

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD  
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 1  
"A Cruel And Sullied World"

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1 NO AMBIENCE

1

NARRATOR

Hello, dear listener. My it's been a while. I'm sorry that you've been kept waiting. Some of the fault is mine, I'm afraid. I'll freely admit that my desire to, shall we say, "unwind" after the end of our first book led to not a few lost weekends with Yllodyk and her canib root-chewing friends.

*BEGIN TO FADE IN SCREAMS AND FIRE FROM THE END OF B1C10.*

But I am here now. So I suppose we had best jump right back into--

*--FX ABRUPTLY CUTS OUT AND RETURNS TO NO AMBIENCE.*

Beg your pardon?

I see. Dear Listeners, it seems our Producers are insisting that I provide you with a "re-cap" of our last book's events. I know, I know. So little respect for audiences these days.

I'll do as I'm told of course, but I must first say this, and then no more: I've been a storyteller since before written language. Back then, all tales told were clumsily crammed in preposterous patterns so mortal minds could better master them.

*(beat, then aside)*

Still got it.

*(back to the task at hand)*

Anyway, my point is if those folk could keep a story straight, surely a modern audience - with their much-lauded computer machines - doesn't need their stories regurgitated to them half-digested like they're helpless baby birds.

I mean, by nature's blessing. The central theme I spent *thirteen hours* driving at was the importance of *engaging critically with stories*. Wouldn't this farce of a summary somewhat defeat that purpose? Why do the Producers think I do all this? It's not for their generous health and pension plan, I can assure you of that.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

You know what? I *do* take this personally. I do. I perform with all the skill I possess, which I am not bragging in saying is considerable.

All of the subtlety and nuance and, dare I say, poetry, that goes into telling our tale, they want me to toss out in favor of some highly truncated synopsis? Something which by its very nature must have the subtlety and nuance of a stampede of sexually excited elephants?

You know what? Fine. Producers want an elephant orgy, here it goes.

Deep breath.

Our tale begins in earnest when three humans called Billy, Jen, and Nelson, from a realm called Northeast Pennsylvania, find themselves in Iorden after enduring a magical event they cannot yet begin to understand.

*PLAY SHORT SNIPPETS FROM LIBRARY SCENE IN CHAPTER 1.*

After initially being met with suspicion, the Pennsylvanians' resemblance to a nearly forgotten prophecy leads the war hero Brennen and the King's Elvish advisor Yllowyyn to conscript them into a quest. The true purpose of this quest, though it is hidden from all but Brennen, is to find the King's sole surviving descendant: an illegitimate child living in the slums of the port city of Armstrungard. The party acquires this person, one Aeron Margaret Regan, along with an academic priest in training called Nia, and hopes to bring Regan back to Castle Guernatal to be legitimized by His Majesty King Gunther. Despite Regan's reservations about the whole thing.

*NOTE: GREY ITALICS denote replayed clips from previous episodes.*

REGAN

*I'm a fucking princess?...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?*

NARRATOR

This never happens, however. Instead, a minor noble named Ardel Redmoor makes a treasonous play for the throne, resulting in the death of King Gunther.

REPLAY CROSSBOW HITTING GUNTHER AND GUNTHER COUGHING  
FROM B1C4.

BRENNEN

*Be quiet and help me move him.*

REGAN

*Brennen, you know damn well--*

BRENNEN

*--Shut up.*

REGAN

*He's dead, and we will be too if we don't leave right now.*

NARRATOR

This of course leaves Regan with a very legitimate claim to the High Throne of the Human Realms of Iorden. It's also worth noting here that the traitor Ardel has a twin sister, Arlene, who is in mutual but unexpressed love with her handmaiden Gwen and that the two eventually flee Castle Guernatal to seek a life together on the frontier.

Meanwhile Jen, to the surprise of her comrades, finds herself both willing and able to kill. Bad men, I assure you, but still.

JEN

*Powerful. I felt powerful...I didn't want to think about it because I knew once I thought about it...Oh my God. I killed somebody.*

NARRATOR

Thus beset by the forces of Ardel Redmoor on one side and the constables of Armstrungard on the other, our Party of seven seeks refuge with Yllowyn's parents in the White Forest, then the seat of Elven power in Iorden. Brennen petitions the Elves and their mighty Knights of the Wood - Th'ar lo-Hyyl in the speech of Elves- to help him dethrone the usurper Ardel. But he is frustrated again when Regan refuses to publicly stake her far more legitimate claim to the throne.

So Brennen, Regan, Nia, and Yllowyn leave the three Pennsylvanians behind as they seek to earn favor with the Knights of the Wood by means of a quest. This quest leads to both the uncovering of an ancient and undeciphered source of knowledge, and a confrontation with a former suitor of Nia's.

REPLAY BATTLE SOUNDS FROM CH. 8.

"Former" in the sense that he had ceased to be alive, not in the sense that he had ceased pursuing Nia. Indeed death had done nothing to cure this undead horror's insufferable personality.

MAG UIDHIR

*So you've resolved not to learn anything from this then?*

RENAULT

*Oh, eat a dick, Mag Uidhir.*

NARRATOR

With their comrades thus occupied elsewhere, the three young Pennsylvanians are abducted by the Templars of Discord - a militant cult of the chaos god Garedien - and are forced to endure visions of their greatest fears, intended to break their psyches. But all three rise to the challenge, much to their own surprise.

NELSON

*Stories matter. You wanna understand people, understand their stories. You wanna change people, change their stories. People are the stories they tell. Power is who gets to tell the stories.*

BILLY

*I'm done! I'm done not being a human. I wanna feel feelings. I'm tired of hurting everyone else 'cause I'm scared. Yaah!*

JEN

*It's not even really a choice is it?*

DADDY

*You can try pretending you're someone someone you're not.*

JEN

*But not forever. Do I have some time to think about it?*

DADDY

*There's whatever little world you grow up in, and then there's the darkness all around.*

JEN

*It's scary.*

DADDY

*That's how you know you need to go there.*

## NARRATOR

No sooner do they wake, however, than they are thrust into battle. For while the Iordic nobility had been feuding for power, an army of the folk from west of the Black Mountains - then known as "Orcs" - had been invading the East to an extent not seen in millennia. This invasion was led by a half-Orc General called Traft, who had been trained in warfare by the Elves some years prior as a sort of experiment, which now *seems* to have backfired.

*REPLAY SOME OF CH. 10 COLD OPEN.*

The fortress at Freehold, with its Civic Guard garrison commanded by General Bryce Riverfell, is the last major stronghold between Traft's Orcish armies and the entire eastern realms of Iorden. It also happens to be where our three young heroes have been taken to recover following their encounter with the Templars.

*REPLAY SOME BATTLE FROM CH. 10*

The Freehold garrison fights bravely, aided in no small part by the three Pennsylvanians. Jen especially is a force to be reckoned with, using magical abilities she is just beginning to discover within herself.

*REPLAY OR FIND SOME GOOD JEN LIGHTNING SPELL SOUNDS.*

But the numbers are stacked badly against them. And Traft's army, aided by the Templars of Discord, have some formidable abilities of their own.

*REPLAY THE WALLS OF FREEHOLD COLLAPSING.*

Just as the keep seems likely to fall, and our young heroes seem likely to be slaughtered, Brennen and the others enter the fray with several hundred Knights of the Wood riding beside them and turn the tide. His armies routed, the war chief Traft flees in the chaos. And thus is our Party reunited to share in a moment of triumph.

