'd)
to know the guard would have changed, m'lord. If the assassin had slain His Majesty before I met her, they would have found his body sooner, m'lord.

NARRATOR
Gwen actually smiled at this, despite her current surroundings, pleased with her own cunning.

ARDEL
So, you are claiming that an assassin, who had been hired to murder the High King, was about to leave the keep without having completed her mission. She spoke to you, and only then decided to return and kill His Late Majesty. Am I correct, is that your claim?

GWEN
All I claim, m'lord, was that His Majesty was still alive when I saw that woman in the kitchen.

GWEN (cont'd)
And have you mentioned this opinion to anyone else?

GWEN (cont'd)
Can't recall, m'lord. M'lady's been so troubled of late. Very distracting, innit? Fogs the memory, m'lord.

ARDEL
If you were right, that would make things look quite bad for you, wouldn't it?

GWEN
Looks worse for you if your regency is built on a lie.

NARRATOR
The look on Ardel Redmoors face brought to mind biting into a sour apple and finding a worm inside... and the learning the apple was covered in feces.

ARDEL
Let me make this abundantly clear, you peasant slut. You are admittedly more clever than I expected, so I'll spare you talk of "unfortunate accidents." There is nothing I would hesitate to do you. I will have you beaten, raped, dismembered, anything.

NARRATOR
Her brief moment of pride quickly wiped away, Gwen did her best to remain composed. She managed fairly well.

ARDEL
Ah, yes, I forgot how "brave" you were. Your self-sacrifice isn't brave. You don't value your life.

(MORE)

ARDEL (cont'd)

As well you shouldn't. It's only bravery if something is at stake that you do value. And I'm sure, by now, you know what I'm willing and able to do to my whore of a sister.

NARRATOR

At this, Gwen finally flinched. Ardel Redmoor did not fail to notice this. His sneer widened a fraction.

ARDEL

So, as far as you're concerned, Gunther's death, and Brennen's, and the assassin's, happened exactly as was said in my Lord Regent's record. And if I hear any rumors otherwise, regardless of who started them, it will come out of my sister's foetid flesh. Now throw her in the dungeon for a day or three to make sure she understands.

5

EXT. Blackhold - Late Morning

5

NARRATOR

The fortress known as Blackhold is a stark, severe castle, just to the east of the Black Mountains. No town or village surrounds the keep; its black bricks rise sharply from the desolate, snow-covered plains. This morning, same as centuries prior, a single standard flew from Blackhold's tower, a field of sable, no adornment.

6

INT. Blackhold Command Chambers -

Continuous

6

NARRATOR

Within the keep, officers of the realm's civic guard studied a map of Iorden. At the head of the table sat the senior officer, a grizzled General by the name of Dillon Kerr. He manipulated tiny figurines of armsmen wearily.

KERR

I have no doubt Traft is coming here. Dawn at the latest.

UNDERLING 1

Is he as savage as they say?

UNDERLING 2

Of course he is, he's half Orc!

NARRATOR

General Kerr pondered a long moment, giving the flippant question a good deal of thought before answering.

KERR

I have come to believe that General Traft is the incarnation of all the sins visited on his people by the Elves. And by us. And one day we shall have to pay for those sins. But, we are sworn to hold this castle. So, for the good of your honor, fight with the bravery of men condemned to die. But, for the good of your souls, know that it's a fair sentence.

7

EXT. Outskirts of Armstrungard -

Late Afternoon

7

NARRATOR

Brennen and Regan -- Queen Regan, that is -- finally arrived at Armstrungard after a long night's march. The queen promptly led them to the whorehouse, as is mete and proper. They rounded a final corner, only to find Madame Bailey's establishment swarmed by a veritable flock of heavily armed city guardsmen.

REGAN

Fuck! No good.

BRENNEN

Are the children all right?!

NARRATOR

Brennen, as we've established, had a habit of dealing with the authorities head-on. A habit of which Queen Regan disapproved, philosophically. Thus she had to grab the old general's cloak to prevent him from introducing himself to the nearest Guard officer.

REGAN

Wait. I dunno where the kids are. Looks like the place got raided. Somebody musta pissed off McShane.

BRENNEN

So where are they?

REGAN

Either they got out before the raid and they're holed up somewhere else, or they're at guard headquarters.

BRENNEN

The day we met, the city guard--

REGAN

--they haven't set the place on fire so don't worry about that. And if they nabbed them, I don't think they'll try anything funny, on account of Yllowyyn. City guard always shit themselves when a fucking splint shows up.

NARRATOR

Brennen tactfully ignored his queen's vulgarity.

BRENNEN

What do we do though, if they've been arrested?

REGAN

Know what we used to call breaking somebody out of guard headquarters when I was a kid?

BRENNEN

What's that?

REGAN

A good Saturday morning.

NARRATOR

Their deliberation was interrupted by the clang of an alarm bell. The pair looked towards the source of the noise, to see a thick black column of smoke rising above the city skyline and into the morning air. Some mutual instinct had them both running towards the source in an instant.

8

EXT. Elsewhere in the City - A Few

Minutes Later

8

NARRATOR

Some fifteen minutes later, the Queen and the General found themselves in front of the charred remains of what was once a tavern. A line of locals hastily doused the smoldering timbers, to prevent the fire's spread. The scene, in fact, was rather reminiscent of the erstwhile Skeeve Rat Tavern & Grill, on the morning after Brennen and Regan had first met.

REGAN

That's the city guard I know and love.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO:

9

EXT. Armstrungard - Late Afternoon9

REGAN

The Well-Groomed Lemming. College pub. Hate to say it but there's a good chance Nia woulda come here.

NARRATOR

Brennen and Regan were surveying the scene of a recent fire in Armstrungard, in search of their missing companions. A glint of light reflected from a pile of ashes. Brennen reached for the source, and came up with a gilded arrowhead. One side was engraved with the Guernatal sigil; the other with the mark of the Elven High Council.

BRENNEN

Yllowyn. They did come this way.

NARRATOR

Without warning, Brennen grabbed a random pedestrian by the cloak, nearly pulling her off her feet with his intensity.

BRENNEN

What's happened here?

TOWNSWOMAN

Lemming burnt down.

REGAN

Gee thanks we can--
(CATCHES HERSELF)
Fucking guard?

TOWNSWOMAN

Nah. I dunno what happened, wasn't guard though.

REGAN

Everyone get out?

TOWNSWOMAN

Fucked if I know.

BRENNEN

Well what else can you tell us?

TOWNSWOMAN

Look, I got my own shit to worry about. What do you think I am? A supporting player in your life story?

NARRATOR

With a parting rude gesture, the woman disappeared back into the crowd.

REGAN

(TO BRENNEN)

They were here, then the place burned down. Wasn't city guard, but there's no coincidences in this city. So...what the fuck happened here?

BRENNEN

Perhaps the night went something like this...

10

IMAGINING - INT. Well-Groomed

Lemming, Late Morning

10

BRENNEN

(V.O.)

The tavern was filled with students discussing... studently matters.

REGAN

(V.O.)

Right. Sure.

MAN

My studies are about how House Guernatal is the greatest and most righteous of the Great Houses.

BRENNEN

(V.O.)

...said one of the students, obviously trying to impress a young lady.

WOMAN

I agree, but tell me more.

BRENNEN

(V.O.)

That's when the Kalth'yr and the others entered.

NELSON

I read a story like this.

BILLY

Silence, you less-of-a-man-than-I.

JEN

Hehehe how clever you are, Billy.

BRENNEN

(V.O.)

Then, some student deep in his cups attempted to court young Jen.

MAN

How is it that I've never before gazed upon your beauty?

BILLY

I respect myself so little that minor insults require mortal combat! Have at you!

BRENNEN

(V.O.)

Billy lunges at the man, knocks some candles onto the sawdust on the floor, and there you have it.

SOUND: FIRE STARTING AND PANIC

SMASH CUT TO:

11

EXT. Ruins of the Lemming - Late

Afternoon

11

REGAN

No, no, no. I know this town. If some kid no one ever saw before got in a fight and burnt down the Lemming, it'd be all these people could talk about.

BRENNEN

Let's see if we can get closer.

NARRATOR

The pair dug through the ashes for a few more minutes. They received some odd looks from the owners of the tavern, who could not understand why two strangers were searching the remnants of their livelihood, but they were kind (or frightened) enough not to mention it. After a moment, Regan identified a spot that appeared even more charred than the rest of the wreckage.

REGAN

I'm guessing it started here.

BRENNEN

Do you remember what this used to be?

REGAN

Girl's room I think. Here's what happened...

12

IMAGINING - INT. Well-Groomed

Lemming, Late Morning

12

REGAN

(V.O.)

Studently matters, right?

MAN

Uh...book learning, book learning, book learning.

WOMAN

Oooh, I'm so impressed. You wanna congress me? Is that how rich people say it? Congress me really hard against the wall out back.

REGAN

(V.O.)

Then our gang comes in.

NELSON

I read a story like this.

BILLY

I like tits.

JEN

Whatever you say, sweetie honey sugar pie.

YLLLOWYYN

[Obnoxious noise]

NIA

Why don't you go find seating while I visit the privy? I need to wash some library dust out of my criminally-neglected fuck hole.

13

IMAGINING - INT. Women's Privy, A

Few Minutes Later

13

REGAN

(V.O.)

So she's in the girl's room when three stupid pieces of shit - you know the kind. Think buying a knife's the same as knowing how to use it - kick down the door. Probably looking for me.

GRIMY MAN

You've been seen with the Thief Queen. And because we're gutless, spineless bugs with extra tear ducts where our gonads should be, we're gonna beat up on a preacher and some kids to get to her.

REGAN

(V.O.)

So Nia gets out her staff, says some flame spell...

SOUND: WHOOSH OF A FIRE IGNITING

NIA
Need a light, boys?

14

EXT. Ruins of the Lemming - Late

Afternoon

14

BRENNEN
I thought I was bad with words, your Grace.

REGAN
Best I could come up with. Whatever. Fuck you.

BRENNEN
That account is possible. But there'd be some sign of a struggle in here. Probably outside as well if there was a window. Nia would have tried to lead them away from the children.

REGAN
Shit.

NARRATOR
Regan spotted a glint in the ashes. She bent down to retrieve the remains of Jen's "Compact" mirror, obviously charred and melted.

BRENNEN
She was probably just in to use the privy with Nia.

REGAN
She would have tried to warn everyone...

NARRATOR
Regan ran out into what was the main hall of the pub, literally following her road of thought.

REGAN
...which means coming out here and trying to get out through the crowd.

NARRATOR
Brennen followed.

BRENNEN
If they were smart, they would have looked for an exit over--

NARRATOR
--With a sharp crack, Brennen's foot fell through a weak plank in the floor.

REGAN

Woah, you all right there? Thought that sound mighta been your hip.

BRENNEN

I've fallen out of better shape than Your Grace will ever be in.

NARRATOR

Brennen groaned as he struggled to lift himself up.

REGAN

Quite the fall, huh?

NARRATOR

As Regan helped the old general to his feet, it became apparent that weak plank which felled Brennen was actually the lid of a trap door, hidden beneath the ashes.

REGAN

Nelson.

BRENNEN

Nelson.

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Regan improvised a torch from the rubble and hopped down. Brennen rubbed his bandaged arm for a moment and then followed.

15

EXT. Same - A Few Hours Ago

15

NARRATOR

Earlier that day, before the fire, the Well-Groomed Lemming was indeed populated by students of Armstrungard College. I regret to say that there was no congressing occurring on the premises, however. Nia, having frequented the pub herself as a student, had in fact led our party to the Lemming's doors.

YELLOWYYN

If we're not going to the rendezvous point--

NIA

--you mean the city gates, also known as a city guard barracks?

YELLOWYYN

I was going to say, there is the practical matter of how we'll find the General.

NIA

I just need a chance to think.

YELLOWYYN

Let's hope he's learned something about tracking from his time with me.

NARRATOR

With exaggerated nonchalance, Yllowyyyn removed a golden arrowhead from his pouch, and dropped it in the dust outside the door as the group entered the Lemming.

16

INT. Well-Groomed Lemming -

Continuous

16

NARRATOR

Inside, the tavern's clientele were not in fact discussing "studently matters," though they would have been on most other days. Today, however...

MAN

I don't know. I just heard someone killed a guardsman.

NELSON

I bet there's someone here who could give is a side quest.

BILLY

I think we got enough to deal with already, knob-stain.

NELSON

But experience. And items.

NARRATOR

Not knowing what else to do, the group sat down at the nearest table. They waited in silence until a barmaid came to serve them.

WAITRESS

(TO NIA)

Haven't seen you in a while. What can--

NIA

--Brandy, for the love of Galadon.

NARRATOR

Taken aback, the barmaid hurried off. The silence stretched interminably, until abruptly Jen lept from her seat. So sudden was her movement that her chair was thrown back, startling the group as it clattered to the floor.

JEN

I gotta pee.

BILLY

You want Nia to go with you?

JEN

No I'm good.

NARRATOR

Just as swiftly, Jen stalked away towards the privvy. Billy and Nelson stared at each other for a moment. If either hoped to find an ounce of understanding of the girl's mind in the other's face, they both were sorely dissappointed. Instead, they turned to Nia in unison. She withstood their silent pleading for only a moment before she rose from her own seat.

NIA

Blast it.

NARRATOR

As she headed towards the privy, Nia passed the barmaid, returning with the brandy and some glasses. Without breaking stride, Nia grabbed the bottle of liquor and took a large swig, directly from the bottle.

17

INT. Well-Groomed Lemming, Girl's

Privy - Continuous

17

NARRATOR

Jen stood at a water basin in the washroom. For a few moments, she simply stood and stared at her own hands. They were still coated with Sergeant McShane's blood. She considered her stained hands, front and back, before slowly lowering them into the water.

SOUND: DOOR OPENS, PANNED TO R

NARRATOR (cont'd)

She scrubbed slowly and methodically, as if in a trance.