*REPLAY KNIGHTS OF THE WOOD RIDING IN.*

Their happiness seems doomed to be short-lived however. After the battle, Regan secretly followed the Knights of the Wood. When last we left her, she had just witnessed the horrific slaughter of hundreds of Orcish women and children at the hands of the very Elf-Knights who had so recently seemed the heroes.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

...And that should just about catch us up. I may interject from time with the odd detail I need you to recall but that's the core of the thing.

Honestly though, it was much better in the initial telling. Metaphors about rabbits and all that. It was beautiful. Worth your revisiting, I promise.

The narrator **SIGHS**.

Truthfully I suppose that wasn't so bad. I'm sorry you had to hear me get so cross. It's just...well if stories really do so profoundly shape the way we see the world then it follows that the storyteller has an enormous responsibility. Sometimes it can be very overwhelming, you know? But if I promise to do my best in the telling, you must promise not to become complacent in your listening. And in that we'll approach truth. All right? All right.

FADE IN:

2 EXT. FROSTY PINE BARRENS - MORNING

2

*WE RETURN TO THE SOUNDS OF THE FOREST FROM THE END OF BOOK 1 AS THE SCREAMS ARE DYING DOWN.*

NARRATOR

We must resume our tale, I think, with Regan, who as I said has just uncovered a grisly secret.

*WE REPLAY THE DEATH OF THE INFANT, AND LET IT SIT IN THE DEAD AIR FOR A BEAT.*

NARRATOR

Even to someone such as Regan, the brutality which just transpired was shocking. And she couldn't help but express as much, with all of her typical eloquence.

REGAN

*(whispers)*  
Mother fucker.

RY'Y

Lieutenant. Bring the oil.

NARRATOR

General Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, the Lord Commander of the Knights of the Wood, spoke in the Elven tongue of course, which I'm translating for you. Regan did not understand the Elf's words...

*WE HEAR LIQUID BEING SLOSHED ONTO THE GROUND.*

NARRATOR

...But she certainly knew what building a bonfire looked like. She began searching for some way of stealthy escape from her precarious perch in the tree. Nothing presented itself.

RY'Y

Styyma!

NARRATOR

I'm hoping you've picked that word up by now. It means something like "halt."

*RY'Y SNIFFS THE AIR SUSPICIOUSLY.*

NARRATOR

Regan held perfectly still as Ry'y took in her surroundings, with the great vigilance that her mighty Elvish senses allowed. Clearly the Elf detected something amiss.

*RY'Y WALKS FROM DISTANT CENTER TO HARD LEFT.*

NARRATOR

Ry'y walked to a tree at the edge of the clearing, which mercifully was not hiding Regan just then, but on which Regan had accidentally left behind some of the mud which she was using to mask her scent from Elvish noses. The irony was not lost on our besieged thief queen.

*RY'Y SNIFFS AS SHE WALKS FROM HARD LEFT TOWARDS CENTER. THE PACE BORDERS ON AGONIZING.*

NARRATOR

With pounding heart but steady hands, Regan inched her fingers towards the repeating crossbows she wore on her belt. A gift from Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, you recall.

*RY'Y ARRIVES AT CENTER AND HER FOOTSTEPS STOP. SHE SNIFFS AGAIN. THE TENSION HOLDS FOR A BEAT, THEN--*

ELF-KNIGHT

*(off mid-right)*

--Th'ayyd! I've found tracks. Some have escaped.

RY'Y

Where?

ELF-KNIGHT

Just over this way.



*RY'Y WHISTLES FOR HER HORSE, WHICH TROTS OVER TO HER. SHE MOUNTS IT.*

RY'Y  
You six. With me!

*SIX MORE ARMORED ELVES MOUNT HORSES.*

RY'Y  
The rest of you, burn this all. I needn't restate the need to be thorough.  
(beat)  
Your houses are depending on you.

*RY'Y CLICKS TO HER MOUNT, AND SEVEN ARMORED HORSES GALLOP OFF TO HARD RIGHT.*

There's a beat of just the forest sounds, then more LIQUID being SLOSHED on the ground.

NARRATOR  
As the Elves resumed building the fire, an old proverb newly remembered made Regan choke back a very grim sort of laugh.

*STEEL STRIKES FLINT. THEN AGAIN. AGAIN. THEN THE HOT WHOOSH OF FUEL IGNITING.*

NARRATOR  
I believe it was something about frying pans and fires.

3 EXT. FIELD OUTSIDE FREEHOLD - JUST BEFORE DAWN

3

*THE INSECTS OF THE NIGHT ARE QUIETING DOWN BUT THE MORNING'S BIRDS ARE NOT UP YET.*

NARRATOR  
You'll recall that Jen was the last of our Party to speak with Regan before she snuck off to follow the Elf-Knights.  
  
What? Yes, this was indeed a few days ago in the timeline of our tale. Very good! You are paying attention. I admittedly introduced a lack of temporal realism towards the end of our last book for sake of giving events their due weight. But I'll get us back on track, don't worry.

Anyway, Jen, having watched Regan stalk off into the night returned to the tent where Billy slept.

4 INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

4

*A TENT FLAP IS PULLED OPEN. A SMALL FIRE DWINDLES DOWN INSIDE.*

NARRATOR

There she saw her paramour sleeping, albeit fitfully.

BILLY

*(sleep talking)*  
What the fuck?

*SOUND OF JEN LAYING DOWN.*

JEN

Billy?

BILLY

*(stirring awake)*  
Uh?

JEN

You up?

BILLY

I was having the weirdest goddamn dream.

JEN

*(soothing)*  
Your dad again?

BILLY

No, Nelson actually. You sleep OK? What time is it?

JEN

Early still, really early.

BILLY

*(drifting back off)*  
Hm.

JEN

Regan just like fucked off into the woods.

BILLY

Yeah, well, you know...sometimes you gotta go.

JEN

She's chasing the Elves I think. I'm trying to decide if I should tell Brennen and Nia.

BILLY

Snitches get stitches dude.

With a **SIGH**, Jen **KISSES** Billy.

JEN

Get some more rest, okay? We could all use some.

*JEN RISES.*

BILLY

Love you.

Jen lets herself think a beat. In light of everything, good and bad...

JEN

I love you too.

*THE TENT FLAP OPENS AGAIN INTO THE STILL AIR.*

5 INT. ANOTHER TENT - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

5

*A DIFFERENT TENT FLAP OPENS.*

NARRATOR

And thus did Jen make her way to the nearby tent where Nelson slept. She placed a very tentative hand on the boy's shoulder.

JEN

Hey Nelson?

NELSON

Ah!

NARRATOR

But Nelson jolted awake as if roused from the sleep of the dead.

JEN

Sorry, I know it's really early. I needed--  
(beat)  
--Are you okay?

NELSON

(catching his breath)  
Huh? Oh, yeah, I'm fine.

JEN

Having a bad dream? I think all of ours are getting pretty messed up.

NELSON

I never remember mine. What's uh...going on?

JEN

I kinda needed your advice actually.

NELSON

You do?

JEN

Regan ran off chasing the Knights of the Wood.

NELSON

The Elves were pretty clear about not doing that.

JEN

Yeah. But seems like a thing Brennen and Nia would definitely wanna be told.

NELSON

And Regan would definitely not want that. You really wanna get on her bad side?

JEN

No. But the Elves are--

--THE TENT FLAP OPENS AGAIN.

NIA

Nelson, are you--Oh. Good morning. I hope I'm not intruding.

JEN

You're fine.

NIA

I think it's time we spoke.

NELSON

About what?

NIA

To begin with, your latest dream.

NARRATOR

Though Nelson could still not remember a moment of his recent dream, the look on Nia's face made clear the gravity of the situation. A situation...

*(playful)*

...Which I'm afraid we must return to when next we meet!

CROSS-DISSOLVE TO:

6 EXT. STREAM NEAR THE HORSE'S HEAD - MORNING

6

NARRATOR

Sorry, sorry, simply too much else to cover this week.

*A BROOK BABBLES, JUST WHERE WE LEFT GWEN AT THE END OF 11003.*

NARRATOR

Well I told you I would correct some of my earlier time-jumping. How do you expect me to do it except by jumping around just a little bit more? You'll recall we last left Gwen of Ruefield in the unenviable position of having stumbled upon an infant child and its mortally wounded mother.

*THE INFANT SHE FOUND COUGHS AND CRIES.*

GWEN

Shh shh shh.

*THE CRYING SLOWS JUST A LITTLE.*

NARRATOR

To make matters worse, the now deceased mother gave every outward appearance of being an Orc. And Gwen had very little time indeed to think through her circumstances.

*FOOTSTEPS DRAW CLOSE*

ARLENE

*(starts panned but moves towards center)*  
Gwen? Are you--Oh my gods.

*THE INFANT RESUMES CRYING.*

NARRATOR

As she was approached by the woman who until recently had been called Arlene Redmoor.

ARLENE

Galadon's green garden, what's happened? Whose child is that?

GWEN

*(to the baby)*

Shh shh.

*(to Arlene)*

I...I don't know where to start. Look in the creek.

*ARLENE'S FOOTSTEPS APPROACH THE WATER.*

GWEN

And we've talked about our names, Anna. I really prefer to be called Gayle.

ARLENE

Yes, of course. How silly of--Ah!!

*ARLENE SCURRIES BACK TO GWEN. THE INFANT CRIES HARD AGAIN.*

ARLENE

Gods, that's an Orc! What are you standing here for? There are likely to be others!

GWEN

Wait. That's what I thought too. But the grey ain't supposed to wash off, is it?

ARLENE

Wash off?

GWEN

Look where the water's touched her. Don't look like Orc skin to me.

*A FEW TENTATIVE FOOTSTEPS ; THE LAST COUPLE SPLASH .*

NARRATOR

"Anna" walked to the water once more, and saw with her own eyes just what "Gayle" had told her about the corpse.

ARLENE

Gods did you ever? But then, the dead one's eyes are still red as the evening sun. Just like in the songs. Perhaps the skin is part of some ruse or glamour to steal that child?

GWEN

The child's hers.

ARLENE

What? How do you know?

GWEN

She spent her last breath begging me to save it.

ARLENE

It could talk?

GWEN

Well enough to say that.

ARLENE

My gods, does that mean it's an Orcling you're holding?  
Put it down! Be careful.

GWEN

No, this...this can't be what an Orcling looks like.  
It's so sweet.

*THE BABY BABBLES AND COOS AS ARLENE WALKS BACK TOWARDS  
GWEN.*

ARLENE

Let me see the babe's eyes.

GWEN

They're lighter than its mothers'. Almost brown.

ARLENE

But not quite.

GWEN

Maybe they get darker as it grows?

ARLENE

You are right though. It's hard to believe that this  
could grow into some foul savage brute.

*MORE BABY NOISES.*

ARLENE

Yet whatever happened out here is nothing good. We  
should get inside.

GWEN

What about the child?

ARLENE

What do you...Oh, my darling, we can't take it. You  
know we can't.

GWEN

We can't leave it out here neither.

ARLENE

*(sympathetic, but...)*  
Gayle, there's been a war. Wars are evil things and  
they make many orphans. But that cannot be for us to  
fix.

GWEN

It's so helpless.

ARLENE

So it seems right now. What's to say it doesn't, I don't know, transmute overnight and cut our throats as we sleep?

GWEN

Oh, that's...Look at it!

*ANOTHER BABY NOISE.*

ARLENE

We must be sensible here.

GWEN

I can be sensible, but I can't be heartless.

ARLENE

Heartless? You think I'm heartless?

GWEN

No, that's not what--

ARLENE

--And where should it end, then? This is a cruel and sullied world full of helpless little creatures. Shall we care for them all?

GWEN

Care for--I didn't say that and you know it! We ain't gonna care for them all, just this one right in front of us.

*THE BABY BEGINS CRYING AND CONTINUES UNTIL SPECIFIED OTHERWISE.*

ARLENE

What place do we have caring for anyone? We only just barely have food and a roof over our heads.

GWEN

Aye, but we have. And it doesn't. You want to just leave it out here to die?

ARLENE

I want us to live in peace for once! Is that too much to ask out of life? Haven't we been through enough? Or is it just our lot to live in turmoil and terror until death finally takes us?



*THE CRYING IS REALLY INTRUSIVE NOW.*

ARLENE

Which will be very soon indeed if this imp does not pipe down!

GWEN

(to the baby)  
Shh. Shh. Shh.

*THAT DOES NOTHING.*

ARLENE

Why will it not stop?

GWEN

Try singing to it.

ARLENE

What?

GWEN

That's what lullabies is for, ain't they?

ARLENE

This is absurd, and we're in danger.

*CRYING CONTINUES.*

ARLENE

Oh, very well!

Arlene hums a verse and chorus of  
"The Singing Sister."

*THIS SOOTHES THE BABY AND STOPS ITS CRYING.*

After a moment of peace...

GWEN

My love. Life ain't ever fair. But if we leave this wee thing out here to be eaten by wolves or worse, I'll never sleep again. And I don't think you will neither. Look at it.

*THE BABY COOS AGAIN.*

ARLENE

I don't...

A beat as Arlene softens.

ARLENE

Yes. Yes, you are right.  
*(resigned)*  
 Gods send all their hosts to help us. What do we tell  
 Bailey?

GWEN

There's been a war. Wars are evil things and they make  
 many orphans.

A slow, difficult beat.

GWEN

It's not forever. It's just until someone can take it.

ARLENE

You make it sound as if it's just any old child. "Here,  
 have this baby, it might turn into an Orc but we're not  
 certain. Best of luck!"

GWEN

Maybe it won't. And it sure looks like any old child,  
 innit? You said yourself, its eyes are nearly brown.  
 Its clothes are ragged but they don't look Orcish, far  
 as I can tell. Looking at it, you'd never think twice,  
 unless...

NARRATOR

Both turned to look at the ashen corpse, motionless but  
 for the swaying of the water.

ARLENE

No one must see that body anywhere near us.

They're quiet for a second, and  
 then...

*THEIR TWO SETS OF FOOTSTEPS APPROACH THE WATER.*

ARLENE

Her arm's hooked on this rock.

*SOME GENTLE SPLASHING.*

NARRATOR

The women watched, uncertainty in their eyes, as the  
 bloodied body drifted downstream. All-in-all, the  
 moment was oddly serene.

SMASH CUT TO:

7 FROSTY PINE BARRENS - DAY

7

*A HUGE, TERRIFYING FIRE BLAZES.*

REGAN

Gods damn ass-licking son of a fucking shit!

NARRATOR

Ah yes, how could I forget? We must return to Regan's decidedly un-serene circumstances.