NIA

(O.S.)
I don't know what to say.

JEN

You don't have to say anything.

NIA

No one would deny that the world is better off without him.

JEN
Look, I know what you're trying to do, but don't, okay?

NIA
I said it before, there's no shame--

JEN
--I'm not ready to talk about it. I need some time to myself.

NIA
...Don't let it fester, Jen.

NARRATOR

When Jen didn't respond, Nia turned back to return to the boys and the brandy. Jen continued to scrub her hands in solitude. After a moment, she withdrew her "compact mirror" from her handbag. After considering her own reflection, she placed the mirror onto the basin. Once more she raised her hands in front of her face, focusing intensely.

As she focused on her hands, there was a strange sensation in the room. To a mortal, it may have seemed like a hum or buzz, but seen, felt, and smelled, rather than heard. Nearly imperceptible at first, it grew in strength, and, as it did, Jen's hair rose from her head.

With a sudden snap, a tiny spark flew between Jen's outstretched fingers, and then another, and another in quick succession. Startled, the cheerleader stumbled backwards, knocking the wash basin onto the floor. As she fell, the humming and the sparks suddenly stopped, although not before one fell to the sawdust floor of the privy. The sawdust, ignited by the spark, went up in flames unbelievably quickly.

Jen stood, and, realizing there was no more water available, ran back towards the main room of the tavern.

18

Continuous

INT. Well-Groomed Lemming,

18

JEN
FIRE! FIRE!!

SOUND: PANICKED CROWD

YELLOWYYN

In the privy!?

NIA

How is there a fire in the privy!?

BILLY

Who cares how?!

NARRATOR

Students were tearing and clawing at each other in a desperate attempt to reach the building's main entrance. Nia grabbed Jen by the wrist and started running in the opposite direction, towards the store-rooms in the back of the pub.

NIA

I know another way.

NARRATOR

In the pantry, Nia shoved aside some sacks of potatoes to reveal a trap door in the floor. She swung the door open. Not yet having learned his lesson about jumping into strange holes, Billy was the first through the opening. Yllowyyyn hesitated, however.

NIA

It's safe. Go!

19

INT. Well-Groomed Lemming Wine

Cellar - Nearly Continuous

19

NARRATOR

Moments later, the entire party was crouched in a narrow tunnel, some distance away from the Well-Groomed Lemming. Rather, from the remains of the Well-Groomed Lemming.

YELLOWYYN

I think we're past the scope of the fire.

NELSON

Okay, even *I* have to ask why the college bar needed a secret passageway.

NIA

Armstrungard as we now know it is built atop the ruins of a much older city. An even more chaotic city, if you can believe that. Which reminds me, Jen, would you like to explain how the fire started?

JEN

No thank you.

NARRATOR

Nia tried to retort, but was cut off by Yllowwyn.

YLLOWYYN

This can wait. Sound carries too far down here.

NARRATOR

And with that, our party set off shuffling along the dank underbelly of Armstrungard. The Elf dropped another golden arrowhead in the muck.

20

SAME - a few hours later

20

(OMIT)

21

EXT. Crab's Claw Inn - A Few

Minutes Later

21

NARRATOR

Several hours later, Brennen and Regan emerged from the tunnels into a canal. As they stepped into the sunlight, the old general stooped to grab Yllowwyn's 14th arrowhead.

REGAN

...and when I set it off and the vault walls blew, there's this kick of hot air, right in the guts. BAM! Whooh, got me wetter than flood season on the Abergwyre.

BRENNEN

Very good, Your Grace, but need your every story contain such intimate details?

REGAN

I ain't been laid in like a month, gimme a break.

NARRATOR

Their path led to an old rusted gate. Regan vaulted the gate and opened it from the other side. As Brennen passed through, Regan looked around, to get a sense of where in the city the tunnel released them.

REGAN

Well shit, this is right by Fallon's place.

BRENNEN

Fallon?

REGAN

Jackie Fallon, guy I knew as a kid. He runs that inn over there. Lets students and shit stay there for dirt cheap.

BRENNEN

Philanthropist?

REGAN

Gods no. The more people come through here the more he's got his finger on the pulse of this city. Information's better than gold if you know how to sell it.

BRENNEN

My purse is a bit light since the castle.

REGAN

Don't worry. My credit's pretty good with him.

BRENNEN

Do me a favor and don't tell me how you earned it.

REGAN

The trick with Fallon is to tell him just enough that he thinks he got something valuable. You throw a couple little clever lies in there, he can be pretty useful for throwing someone off your trail.

22

INT. Crab's Claw Inn - Continuous22

NARRATOR

Jackie Fallon's inn was crowded, but on the whole much cleaner than you might have expected from Regan's recommendations. Jackie Fallon himself was working the bar when he spotted Regan as she entered.

FALLON

Well send me to Selbirin and call me Sally.

REGAN

Didn't know that was your thing, Jackie. But I'm game.

NARRATOR

Jackie decided he could no longer ignore the old man who had entered with Regan and now stood beside her, looking woefully out of place.

FALLON

Hey, fella.

NARRATOR

Brennen was searching for the proper response when Regan stepped in to save him the trouble.

REGAN

This here's my squire.

FALLON

Haha what squire? You ain't no fucking knight.

REGAN

(MOCK WHISPERS)

That's what they call whores in some places. He's a whore is my point. My whore.

NARRATOR

At this moment, Brennen may have preferred to have not been saved the trouble.

REGAN

Go grab us a table, "squire". I'm gonna catch up with the proprietor of this fine establishment.

NARRATOR

As Brennen left to do his queen's bidding, Jackie pitched his voice slightly lower, so their conversation would not carry to any prying ears.

FALLON

So you like 'em halfway to the grave now?

REGAN

I was just fucking with him. He's a mark. I'm supposed to be helping him find Gailin's old crew. So what's the word?

FALLON

You mean other than McShane getting ganked?

REGAN

WHAT?! You're shitting me!

FALLON

Where the fuck you been? That's the talk of the town.

REGAN

Clearly, or else you'd never tell me for free.

FALLON

You know, I almost missed you. I'll throw you another freebie.

REGAN

Any word on who did it?

FALLON

Some girl nobody knows.

NARRATOR

Regan knew of some girl nobody knows whose last whereabouts were coincidentally right where McShane was murdered. Regan did not believe in coincidences in Armstrungard. She did well to hide her surprise, however.

REGAN

Probably one of his kids grew up and learned how to use a knife.

FALLON

I got another juicy little morsel about the whole thing.

REGAN

That so?

FALLON

I'd be willing to part with it if you tell me why you give a fuck.

REGAN

As it happens, I ain't given a fuck in far too long. But I'd sure like to.

NARRATOR

Jackie Fallon matched Regan's rather transparent grin with a somewhat regretful smile.

FALLON

Sorry, kid. I'd like to help you out...

REGAN

But?

FALLON

You ain't heard?

NARRATOR

Jackie lifted a hand up from the bar, to show Regan a pewter wedding band around his finger.

REGAN

No fucking shit! What poor soul actually has to stick around with you the morning after?

FALLON

Remember Angie?

REGAN

Remember? I knew her before you did. Quite the catch though, Jackie. Nicely done.

FALLON

Well I thank you. But I'm afraid it's gonna have to be coin, or tell me something I don't know.

NARRATOR

As it happened, Regan was short on coin at the moment. She scrambled for a convenient lie to tell, but was saved the trouble by the arrival of Jackie's bride. Angie Fallon looked haggard from a long shift waiting tables in the tavern, but her face brightened at the sight of Regan.

ANGIE

(O.S.)
Is that who I think it is?

REGAN

In the flesh.

ANGIE

Feels like forever. You all catching up?

NARRATOR

Suddenly, a thought occurred to Regan as to how she might better facilitate the flow of information. Her smile widened imperceptibly.

REGAN

Yeah, we were just talking about you.

ANGIE

Leaving some things unsaid, I hope. A married woman's still allowed a few secrets.

FALLON

As is her husband.

NARRATOR

Tactfully left unsaid by either was...how shall I...oh, fine. Regan had bedded both of them at one point or another but neither knew this about the other.

REGAN

Well I ain't ever been married. But sharing a secret can really tighten the bonds between people, doncha think?

ANGIE

(CAUTIOUS)

I guess that would depend on the secret.

REGAN

Well to have that effect, I suppose it'd have to be really quite intimate. Kinda secret you're really scared of the other one finding out. But you still stay up late thinking about it some nights.

23

INT. Fallon's Bedchambers - 77

Minutes Later

23

NARRATOR

In case you're the sententious type, I'll spare you the details of the next 74 minutes. Though I suspect Regan herself would be quite happy to tell the tale in graphic, graphic detail.

Suffice it to say, it was a much calmer Regan - at least by her standards - who rose from a small upstairs bed and quickly jumped back into her clothes. Mr. and Mrs. Fallon, on the other hand, were far too exhausted to even move, their faces blissful mirrors of contentment.

REGAN

So. Who popped the sore on the world that was Jamie gods-damned McShane?

FALLON

Dunno. But I do know there's a knight looking for her too.

NARRATOR

Regan raised a single eyebrow.

ANGIE

Green falcon on a white field.

NARRATOR

With a wink and a small bow, Regan left the couple alone. As she retreated down the hallway, she was followed by sounds coming from the room she just left. Apparently, Jackie and Angie had found another well of energy.

NARRATOR

Regan returned to the public room of the inn, and found Brennen. The old general looked less than pleased at having been left to himself in this place. His skin also had also taken on a clammy, ashen pallor.

REGAN

Bad news. Don't look at me like that. Killed a lot of birds with that stone. Well, stones. Pretty nice ones, too, far as they go.

BRENNEN

[Dismayed grunt]

REGAN

You wanna smell my fingers?

NARRATOR

Brennen chose not to respond. He took another small sip of his ale, and wiped at his brow, which was sweating more than one might have expected, given the temperature in the bar.

REGAN

You don't look so good, Grandpa.

BRENNEN

Probably something I ate in this pit.

REGAN

Oh, shit. How's your arm feeling?

BRENNEN

It's fine.

REGAN

Lemme see.

BRENNEN

It can wait until the children are safe, your Grace.

REGAN

So yeah, about that. I found out what happened at Bailey's. Remember that piece of shit I told you about? McShane? Somebody stabbed him.

BRENNEN

Dammit. Billy? Maybe Nelson but I doubt it. DAMMIT!

REGAN

Word going around said it was a girl. Matched Jen's description.

BRENNEN

No! That strains belief.

REGAN

Doesn't mean she did it, just means everyone thinks she did it.

BRENNEN

It would be madness for them to split up, but that means the greater part of the city guard will be looking for them all.

REGAN

Not just guard. Do you know anyone who flies a green falcon on a white field?

NARRATOR

As ill as Brennen had already looked, he managed to turn a shade more pale at the mention of this standard.

BRENNEN

That's Sir Jasper Frieshelm. Ardel Redmoor's executioner.

A BEAT.

BRENNEN (cont'd)

And the only man ever to best me in single combat.

END OF ACT TWO.

ACT THREE:

25

EXT. Crab's Claw Inn - Simultaneous

25

NARRATOR

Brennen and Regan had just deduced that a dangerous knight by the name of Jasper Frieshelm, executioner for Ardel Redmoor, was in pursuit of the remainder of our party. They had also just deduced that Jen had murdered an officer of the law, that someone in their party had burned down a tavern, and that Angie Fallon and her husband were amenable to allowing a third sexual partner into their marriage. Well, that last point was deduced mostly by Regan.

In the mud outside Fallon's inn, Brennen had found seven sets of horse prints in perfect formation. This last detail being very unusual for Armstrungard, Brennen and Regan followed the tracks at a jog, hoping they would lead to Sir Frieshelm.

BRENNEN

Galadon help us. How did it come to this?

REGAN

Billy probably started some shit with McShane. Not that there weren't a million good reasons to off that motherfucker. But I'm sure Billy found a stupid one.

26

Early the Past Morning IMAGINING - INT. Madame Bailey's,

26

BILLY

I know you fuck kids and all, but what really gets me is what you said about me, or my mom, or Jen's ass. I don't know. Why am I doing this? I'm having a really hard time understanding the motivations of someone I have no respect for.

BRENNEN

(V.O.)

I'd counsel you to try harder, your Grace. We'll never find the truth that way.

REGAN

(V.O.)

Yeah, fair enough.

BILLY

Anyways, fuck you and fuck your stupid face.

REGAN

(V.O.)

And fine. Billy's probably good for one decent dummy punch. So the fucker falls, and happens to grab at a table as he goes. A knife happened to be sitting on the table, he knocks it over [imitates cutting sound] nicks his throat, and the town rumor mill turns it into a stabbing. Then Jen comes in and sees.

JEN

Billy? Oh no! This is terrible but I'll stand by you because I only like myself when boys like me.

REGAN

(V.O.)

Of course, that's exactly when the city guard shows up.

SOUND: IMPROBABLY MANY BOOTS, HALTING BEFORE NEXT LINE

GUARDSMAN

Halt! In the name of the council and people of Armstrungard.

BILLY

Someone I'm obsessed with protecting actually needs my protection for once. I'm getting out of here.

REGAN

(V.O.)

So he fucks off to yellahead and Jen's there standing over a bloody corpse with her thumb up her ass.

BRENNEN

(V.O.)

Possible. Or...Suppose the death happened exactly as you said, but then Jen said to Billy,

27

Imagining - Same

27

JEN

Give me the knife and flee, by... Galadon's grace!

A BEAT.

JEN (cont'd)

I am having some difficulty capturing young Jen's manner of speaking.

REGAN

(V.O.)

You get a feel for it with practice. Like choking a man. Which reminds me, you wanna know something about Fallon?

JEN

As I was saying, flee Billy! I'll take the blame.
They'll be more lenient with a girl.

28

EXT. Mud Road in Armstrungard -

Night

28

REGAN

Gods, I hope she's not that stupid.