*ARMORED RIDERS TAKE THEIR MOUNTS.*

NARRATOR

Though the Knights of the Wood had finally begun to leave, the fires they had set had already grown into a roaring conflagration.

*A KNIGHT WHISTLES AND SEVERAL DOZEN OF THEM TROT OFF.*

NARRATOR

Acrid smoke hung in the air, sickly and sweet. It was, in fact, one of very few odors in this world with which life in Armstrungard had not acquainted Regan. And though it was not terribly unlike the appetizing aroma of a roasting pig, the memory of screaming mothers and children made the smell unspeakably vile to Regan's nose. She choked back a gag as she looked down the tree.

*REGAN GAGS. FIRE CREEPS CLOSER.*

NARRATOR

To her dismay, tongues of flame were already lapping at the tree which concealed her. She looked to the ground for any sign of a soft spot, but found none.

REGAN

You fucking dumbass, Maggie. *This* is where your luck dries up?!

NARRATOR

She gave a hasty inspection of the branches around her, hoping one might be both strong and flexible. One potential option presented itself.

*WOOD CREAKS PRECARIOUSLY.*

NARRATOR

She dropped down and, pumping her arms and legs, she sought to bend the branch low so that she might safely drop to another beneath it.

*WOOD GROANS AS REGAN BENDS THE BRANCH.*

NARRATOR

Unfortunately...

*A BIG BRANCH SNAPS.*

NARRATOR

...it gave way too early. Regan tried to grab the branch beneath but was falling too fast.

*ANOTHER CRACKING BRANCH*

NARRATOR

She managed to get her arms out in front of her to save her skull and chest.

*HER BODY HITS WITH A SICKENING CRUNCH.*

REGAN

Nnnnnnngh!

NARRATOR

But she knew the stronger of her wrists was broken as soon as she hit the ground. And then, as she raised herself on the other elbow to more easily stand...

*ANOTHER BRANCH CRACKS.*

NARRATOR

...a third branch gave way right above her, and pinned her legs.

NARRATOR

I understand of course why, in the moment, she cursed that second branch with all her considerable rage.

REGAN

Oopf! You mother fucking dripping cock wart piece of fuck.

NARRATOR

Mortals are quick to disregard and disrespect nature when they're only looking in front of their own noses. But had the branch not pinned her, she would have very likely been struck and killed by the massive log that fell a moment later.

*A BIG TREE CRASHES DOWN.*

REGAN

*(through pain)*  
C'mon Maggie. Upper body strength.

NARRATOR

With her healthy arm, Regan reached out for purchase to pull herself forward.

*FLESH SIZZLES.*

REGAN

Aaaaaaaaaaagh!

NARRATOR

But burnt her hand on what felt like a rock. She tried scooting forward on her elbows, but it was around this time she became aware that she was having quite a hard time indeed catching her breath.

Regan **coughs hard** and **gasps**.

NARRATOR

The air around her was more smoke than anything else.

*ALL AMBIENCE GETS REVERB-Y AND DISTANT AS IT BEGINS TO FADE, LIKE WE'RE LOSING CONSCIOUSNESS.*

NARRATOR

Her vision blurred, then greyed, then narrowed.

*AMBIENCE HAS FADED TO NOTHING BY NOW.*

NARRATOR

Then all was black.

**END OF PART ONE.**

## PART TWO:

8 INT. TENT - PRE-DAWN

8

*THE LAST INSECTS OF THE NIGHT ARE QUIETING DOWN.*

NARRATOR

We rejoin some of our party in one of their tents near Freehold, where Nia had come to converse with Nelson and Jen.

NIA

We must speak about your dreams, Nelson. Do you remember anything?

NELSON

I told you, I never remember my dreams.

NIA

I thought this one might be different. You spoke to me in my dream.

NELSON

That's...weird.

NIA

Yes. In the past when I've had visions of the wounded young girl, I was alone. But last night you were there, as was Billy, and Yllowyyn, and Sir Brennen, which is why I've come to speak with you.

NELSON

The wounded...  
(*then it comes back to him*)  
Ohhhhh, right. *That's* the girl. The wounded girl. I have seen her!

JEN

Sorry, can we back up just a tiny bit?

NIA

So you do remember the dream.

NELSON

No, still no for tonight. But I think I saw that girl when the Templars made us hallucinate.

JEN

(*still trying to get an answer*)  
Uh, yeah, just real quick--

NELSON

--Right, sorry. So, turns out Brennen and Nia have been having these, um, dreams. Where they see this little girl with a chest wound. And she tells them stuff that's maaaybe a prophecy.

JEN

...Kay.

NELSON

But I forgot to tell Nia. When the Templars poisoned us, I saw...well, I saw a lot of things. But one of them was this girl. She had a big bleeding hole in her chest, and she said "There are seven things you must know to save me. The sixth is: Order is a story made flesh through power."

NIA

Interesting. In last night's dream she mentioned Chaos. Order and Chaos, the ideals of the gods Galadon and Garedian.

*(some fear)*

All of this is just as I have been coming to suspect it would be.

JEN

You guys are being pretty casual about some straight-up horror movie shit.

NIA

Oddly, the wounded girl exudes calm. The same sense of safety and protection that Sir Brennen reported from *his* dream, the day you three arrived in Iorden. Do you remember that?

JEN

That was why the King let us live.

NELSON

Right! Brennen's dream reminded him of that old prophecy. The scrolls of, was it...Baradir?

NIA

Yes, very good. The Scrolls of Baradir. And since having that dream, Sir Brennen has come to believe that the three of you are going to play some vital role in an upcoming war between Order and Chaos, which in his mind I'm sure means his war to retake the throne.

JEN

Okay, but that's...you don't think that's true, do you?

NIA

I've given that question much thought, and I have much to say. But for the moment, you must understand that Sir Brennen believes it with his whole heart. And if he shared my dream last night as I suspect, he will want to speak with you immediately upon waking. He will likely insist on taking you before the Council of Elders as he had planned to do when all of this started.

JEN

That's...the council of Elves that we talked to like last week? That Regan lied to?

NIA

No, that was the High Council of the White Forest. The Council of Elders is a gathering of scholars, clergy and theologians who aim to guide proper interpretation of scripture throughout the realm.

NELSON

Oh. They should have picked more distinct names that were easier to remember.

NIA

I'll be sure to mention it when next I've a hand in shaping centuries-old institutions.

JEN

Oh my god Nia, was that a joke?

NIA

No, we are too short on time to joke. Be forewarned: If you come before the Elders, depending on what they say, Sir Brennen may either release you from his charge entirely, or else...

JEN

Or if we're important, then we're in for the duration.

NIA

What the Elders say may make you indispensable in Sir Brennen's eyes, yes.  
*(almost an admission)*  
He is too honorable for outright kidnapping, but he would not make your departure easy. So you should think carefully about what you do next.

JEN

Are you...telling us to run away?



NIA  
I'd sincerely hope you wouldn't. But you ought to make an informed decision.

JEN  
Thanks, Nia. Thanks for, I dunno, treating us like grownups.

NIA  
You've been given responsibilities no child could bear. You're owed the respect that goes with that.

A beat. Feels like they're reflecting.

NELSON  
Speaking of that, Nia...what do you think about this prophecy stuff?

JEN  
Yeah. Informed decision, right? So inform us.

NIA  
Yes. Well. Let me begin by saying I think it is obvious by now there is *something* extraordinary about you all.