NARRATOR

They ran along horse tracks in the mud for still a
while longer, but, unsurprisingly, gained little
ground.

REGAN

Stop. We gotta stop.

BRENNEN

We must not lag, Your Grace.

REGAN

Brennen. We're not gonna outrun horses. We gotta try
figure out where they're going and get there before
they do. That's the only way to get out in front of
this Frieshelm guy.

BRENNEN

You don't understand how tough the man is. He'll be
relentless.

REGAN

Yeah but the kids'll need to rest at some point. I just
hope the elf and the preacher are--
(A LIGHTBULB)
--brilliant.

NARRATOR

Needless to say, that was not the descriptor Brennen
was expecting. He stopped his run suddenly.

BRENNEN

What is it?

REGAN

You see that rocky hill over there? About 3 miles that
way?

BRENNEN

Aye.

REGAN

There's a monastery up top. The way up's a bitch. Damn near impossible for horses.

BRENNEN

As an acolyte, Nia may have been allowed lodging there.

REGAN

And I know a back door. This way.

29

EXT. Crab's Claw Inn - A Few Hours

Ago

29

NARRATOR

Some hours earlier, Nia had indeed led Yllowwyn and the children through the tunnels to the very same inn, owned by Regan's friend Jackie Fallon. Yllowwyn surveyed the establishment skeptically.

YLLLOWYYN

And this place is?

NIA

Not currently on fire or surrounded by city guard.

BILLY

Can we get some food here? I'm fucking starving.

NIA

"Food" is a charitable description. But they usually have a few things available which resemble mattresses.

30

INT. Room In The Inn - Half an Hour

Later

30

NARRATOR

The group procured food, and then rooms for a brief rest.

At her first opportunity, Jen pulled Billy into one of the rooms, pushed him onto a straw bed and began kissing him aggressively. She scratched at his armor, searching for the latch that would release his codpiece.

BILLY

--Jen. Are you...like, are you okay?

JEN

I'm good. I feel good.

BILLY

Are you sure?

JEN

Yes.

NARRATOR

Billy had a difficult time refusing amorous attention, so he accepted this answer, briefly. But the situation became too abnormal even for Billy, and so he managed to push Jen away long enough to speak.

BILLY

Really?

JEN

What's your deal?

BILLY

I don't know, EVERYTHING that's happened since we've been here?

JEN

Are you gonna fuck me or what?

NARRATOR

Taken somewhat aback by Jen's direct language, Billy pushed the girl off of him and stood up.

BILLY

I don't like you like this, Jenny.

JEN

Like what?

BILLY

I dunno, you're not yourself.

JEN

What's that mean? What is myself like?

BILLY

You're freaking me out, okay?

JEN

I thought you wanted to be a man.

NARRATOR

Confusion, fear, and hurt battled for dominance on Billy's face. He stared uncomprehendingly at his girlfriend, before storming out of the room, punching the wall on his way and slamming the door behind him.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Nia happened to be heading up the stairs just in time to observe Billy's exodus. With some trepidation, she knocked on the door that the boy had just slammed.

31 INT. Hallway - Continuous 31

NIA

Jen, are you decent?

JEN

(O.S. THROUGH DOOR)
Leave me alone.

32 INT. Room In The Inn - Continuous 32

NARRATOR

Nia entered the room regardless.

JEN

I said leave me alone.

NIA

This needs to stop.

JEN

You barely talked to the guys when they- in the cave!
Why do I have to get cross-examined?

NIA

You know well enough that theirs was an accident. And this isn't an examination, it's an offer of guidance.

JEN

I don't want guidance.

33 INT. Crab's Claw Inn - Simultaneous

33

NARRATOR

Down in the common room, Yllowyyn and Nelson still sat at the bar. Nelson was, with extreme effort, aligning the prongs of his fork with the tip of his knife. Yllowyyn was engaged in some argument with Fallon.

YLLOWYYN

Do you mean to tell me you can't prepare a simple honeyed milk with rosewater?

FALLON

Watch yourself 'fore you wind up on your splintery ass outside.

NARRATOR

Billy stormed down the stairs and sat down heavily next to the elf.

BILLY

(TO FALLON)

Beer me, dude. Women, right?

FALLON

My marriage is pretty great actually. You gotta be real honest with each other. That's hard. But it's worth it.

BILLY

(TO YLLOWYYN)

Are your women as much of a pain in the ass as ours?

YLLOWYYN

No, but then we don't refer to them as "ours." It's like I was saying to my servant...

34

INT. Room In The Inn - Simultaneous

34

NIA

Would you like to tell me what happened at the Lemming?

JEN

Not really, no.

NIA

Unhealed spiritual wounds are even more noxious than physical ones.

JEN

Who says I'm wounded?

NIA

I'm a woman of letters, I'm not--

JEN

--What the fuck do you know about wounds? I bet you still believe in unbalanced humours and that "oslit" bullshit, don't you? Yeah, well I'm sick and tired of pretending I don't know things I goddamn fucking jolly well do!

NIA

Firstly, you should confirm to whom you're speaking, because I doubt this tantrum is meant for me. And secondly, the theory of oslits is--

JEN

--incomplete! You don't have protons, neutrons, electrons, anything. That's why you can't do lightning spells. Not because they're "blasphemous." It's because you need electrons to discharge static elec--

NARRATOR

Jen suddenly clamped her hands over her mouth. Nia recoiled as if physically struck.

NIA

Galadon help us, Jen. Is that how the fire started? Did you try to do a lightning spell?

JEN

Okay, it was like, 80% an accident.

35

Int. Crab's Claw Inn - Continuous35

NARRATOR

Back in the tavern, an empty space had widened around Yllowwyn.

YLLOWYYN

So have you heard the one where--

BILLY

--I think that's enough human jokes for one night, Weenie.

NELSON

Yeah there's something I don't like about the way you say "Memyet."

NARRATOR

The elf's idea of jokes were mercifully cut off when Nia stormed down the stairs, dragging a clearly unwilling Jen by the wrist.

NIA

We need to leave this place.

YLLOWYYN

What? Why?

BILLY

I'm not going anywhere until I get some sausage down my throat.

A BEAT.

NARRATOR

Also at the table were Antonin's father, Marcus, and uncle, Julius. The former was the official head of House Mooncrest, and had 50 years, but, sadly, was afflicted such that his mind was in many ways still a child's. The latter was of an age with his brother, and assisted Antonin in the actual running of affairs.

ARDEL

You must forgive my sister's atrocious manners, my lord.

ANTONIN

To be terribly honest, Lord Redmoor, after a week on the fields of battle, I'm much more concerned with enjoying my betrothal feast than I am in the finer points of etiquette.

NARRATOR

Ardel Redmoor was shocked and disappointed that anyone would decline an opportunity to harass his sister.

ARDEL

Well I suppose there will be time for discipline later.

ANTONIN

If you forgive me for saying, my Lord, she likely needs fresh air more than discipline. She must have been in her chambers all day preparing. And on the last day of autumn no less. What do you say, my lady?