JEN  
(*you flatter*)  
Psh. Naah.

NIA  
Whether I think you have ought to do with The Scrolls of Baradir is complicated. In no small part because my beliefs regarding the Scrolls themselves are complicated. They were very important in my house as a child. My parents are priests in the Order of the Plow, you see.

JEN  
Joined the family trade, huh?

NIA  
Not quite. The Order of the Plow is a ministry devoted to the concerns of farmers and other country folk. And the Scrolls of Baradir purport to be written by a fisherman who was visited by Galadon in his sleep. You can see why this idea of Galadon speaking to a humble fisherman would be appealing among the rural lowborn.

NELSON  
Visited? Like in a dream.

NIA

That is where beliefs diverge. You see writing in the time of Baradir tended to be very poetic. The ancients were more concerned with the personal emotional truth of events than with the objective, material truth. So what does Baradir mean when he speaks of his visits from Galadon? Perhaps he is speaking in metaphor, and only meant to say he felt the presence of Galadon in a very personal way. The Council of Elders prefers this interpretation.

NELSON

How come?

NIA

Because the alternative is that he visited the Selbiric plane in his dreams and communicated directly with Galadon.

JEN

And they don't like that idea?

NIA

Selbiric Dreaming is a known and accepted miracle. But the canonical scriptures say this only happens to the worthiest of the worthy, to those who have devoted their entire lives to the rule of Order and the glory of Galadon. And the Council of Elders holds that this means, well, them.

JEN

So god's word has to come through them. Convenient.

NIA

I'd be lying if I said politics weren't involved. But...the Scriptures are dense texts full of archaic language and many meanings. I do not think they can be fully understood without many years of study. If I did not fully believe that, I never would have joined the Order of the Quill.

NELSON

Okay, but, so, there's a *chance* one or many of us may be Selbiric Dreaming?

NIA

Perhaps. There is also a third possibility. *Some* readings of Baradir seem to lend credence to what is called the theory of Divine Avatars.

JEN

Oh! You *did* mention this before. I was pretty out of it on that wagon ride to the White Forest but I remember

(MORE)

JEN (cont'd)  
that cause Nelson was shitting on *Legend of Korra* and I thought he was wrong.

NELSON  
You're really gonna front like it lives up to *Last Airbender*?

JEN  
It gets really good in the later episodes!

NIA  
May we stay on topic please? Much to say before the sun rises.

JEN  
Sorry.

NELSON  
Sorry.

NIA  
The theory of Divine Avatars holds that the gods Galadon and Garedian have the power, if they so choose, to leave Selbrin and inhabit the physical body of a mortal in Iorden. They must join with the body at birth, and must remain with it until death. Some versions hold that while inhabiting an Avatar, the gods lose all their powers. Others say that it strengthens them, they become super-human. These beliefs were all common in antiquity.

JEN  
What does the Council of Elders think of that one?

NIA  
It is heresy. Blasphemy. It defies the First Theological Axiom of the the Second Concordat: The gods are of Selbirin alone. Scholars sometimes discuss it hypothetically, as the metaphysical implications would be fascinating. But to preach it in earnest is to forfeit one's tongue.

JEN  
Goddamn.

NIA  
Yes, perhaps. I never took the idea seriously before. But the things I have seen during our time together... the parallels between the dreams and the scrolls is uncanny, and Brennen knew nothing of the scrolls when his dreams began. But I finally started to think in earnest about Avatars after meeting that beggar in Armstrungard. The night we stayed in the monastery, I dreamt of the girl. She told me "the blind man has seen the face of God." And the very next day a blind man I never met before tells me he saw Garedian *herself* carry

(MORE)

NIA (cont'd)

out the murder of Prince Uther. Granted there is nothing to rule out that the man was just mad and our meeting pure coincidence, but once I allowed myself to consider the Theory of Avatars...

JEN

Other things just started coming into focus?

NIA

Yes. Well said. Many things that have long been mysterious. Especially regarding the death of Prince Uther, but that is a *much* longer story.

JEN

Okay so bracket that. What could this mean for us?

NIA

Well, you did arrive here seemingly out of nowhere with memories of a fantastical world that is nothing like this one.

NELSON

Wait wait wait wait. You're not actually suggesting that we're...Avatars of your gods. Are you?

NIA

One thing the literature agrees on is that if the gods were to take human form they would still know they were gods. So no, I don't think so. There is, however, talk in the Scrolls of a Champion.

*A ROOSTER CROWS.*

NIA

*(hasty)*  
And that will have to wait it seems.

NELSON

What? Come on! You can't leave us hanging on that.

NIA

Brennen will be in soon, and then you'll have some thinking to do. But before you choose your course, I'd say this in favor of your staying. Regarding the mysteries we've discussed, including your arrival in Iorden and perhaps even how you might return to your home, the Elders certainly have access to research that I do not. I promise no answers, but neither can I think of a better alternative. Now think on what I've said.

NARRATOR

She turned to leave them.

*THE TENT FLAP OPENS.*

NARRATOR

But then paused once more.

NIA

I'd not make liars of you. But I would ask that you not *volunteer* the details of this conversation to Sir Brennen.

JEN

Wait, hang on.

NIA

Yes?

JEN

*(cautious beat)*  
Regan left to chase the Elves in the middle of the night.

NELSON

Ruh-roh. There it is.

NIA

She did what?

JEN

I can't decide whether to tell Brennen.

NIA

*(Wit's end)*  
This is who would be Queen. Galadon save us all.  
*(regaining composure)*  
Sir Brennen must be told, but let me handle it. Take the chance to talk amongst yourselves.

NARRATOR

And then she departed, leaving Jen and Nelson alone with a great many thoughts.

9 INT. YET ANOTHER TENT - SIMULTANEOUS

9

NARRATOR

Unbeknownst to Nia though, Brennen had awoken before the horn's call. But having found Nia out of bed, he chose to begin his day speaking with Yllowyyn.

BRENNEN

Her Majesty must declare herself. Now that Traft is routed, there are houses that will take up arms against Redmoor. Maybe enough to defeat him. But only if Queen  
(MORE)

BRENNEN (cont'd)

Regan flies Guernatal banners. Perhaps she'll be more willing, now that see's seen the Th'ar lo-Hyyl are true to their word.

YELLOWYYN

Though if she makes her claim now, after having earlier denied knowing Guernatal's heir, I worry they may hold the, ah, ruse against her.

BRENNEN

She was thinking tactically. Hardly damning for a Queen, rather the opposite.

YELLOWYYN

I pray the High Council of the White Forest sees it that way. I must admit I worry sometimes Sir Brennen. Is she ready to wear Gunther's crown?

BRENNEN

More ready than that sniveling shit Ardel Redmoor!

YELLOWYYN

Well of course, I only--

BRENNEN

--And she is Gunther's granddaughter.

YELLOWYYN

*(not unkind but...)*  
Bastard granddaughter.

BRENNEN

I know for a fact he planned to legitimize her. Before he was usurped and murdered!

YELLOWYYN

Yes, I'm not--

BRENNEN

--And I'll not listen to you disparage Gunther's dying wish.

YELLOWYYN

Let's remain calm, Sir Brennen.

BRENNEN

Do you think you know better than the High King what's best for the realms of men?

YELLOWYYN

Let you not forget, Sir, what I've given for this Queen! I challenged the High Council and spurned my parents, out of faith that her cause would one day be

(MORE)

YELLOWYYN (cont'd)

proven just. But if I am wrong, then my life in politics is over before it has started, and I've done insult to my kin for naught. Is that all forgotten?