ARLENE

That would be lovely, my lord.

ANTONIN

There, you see? Why don't we all go riding before dessert?

NARRATOR

Politics is an interesting game. Such a simple offer, and yet both the Redmoor siblings could not help but hastily calculate outcomes, weigh risks and rewards, and seek unseen implications. Arlene dared not answer without knowing her brother's intentions. Ardel himself was cautious, hoping to avoid a situation that might shift beyond the reach of his manipulation, but eventually resolved to speak first.

ARDEL

My sister is such so terribly skittish. I don't let her near horses, lest the poor stupid things get scared and someone gets hurt.

ANTONIN

Then we shall take my mare Sunbeam. The damned nag is too lazy to bother getting scared.

ARDEL

I'm sure, but I'm afraid I must--

ANTONIN

--And it will a splendid way for my betrothed and me to become better acquainted. With a chaperone of course.

NARRATOR

Ardel could not find a reasonable excuse to deny Mooncrest, despite his every effort.

ARDEL

If you insist, my Lord.

NARRATOR

Arlene smiled for the first time all evening, perceiving that, although the terms of the battle were unclear, somehow her brother had lost anyway. Suddenly, however, the corners of Ardel's mouth twitched upwards.

ARDEL

If I may recommend a chaperone...

ANTONIN

But of course.

ARDEL

I cannot speak highly enough of the character of my cousin, Rickard.

NARRATOR

Arlene's smile died suddenly.

ARDEL

You remember your cousin Rickard, don't you, sister? You two got along so well at your Nyy'lynni feast.

BRENNEN

(PRE-LAP)

Do me a favor, Your Grace.

39

EXT. Steep Hill in Armstrungard -

Late Night

39

NARRATOR

The main path from the King's Road up to the monastery on the mountain was narrow, windy, and treacherous. Regan and Brennen were not taking the main path. Instead, they climbed up a back route. 'Route' might be

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

a generous descriptor for what they climbed. It may be more accurate to say 'mountain'. They climbed the mountain.

BRENNEN

Don't tell me how you know this way. I'd rather quietly deceive myself into thinking my Queen has never robbed a monastery.

REGAN

Hey, whatever helps you sleep. Try not to think too hard about priests wearing gold while other people starve.

BRENNEN

This is a monastery, not a temple. What of value did they keep here?

NARRATOR

"Myrrrrr" went a goat that happened to be passing by. Sometimes the spirits of nature have a poignant sense of irony.

BRENNEN

Galadon forgive me.

NARRATOR

Thunder rumbled ominously in the background.

SOUND: WIND PICKS UP

REGAN

Come on. We gotta be off this path before that storm gets here.

BRENNEN

And before Frieshelm gets up the other side.

40

INT. Monastery On The Hill -

Similtaneous

40

NARRATOR

The same thunder peal shook the inside of the monastery. In an upper-floor dormitory, Billy, Nelson, and Nia slept soundly. Yllowyyn sat guard, polishing his knives. A fifth bed was empty.

ACT FOUR:

43

EXT. Wooded Path Near CastleGuernatal - Night

43

NARRATOR

The Redmoor and Mooncrest post-dinner horse ride was a tense affair. The soon-to-be-married couple rode some distance ahead, out of ear-shot but within sight of the others. Ardel Redmoor watched the couple suspiciously, trying to decipher Antonin's motivation for this ride. With him rode his cousin Rickard Redmoor, who was accompanied by his favorite hunting dog.

Arlene Redmoor shared a beautiful white mare with Antonin, the man she had just met who was to be her husband. She could imagine she felt the eyes of her brother and cousin boring into her back.

ANTONIN

I hope you do not think me too mannerless, my lady.

ARLENE

I only found you exceptionally gracious. So long as my behavior did not offend you.

ANTONIN

Not in the least. Understand, it's not that I don't value etiquette. But, if you'll excuse my frankness, I've come to believe that some rules are more important than others.

ARLENE

(CAUTIOUS)

I've...never considered that point of view, my lord.

ANTONIN

Have you ever been on the banks of the Abergwyre, my lady?

ARLENE

I haven't. I look forward to it, though, when...when we are wed.

ANTONIN

For a mile or so on either side of the river is a verdant oasis. But as you travel further north the reeds get terribly dry. If lightning strikes, or feral men make camp and are not careful, the resulting fire could quickly grow out of control and envelop the oases as well. That would ruin my family and doom our people to starvation, as I'm sure you understand.

ARLENE

Perish the thought!

ANTONIN

Indeed. Do you know what we do to prevent such calamity?

ARLENE

I don't, my lord.

ANTONIN

Twice a year, we send men out with torches and water to burn off the driest patches but stop the fire from spreading any further.

ARLENE

Fascinating.

ANTONIN

So sometimes you must destroy a little on the periphery to save what truly matters most. Do you see what I mean?

ARLENE

I...think so, my lord.

ANTONIN

When it comes to laws and customs, of course we do honor to Galadon by obeying them. But when we must choose between breaking a rule here or there, or allowing widespread chaos to run amok, surely Galadon would favor the former.

ARDEL

There's wisdom in that, my lord.

ANTONIN

Good. So I pray you'll forgive me for this next part.

NARRATOR

Had you been close enough to observe, you would have seen Antonin Mooncrest lift a small wooden whistle to his lips. The sound it made was inaudible to the human ear, but it was rather painful to the hound.

Ardel, of course, was not close enough to observe, and could not hear the sound. From his vantage, the dog's sudden fit of barking and running was quite without provocation.

The barking startled the white mare, who reared upon her hind legs like a statue before bolting ahead. Antonin sat the terrified horse as calmly as if she

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)
 were walking in a park. Arlene clung to her betrothed
 for dear life.

44

Ext. Elsewhere In The Woods - A Few
Minutes Later 44

NARRATOR
 By the time Ardel and Rickard had caught up, Arlene was
 on the ground next to a large oak tree. Antonin lept
 off his horse to offer a hand to Arlene, but she rolled
 away from him and tried to run.

ANTONIN
 My lady!

ARDEL
 What in Galadon's name is happening?!

NARRATOR
 Antonin Mooncrest knelt in contrition before Ardel.

ANTONIN
 Lords Redmoor, you have my most abject apology. I
 thought I knew my horse well, but you knew the Lady
 better. I beg your forgiveness, my lord. If the lady is
 injured in any way, my house will repay yours tenfold.

ARDEL
 Go help the poor thing, Cousin.

NARRATOR
 Rickard dismounted, and made the briefest eye contact
 with Mooncrest.

ARDEL
 All I will say, Lord Mooncrest, is that your Lord Uncle
 would never have been so foolhardy.

ANTONIN
 I deserve much harsher words.

NARRATOR
 Cousin Rickard offered a hand to Arlene. Rather than
 accepting it, she skittered on her hands and knees away
 from her cousin's touch.

ANTONIN
 And, this should go without saying, but on behalf of my
 house, I forfeit the right to request blood proof of
 Maid Redmoor's maidenhood.