BRENNEN

No. No, 'tis not Kalth'yr. You've been as true to your post as could ever be asked. Forgive me, I've been troubled of late.

YELLOWYYN

I'll never ask your apology for being fierce in defense of your liege. Loyalty is perhaps the finest trait of men. I only ask you to believe that I speak as an ally. As far as I'm concerned, Aeron Regan's claim on the throne is not in question. But in my capacity as an advisor, I must respectfully express my...reservations concerning her readiness.

BRENNEN

I cannot lie, Kalth'yr. I do wish she had more time to learn how to rule. And I wish Gunther was around to teach her. But never does the beggar set the banquet menu.

YELLOWYYN

Well, you've never been a beggar, Sir Brennen. At least not for wisdom and strength. And she's not without a few regal qualities. If anyone can cultivate them, it is you.

BRENNEN

You're gracious, Kalth'yr.

YELLOWYYN

The Human Realms shall have a good Queen one day. And you shall have your vengeance.

*THE TENT OPENS.*

NIA

Sir Brennen, there you--ah. Kalth'yr. Good morning. Am I intruding?

BRENNEN

Not at all. I sought you out earlier but you were not abed. I take it you had the dream as well?

NIA

I did, and there is much to discuss there, but--

BRENNEN

--Now we truly must bring the young ones before the Council of Elders.

YLLLOWYYN

I still fear Sir Brennen may be giving too much credence to writings which have already been deemed false.

BRENNEN

I believe Galadon is just, Kalth'yr. And for those three to arrive and the dreams to follow, just as the monarchy is in greater peril than it has been in a dozen lifetimes...Come to my aid here, Nia.

NIA

I...think you are onto something, truly. It merits much discussion. But I'm afraid there is a more urgent matter.

BRENNEN

What is it?

NIA

It is, ah, perhaps best discussed in private, Sir Brennen.

A slightly uncomfortable beat.

BRENNEN

Are you certain the Kalth'yr's skills and knowledge would not be helpful?

NARRATOR

A brief look passed between Nia and Brennen.

NIA

I'm sure there will be much to discuss with him come supper. But for now...

YLLLOWYYN

If...that is the will of the court.

BRENNEN

Kalth'yr, I'm certain General Riverfell could use a hand rebuilding his ramparts. Perhaps you could offer your services for the day.

Yllowyyn pauses. That one stings.

YLLLOWYYN

You would like me to work as a carpenter?

BRENNEN

He's been a most gracious host. And with your skills as a climber you are uniquely suited to the work.



YELLOWYYN

Yes it seems I am. Very well then.

*YELLOWYYN EXITS THE TENT.*

We let the tension sit in the air  
for a while.

NARRATOR

Nia hesitated to speak for some time, knowing what she did about an Elf's senses.

BRENNEN

He's out of earshot by now.

NIA

*(get ready for the shit blizzard)*  
Her Majesty our Queen seems to have departed.

BRENNEN

Departed where?

NIA

West, tracking the Th'ar lo-Hyyl.

BRENNEN

SHE WH--  
*(catches himself, whispers)*  
She what?

NIA

This was several hours ago as far as I can tell.

BRENNEN

Why didn't you tell me sooner?

NIA

I only just found out. Jen was the only one she told.

BRENNEN

Well why didn't Jen tell me sooner?

NIA

Seems she was torn between guarding Regan's safety and respecting her stated wishes. A noble struggle if ever there was one.

BRENNEN

The Th'ar lo-Hyyl care not about intentions. They will suffer no defiance, which is how they'll see Regan's trespass.

(MORE)

BRENNEN (cont'd)

*(beat)*

None of you understand, and I blame myself. Perhaps I was too permissive with that tablet you found in the cairn.

NIA

The map, you mean? It could be an invaluable font of information if I could just decipher it.

BRENNEN

That's just what I mean. I accepted that risk because I truly believed there was no way the Elves would know. And even then with unease. But trespassing where the Knights are like to be? These are not some petty watchmen to be bribed. They are the army of order in this world and they are ironclad in their purpose.

NIA

*(thinking aloud)*

Order is a story made flesh through power.

BRENNEN

What?

NIA

Nelson did have the sixth vision as suspected. Neither here nor there at present. Is Regan good enough to avoid the Elves' detection?

BRENNEN

Depends. On what they're doing, on how close she gets.

NARRATOR

Brennen allowed himself a moment to think. And Nia saw his face change. The vexed consternation of man thinking fell to the grim certainty of man deciding.

BRENNEN

I must go. As far as the Th'ar lo-Hyyl know, I still hold rank over Regan. If she's found, I gave the order to scout to the west. They may let her live if she was following my command.

NARRATOR

Nia did not fail to grasp what Brennen was implying for himself. It showed on her face.

NIA

You needn't throw your life away, Sir Brennen. She is a woman grown, and she cast her own lot.

BRENNEN

And I cast mine with hers. Forty one years ago, I pledged my life to House Guernatal. Every day since has been borrowed from Galadon.

NARRATOR

Brennen stood to leave.

BRENNEN

If she returns alone then you must convince her to declare. Make Jen help, if they're such close friends. And if she needs someone to lead her army, you could fare worse than Bryce Riverfell.

NARRATOR

Nia dropped her head, crestfallen, as Brennen departed.

*HOOFBEATS GALLOP INTO THE DISTANCE.*

BRENNEN

Hyah!

NARRATOR

Brennen rode his mount hard, all that day and into the night.

DISSOLVE TO:

10 EXT. PINE BARRENS - NIGHT

10

*DAY TRANSITIONS INTO NIGHT.*

NARRATOR

The dense forest slowed him, as did his frequent stops to put his ear to the ground for signs of the Th'ar lo-Hyyl. But in the end he was glad he did so.

*A DISTANT MUFFLED RUMBLE OF HOOF BEATS, PANNED MIDDLE RIGHT.*

*BRENNEN'S HORSE TROTS OFF TO THE LEFT.*

NARRATOR

The requisite detour, however, took him far out of his way. And by the time the night was at its deepest, Brennen had to admit to himself that he was well and fully lost.

*NIGHT SOUNDS GIVE WAY TO EARLY MORNING*

NARRATOR

Thus it was with a drop of relief, but a torrent of dread, that Brennen spied the pillar of smoke to his north, just after sunrise.

BRENNEN

Galadon help me. Git up ye mangy nag. Hyah!

*BRENNEN STRIKES HIS HORSE HARD, SPURRING INTO A FRANTIC GALLOP THAT ZOOMS OFF, FADING INTO THE CENTER.*

11 EXT. BURNING CLEARING - DAY

11

*A RAGING INFERNO BLAZES ALL AROUND US.*

We REPLAY bits of the end of Part One.

REGAN

C'mon Maggie, upper body strength.

*FLESH SIZZLES ON THE HOT ROCK.*

REGAN

Aaaaaaaaaaagh!

*REGAN COUGHS AND CHOKES AND GASPS FOR AIR . HER HEAD HITS THE GROUND LIMP.*

*FIRE ENCROACHES NEARER FOR A TOO-LONG BEAT.*

BRENNEN

*(panned, very distant)*

REGAN?

*HOOFBEATS JUST BECOME AUDIBLE.*

BRENNEN

*(a little bit closer)*

REGAN?