SOUND: SILENCE

NARRATOR

The silence was deafening. The entire forest stilled at the shock of these words. Arlene scarce dared to breathe.

ARDEL

What.

NARRATOR

Ardel's face grew more and more red, impossibly red. A vein in his neck bulged. Antonin Mooncrest continued to kneel, and continued to speak calmly, as if he were discussing the weather.

ANTONIN

It's entirely plausible that the maidenknot was broken in this dreadful accident. It happens to many ladies who take an early interest in equitation.

ARDEL

Are you sure you understand what you are saying, my lord?

ANTONIN

You saw how the beast took off.
(TO RICKARD)
Didn't you, my lord Rickard?

NARRATOR

At this, Rickard Redmoor finally managed to make eye contact with Arlene. He made a slight bow, merely a dip of his head towards his cousin, as he said quietly--

RICKARD

--Indeed.

ANTONIN

There you have it.

NARRATOR

The vein in Ardel's neck looked fit to burst.

ARDEL

You are most gracious, my lord.

NARRATOR

Nia dreamed of the great lecture hall atop the tower of Armstrungard. The hall was crowded, and the great Ba'a Lo'Kyr was delivering a lecture. In the manner of dreams, the subject of the talk slipped beyond the mind.

A handsome student across the hall smiled at Nia. She flushed and smiled, disproportionate to the small gesture. Her joy was interrupted, however. Suddenly Ba'a Lo'Kyr screeched, a haunting, un-earthly sound. Ba'a's skin split and peeled, and from within the Elf's body burst the most terrifying beast Nia could possibly imagine. The demon screeched again. Nia stood to flee, but none of the other students in the room appeared to notice Ba'a's transformation. As Nia gazed around in horror, she noticed that the girl in the seat next to her was too young to be an Armstrungard student. She also had a gaping wound in the center of her chest.

YOUNG GIRL

There are seven things you must know to save me. The fifth thing is: the blind man has seen the face of god.

NARRATOR

The dream demon sprung towards Nia, leaping the many intervening rows of the lecture hall in a single bound.

YOUNG GIRL

Jen may be ready to talk.

46

INT. Monastery - Late, Late Night46

NARRATOR

Nia awoke in the monastery dormitory with a start. She looked towards the empty cot, which should have contained Jen, in confusion. Yllowwyn, still awake and on guard, noticed her confusion.

YLLLOWYYN

Bell tower.

NIA

And you let her go in her current state?

47

INT./EXT. Bell Tower - Continuous47

NARRATOR

Nia indeed found Jen in the bell tower, surveying the storm.

NIA

Jen? I owe you an apology.

NARRATOR

The anger had fled from Jen's eyes. Still, she did not turn or speak.

NIA

Since undertaking this quest which I was, admittedly, not fully prepared for, I have...well suffice it to say my faith has become somewhat more complex. I unfairly expected you and the boys to restore some of the simplicity of youth. And then lashed out when you were human.

JEN

You know what I've been feeling since this morning?

NIA

I can't imagine.

JEN

Powerful. I felt powerful. Like I had control over something. For once.

NARRATOR

Jen turned, and looked Nia directly in the eyes.

JEN

I swung my arm, and made the bad man go away. And now he can't hurt anyone else. And I wanted to hold onto that feeling. That I could make all the bad men go away. And then no one else would have to go through that. I didn't want to think about it because I knew once I thought about it...

(CRIES)

Oh my God. I killed somebody.

NARRATOR

Jen fell sobbing into Nia's shoulder as the priest wrapped the girl in a comforting embrace.

Their moment, however, was interrupted by a splintering crash from below.

48

INT. Monastery Chapel - Continuous

48

NARRATOR

Frieshelm and his squires had broken through the monastery's barred door. Yllowyn's arrows felled three squires in the blink of an eye, but the other three used their fallen companions as a shield to get close enough to tackle the Elf. At that range, his bow was useless, and without enough time to draw a knife, he was quickly restrained by the three large men.

Billy and Nelson, to their credit and the credit of Brennen's training, were awake and armored in moments. They stood bravely shoulder-to-shoulder, brandishing

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

their swords at Frieshelm in a posture they only prayed was correct. The knight only laughed, and with a quick flick of his own blade, disarmed both of the boys. Their swords skittered down the hallway and out of reach.

A single ursine swing of Frieshelm's gauntleted hand knocked both of the boys on their backs. The man casually lifted his own blade to strike Billy down.

JEN

No!

NARRATOR

Jen and Nia emerged from the stairwell just in time to see Frieshelm's sword poised over Billy's throat. Heedless of her own safety, Jen ran at the man, swinging her own sword wildly. Her strikes bounced off of Frieshelm's armor harmlessly.

NIA

Jen!

NARRATOR

With his left hand, Frieshelm grabbed the girl by the throat and lifted her clear off the ground. Nia pointed her staff at him in preparation for a spell, but a flippant stroke from the sword in his right hand shattered the wood effortlessly.

Jen's eyes bulged as the large man throttled her. He shook, and her eyes rolled wildly as she kicked and struggled. Suddenly, she stopped kicking, her eyelids fell closed. Sir Frieshelm laughed cruelly. As he laughed, a sort of "hum" filled the room. Almost imperceptible at first, the sensation was more felt than heard, and it slowly grew stronger. The hairs on Jen's head stood on end.

For just a heartbeat, the room went still. And then the figure of Frieshelm exploded in sparks. His armor shone from the light of it, and girl and man were thrown apart, each heavily hitting the walls at opposite ends of the room.

Yllowyyn took advantage of the momentary shock to throw the three squires off of him. The terrified men fled to the door of the room, only to run headlong into Regan and Brennen, who had just arrived. The queen's twin swords flashed and her general's axe gleamed, and then the squires were dead.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Sir Frieshelm himself lay stunned against a back wall. Wordlessly, Brennen kicked off his helm, and decapitated him with a great swing of his axe.

Billy was the first to recover from the shock of the battle. He rushed to Jen's side.

BILLY

Jen!

BRENNEN

Is she all right?!

JEN

(CROAKS)
That sucked.

NARRATOR

The print of a hand was clearly burned into her flesh, red ghosts of fingers grasping her neck. She slumped against Billy's chest, unable to move further.

BILLY

You're okay, babe. We got 'em.

NIA

I'll make you some ice.

NARRATOR

The priest reached for her staff before remembering it lay in ruins on the floor. Instead she gingerly placed her own hands upon the girl's neck and began muttering some words.

BILLY

Nice of you guys to join us, by the way.

REGAN

Way to kill a cop while you're supposed to be laying low. Which one of you fucking wizards thought that was a good idea?

NARRATOR

Jen raised a weak hand before letting it drop.

REGAN

Glad you've kept you're sense of humor, but really, I'm curious.

NARRATOR

Nia only nodded. When Regan looked towards the Elf for confirmation, he nodded too.

REGAN

No shit? Well fuck me, I had you wrong, girly. I owe you a drink. And you just magicked the shit out of falcon boy there.

BILLY

Yeah, what did you do, honey?

NELSON

That was fucking awesome.