*Mixer: for the rest of this scene, the audience POV will be locked to Regan's unconscious body, which remains dead center. Brennen's voice will be locked to his horse, so he should be placed with the hooves for position and distance. He'll be circling Regan's location, and we want to build tension by making it unclear if he will find her.*

*BRENNEN'S HORSE TROTS PAST THE OUTSKIRTS OF CENTER...*

BRENNEN

REGAN ARE YOU HERE?

*...BUT THEN KEEPS GOING. MUST HAVE NOT SEEN HER.*

BRENNEN

*(fading)*

Regan, answer if you hear me.

*A TREE CRASHES DOWN AND SPOOKS THE HELL OUT OF BRENNEN'S HORSE.*

BRENNEN

*(still distant)*

Whoa! Whoa!

*THE HORSE WHINNIES AND BUCKS UNTIL HE GETS IT UNDER CONTROL.*

BRENNEN

*(getting nearer)*

Is anyone out here?

*THE HORSE TROTS NEARER, AND THEN TURNS AWAY.*

BRENNEN

*(receding again)*

REGAN?

*THE HORSE SEEMS LIKE IT'S TROTGING AWAY FOR GOOD. AND THEN...*

BRENNEN

Regan!

*THE HORSE GALLOPS TOWARDS US. BRENNEN DISMOUNTS WHILE IT'S STILL MOVING AND SPRINTS THE REST OF THE WAY. WE HEAR HIM DROP TO ONE KNEE.*

NARRATOR

Brennen knelt beside his Queen, doing his best to assess the situation.

*ANOTHER TREE COMES DOWN, TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT. THE HORSE WHINNIES AGAIN.*

NARRATOR

But it was soon apparent there wasn't a moment to spare.

*WE HEAR REGAN'S BODY SCOOPED UP AND PLOPPED ON THE HORSE.*

NARRATOR

He hoisted Regan onto the back of his mount.

*HE MOUNTS UP AND GALLOPS OFF.*

NARRATOR

And fled as fast as the beast dared run.

*THE FIRE RAGES ON A FEW BEATS LONGER, AS GIANT TREES CRASH ALL AROUND US.*

**END OF PART TWO.**

## PART THREE:

12 EXT. FREEHOLD RAMPARTS - DAY

12

*FADE IN SOUNDS OF MEN WORKING AND HAMMERING WOOD.*

NARRATOR

You'll recall that Yllowyyn, Kalth'yr to the Great but troubled House Guernatal, had been tasked with helping Bryce Riverfell's garrison rebuild the badly damaged fortress at Freehold.

You'll also recall that this was in large part a ruse by Sir Brennen to conceal from Yllowyyn his flight west in search of Regan.

*WE NEED TO HEAR A HORSE GALLOPING BUT WITH AN EFFECT ALMOST LIKE TELESCOPIC HEARING TO SIMULATE ELVISH SUPER-SENSES.*

So it is somewhat ironic that Yllowyyn's vantage point atop the ramparts of Freehold was what allowed him to spy Brennen's riding away.

He returned to the day's work he had promised to do, but thereafter the scowl he'd worn since the morning hardened even further.

DISSOLVE TO:

13 EXT. CAMP NEAR FREEHOLD - EVENING

13

*MOSTLY NATURE SOUNDS. CAMP SOUNDS ARE FAR OFF AND PANNED.*

NARRATOR

That evening, with Brennen gone, Jen and Nelson took the opportunity to speak privately with Billy.

*THREE SETS OF FOOTSTEPS.*

NARRATOR

Their first order of business was to fill him in on what Nia had told them.

JEN

So that's pretty much it. Everyone's been having those freaky dreams that *might* be about us.

NELSON

Because maybe one of us is some kind of mythical champion. Or something.

JEN

And our best chance to figure out how to get home is by talking to some old people, but those people might convince Brennen not to let us leave anyway.

BILLY

That's for sure a, uh, whaddaya call it...dilemma.

NELSON

Catch twenty two.

BILLY

What?

NELSON

It means we've got a bunch of things that need to happen before we can get to our final goal, but one of the things that needs to happen actually interferes with the final goal. That's a textbook catch twenty two. A dilemma is different, it's when you've got two choices that both suck.

BILLY

Right so like right now, when your choice is between my foot up your ass and my fist through your nose, is that a dilemma?

NELSON

That would be assault.

JEN

Billy, don't threaten Nelson when he explains things, he usually knows what he's talking about.

BILLY

But he's--

JEN

--Nelson, before you say stuff like that, maybe stop and ask yourself whether you're trying to help the group or just make yourself feel smart.

BILLY

Fine.

NELSON

Fair.

JEN

But seriously I kinda do have a dilemma. I can stay here, or I can try to go home.



NELSON

Okay as someone who never felt safe for a second in High School, lemme be the first to say that this place is mad dangerous. We narrowly avoid violent death like ten times a week.

JEN

Agreed. I'm not saying I like it here. I'm just saying, there's something...easier, in a screwed up way, about being in pure survival mode. Like just react or you're dead, no time to spin every little thing around in your head until you convince yourself it's your fault and you're a bad person.

BILLY

Babe, none of this is our fault. We just got put here and we're doing what we have to.

JEN

Exactly! Look I'm realizing lately there's some stuff in my head I've gotta deal with, and I know that's where this is coming from.

BILLY

Hang on, what kinda stuff?

JEN

I...I'll talk to you about it later, okay? But you know the second we get back, there's gonna be a parade of counselors and cops and ex-cruc-i-a-ting nights with our families where they stare at us quietly and say "it's okay if you don't wanna talk" a million times until we talk just to shut them up. I can't deal with that right now.

BILLY

If my dad ever did that I would die of a heart attack.

JEN

You know what I mean though, right?

NELSON

I'm worried about my grandma. She already buried her son. I'd hate thinking about doing one of those lame "assumed dead but no body found" funerals for me.

JEN

Yeah, I know. I'm worried about my mom. But still, I'm staying. I can't make this call for anyone else. I don't want either of you stay just because I'm staying. If you wanna to leave...

BILLY

No. Hell no. No way I'm leaving you behind.

JEN

I know, honey, I know. I'm just saying. Let's not bullshit ourselves - if we stay here any one of us could die tomorrow. If you stay, stay for yourself.

BILLY

Can anyone honestly say they didn't feel like they were slowly dying on the regular in Pennsylvania?

NELSON

At least there were options.

BILLY

Maybe for you, man. Ain't shit for me. I'm *pretty good* at football. On a good day, I'm probably the second or third best QB in an ass-crack of nowhere town. And I'm a dumbass.

JEN

You're not.

BILLY

I'm a redneck dumbass, who's just pretty good at football. No college for me. Only thing for me in Pennsylvania was Jen.

JEN

Hon, you're not dumb. And you're not a redneck. You have a rugged country aesthetic. It's hot.

NARRATOR

She placed a hand on Billy's arm.

JEN

Part of me would kind of love to see those assclowns from Valley North try and sack you now.

BILLY

(*chuckles*)  
Yeah.

JEN

You're not worried about your mom?

BILLY

Maybe without me tying her down she'll finally have the balls to leave my dad.

A beat for everyone to process.

NELSON

I think Nia's right. We've been here like a month and we still don't have a snowball's clue in fuck how we got here or how to leave. I think we gotta hear what this Council of Elders has to say.

JEN

I'm on board with that.