NIA

She attempted an enchantment way beyond her ability, and injured herself in the process. Which is exactly what I warned her about.

(WHISPERS)

Thank you for not listening.

REGAN

I just wish I coulda seen the look on McShane's sonofabitch face. Your timing leaves something to be desired though.

YELLOWYYN

Indeed. General, while out in the taverns I heard some troubling whispers about the Kingdom.

BRENNEN

Some are true, I'm afraid. His Majesty is slain and Ardel Redmoor has usurped the High Throne.

NIA

What?! Yllowwyn, you heard talk of this and didn't tell us?

YELLOWYYN

You know how common men gossip. There was no sense worrying you all until we knew for sure.

REGAN

Well now you know. Oh and also that means I'm Queen, apparently.

NIA

Your Grace!

NARRATOR

Nearly dropping Jen, Nia knelt low to the ground. At a slight gesture towards the boys, they eventually followed suit.

YELLOWYYN

The Knights of the Wood will not abide such wanton chaos.

NARRATOR

Regan lifted an eyebrow at the Elf. With a sigh, he lowered his head, the minimum required by ettiquette.

YELLOWYYN

Your Grace.

BRENNEN

Would you say this merits petitioning the High Council directly, Kalth'yr?

YELLOWYYN

I never thought I'd see such a thing in my life, but I'm afraid it does,

BRENNEN

If you would be so gracious as to broker our passage into the White Forest...

YELLOWYYN

Of course. Though I would caution you all not to mention the less lawful moments of the last few days in the presence of Elves.

REGAN

We can't go anywhere until this storm dies down.

BRENNEN

Luckily, neither can anyone get up here. Let's take the chance to get some rest.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyn looked around, as if noticing for the first time that the room was full of corpses.

YELLOWYYN

We should deal with these before the rats come.

BRENNEN

I'll deal with Sir Frieshelm. Kalth'yr, gather up the rest.

REGAN

I'll help you, Brennen.

49

EXT. Gates of the Monastery -Nearly Continuous

49

NARRATOR

Brennen and Regan struggled to carry the large corpse through the gale winds and driving rain. As they tossed the body over a cliff, Brennen spoke.

BRENNEN

It was in a tourney. He was Redmoor's champion, and I was your grandfather's. The victor got to hold the vanquished "hostage" for the champion's purse. When I lost, the Lord Treasurer didn't think a peasant was worth the money. Gunther humiliated himself to get me released. Don't think I've ever forgiven myself. Next time I rode into a real battle was an Orc raid near Blackhold. I led 500 horse into four times as many pike.

REGAN

Even I heard about that. Didn't know it was you though.

BRENNEN

Our foes broke rank. Everyone said my "boldness" won the day. I rode in thinking we would surely die. That was the point.

REGAN

Guilt's a privilege of the living. Frieshelm's dead.

BRENNEN

Aye, but he lived and died a knight.

A BEAT.

REGAN

Let's get inside.

50

INT. Monastery - Continuous

50

NARRATOR

As the two returned from outside, Yllowynn was searching the squire's bodies for anything useful, while Billy, Nelson, and Nia tended to Jen.

REGAN

I'm gonna need somebody to walk me through this.

YLLOWYNN

Through what?

REGAN

I'm knighting Brennen.

BRENNEN

(ECSTATIC)
Your Grace?

REGAN

A Queen can do that right?

BRENNEN

If Her Majesty wills it.

REGAN

Kneel, General Brennen of Greyfield.

NARRATOR

Brennen could not keep the grin from widening across his face as he knelt in front of his queen. He waited, expectantly. And waited. And waited.

REGAN

Okay, that's all I got.

NARRATOR

Yllowwyn rolled his eyes, but took the Kalth'yr post behind Queen Regan's right shoulder.

YLOWYYN

Say "I," then state your full name and titles.

REGAN

I, Aeron Margaret Regan, uh, thief queen of Armstrungard...

YLOWYYN

Your real titles.

REGAN

What are my real titles?

NIA

Champion of the civilized peoples and High Queen of the Human Realms of Iorden.

REGAN

Shit, look at me. I, Aeron Margaret Regan, Champion of the civilized peoples and High Queen of the Human Realms of Iorden...

BRENNEN

Do call upon me...

REGAN

I call upon me?

BRENNEN

No, you call upon me.

REGAN

Do call upon you, General Brennen of Greyfield.

YLLLOWYYN

"To serve me as a knight."

REGAN

To serve as a knight.

YLLLOWYYN

Now ask "would you be knighted?"

REGAN

Would you be knighted?

BRENNEN

I would, Your Grace.

REGAN

Can I just appoint the preacher lady to say the rest of the words for me?

NIA

You may.

REGAN

Is that gonna make this count any less for you, General?

BRENNEN

No, Your Grace.

NARRATOR

Brennen's smile still split his face. Regan gestured to Nia, who could not suppress her own smile. She proceeded with all the dignity and warmth she could muster.

NIA

Would you bring honor to your liege in all you do, and obey her every order, may Galadon help you?

BRENNEN

I would.

NIA
And would Your Grace never give your knight a command
which would bring disorder or disgrace?

REGAN
How are we defining "disorder" and "disgrace"?

YELLOWYYN
Ahem.

REGAN
Fine. I would not.
(UNDER HER BREATH)
I'll do all the fun stuff myself.

NIA
Now you dub him.

REGAN
Is that the sword part?

YELLOWYYN
Yes.

NARRATOR
Regan drew her blade and touched the flat steel gently
to Brennen's left shoulder.

NIA
Do you have a family name, General?

BRENNEN
My father was called Willem.

REGAN
I dub you Sir Brennen Willemsen.

NARRATOR
The steel touched his right shoulder.

REGAN
Arise, Sir Brennen.

NELSON
This is like *Man of La Mancha* except Brennen's not a
total fuckup.

REGAN
Sir Brennen is not a total fuckup.

BILLY
Man of the what?

JEN
It's a musical, Billy. They did it at school last year.
I was gonna be in it, but...

NIA
Jen, rest your voice. Billy, Nelson, would you please
help her into bed? I'll see to her in a few minutes.

NARRATOR
Billy lifted the girl and carried her towards the beds.
Nelson followed. Once Nia was sure the children were
out of earshot, she turned to Brennen and Regan.

NIA
Jen's throat will swell. I can ice it but I can only do
so much without my staff. She needs a real physician.

REGAN
And Brennen needs his arm taken care of.

BRENNEN
I told you it's fine.

REGAN
You're a knight now. That's my arm and I'm gonna need
it.

YELLOWYYN
There is Elven medicine that can help when we get to
the White Forest.

NIA
If we don't get there soon it may be too late for Jen.

REGAN
But we're dead for sure if we try to get down in the
storm.

BRENNEN
We must be ready to depart as soon as the storm clears.
Kalth'yr, take the first watch.

NARRATOR
As they dispersed to prepare for the evening, Regan
held her knight back for a moment.

REGAN
Sir Brennen.

BRENNEN
Your Grace?

REGAN

Are 'Maggie' and 'Catie' good sword names?

END OF EPISODE.