NELSON

But if we decide we wanna go back between now and then, I don't really have a plan for dealing with Brennen.

BILLY

If it really came down to it...you think you could take him?

JEN

I don't want to.

(beat)

But if we really caught him off guard I think I could knock him out.

NELSON

We'd have to--

BILLY

--Yo chill chill chill.

*FOOTSTEPS APPROACH US FROM THE RIGHT.*

NARRATOR

Billy quickly shushed his friends, as he spotted Yllowyyn stalking towards them purposefully from several dozen yards away. We shall, how do you say it, "fast forward" through most of the awkward shuffling small talk as the Pennsylvanians waited for the Elf to draw close.

NELSON

Sucks that we keep getting interrupted like this.

*FOOTSTEPS STOP.*

BILLY

Sup weenie?

YLLOWYYN

Have any of you seen Regan today?

JEN

Not today, no.

YLLLOWYYN  
Right.

*FOOTSTEPS - A FAST WALK*

NARRATOR  
And he strode off with purpose, as our three youngest heroes shared a look of concern. And no small disappointment.

14 EXT. ELSEWHERE IN THE CAMP - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

14

NARRATOR  
Perhaps to her own surprise, Nia had stolen a few minutes to admire the stars, as grown folk so rarely do.

*FOOTSTEPS RAPIDLY DRAW NEAR.*

NARRATOR  
But her meditation was disturbed by Yllowyyn.

NIA  
Kalth'yr. How went things at the keep?

YLLLOWYYN  
Where was Sir Brennen headed after your conversation?

NARRATOR  
Nia's fidgeting was subtle, and would have hardly been remarkable were it not so great a departure from her usual trained, sage-like composure.

NIA  
*(just a little shaky)*  
I'm not certain.

YLLLOWYYN  
I saw him riding west in great haste from atop the ramparts.

NIA  
I say again, his exact destination is not known to me.

YLLLOWYYN  
But you have some idea as to his purpose. Am I wrong in suspecting it has something to do with Her Majesty's conspicuous absence today?

NIA  
Whatever else I know is not rightly mine to divulge.

YELLOWYYN

But it was fine to discuss with Sir Brennen?

NIA

Under the circumstances, yes.

YELLOWYYN

Nia, have I shown myself at any time to be less than faithful to my post? Or to have betrayed your confidence in any way?

NIA

No, Kalth'yr.

YELLOWYYN

Then why do I feel I still lack the trust of all those I travel with? They who still feel the need to make plans behind my back.

NIA

It's not a slight on you personally. I'm sure you're worldly enough to understand a man in Sir Brennen's position might have need of a few secrets. That is why the Concordat allows for the legal right of a Royal Court to--

YELLOWYYN

--Do not condescend to lecture me on the law. I've not said anyone's behavior was unlawful, or even improper. But it is unbecoming of a friend.

A beat: "Wait, we're *friends*?"

NIA

Kalth'yr?

YELLOWYYN

I will not grovel to be called friend by...

*(catches himself)*

By those I am charged to as Kalth'yr. But I'm sure you're worldly enough to understand that rebuking my parents in their own house to defend this Queen was a tremendous show of faith, performed at a considerable cost to myself.

NIA

I know that your faith in the Queen has been noticed, if not yet rewarded. And I am sorry for any insult I have personally done you. *Ath' Tyymo lo Ygo.*

YELLOWYYN

*(what-everrrr)*

Yes that's well and good. Have you any sense when Sir Brennen might return?

NIA

Kalth'yr. Your familial ties are none of my concern, but you should know that my parents were furious when I decided to join the Order of the Quill. And things have improved, truly. No one can walk a path for long which they believe to be false. Rather, wisdom shows us that the path of truth is ever-winding. So we must have faith that love is unwavering. I have found that to be true, in the long-run at least.

YELLOWYYN

*(genuine)*

Thank you, Nia. *Ath' Tyymo lo Ygo.* I would still like to speak with Sir Brennen.

NIA

I truly do not know when he will return. I'm sorry.

YELLOWYYN

Then it seems I must wash my hands of the matter until he deigns to return. Good evening.

*FOOTSTEPS DEPART.*

NARRATOR

He departed then, but the brief serenity Nia had found just a few moments prior now seemed to be good and gone.

15 EXT. CASTLE GUERNATAL RAMPARTS - NIGHT

15

NARRATOR

I'll now take the opportunity to return your attention to the former seat of power for the once great House Guernatal.

*SOME WIND BLOWS AROUND.*

NARRATOR

You'll recall that Castle Guernatal was now held by forces allied with the usurper, Lord Ardel of House Redmoor.

*A SET OF FOOTSTEPS APPROACHES FROM EACH SIDE AND MOVES TOWARDS CENTER.*

GUARD 1  
(left)  
Halt and state your business!

GUARD 2  
(right)  
It's me, you dolt.

GUARD 1  
(left)  
...Harold?

GUARD 2  
(right)  
Yes, Harold. Come to relieve you, like I done for five nights running at exactly this hour.

*WE HEAR THEM WALK TO CENTER AND PAT EACH OTHER'S SHOULDERS.*

GUARD 2  
What's with you these days? You've been jumpy as a rat in a rookery.

GUARD 1  
I've seen it again.

His comrade **sighs**, exasperated.

GUARD 2  
You've seen the "ghost?"

GUARD 1  
Well, heard it.

GUARD 2  
I told you, you're not used to castles this tall. It's just the wind playing tricks.

GUARD 1  
I know what wind sounds like, Bors. Wind don't talk.

GUARD 2  
(*"okay, I'll bite"*)  
What did it say?

GUARD 1  
*(imitates harsh whisper)*  
Death to usurpers.  
*(speaks normally)*  
Just like that, and then it was gone.

NARRATOR  
At this, a concerned frown did overtake the older sentry's face.

GUARD 2  
Where'd you hear this?

GUARD 1  
That tower over there.

GUARD 2  
Come with me.

*WE HEAR TWO SETS OF FOOTSTEPS WALKING TOGETHER.*

GUARD 1  
Believe me now, do you?

GUARD 2  
That there's a ghost in the castle? No. But Lord Redmoor's enemies do have spies who spread slanders about him.

GUARD 1  
Harold? What's a usurper?

GUARD 2  
It's not Lord Redmoor, and that's all you need to know.

*WE HEAR KNEES KNOCKING AGAINST WOOD IN TIME WITH ONE OF THE TWO SETS OF FOOTSTEPS.*

NARRATOR  
It was then the older sentry noticed the younger was covering his lower body with his shield, instead of the customary upper body configuration.

*FOOTSTEPS STOP.*

GUARD 2  
What in Selbirin are you doing?

GUARD 1  
*(isn't it obvious?)*  
Guarding myself.



GUARD 2

Your heart and lungs are up here.

GUARD 1

Don't you know, Harold? They say a ghost can hex a man's...you know.

GUARD 2

You think a ghost's gonna put a curse on your cock?

NARRATOR

As your spiritual guide to our tale, let me be very clear: this is not a thing. There are more things in Selb'rin and Iorden, my dear friend, than are dreamt of in man's philosophy. But non-corporeal apparitions placing a hex on a man's genitals have never been among them.

GUARD 2

Would you pick your bloody shield up?

GUARD 1

Look!

NARRATOR

As it happened though, the torches in the watchtower to which the two sentries were headed did extinguish suddenly just then.

GUARD 1

It's the ghost!

GUARD 2

C'mon.

*THE TWO MEN JOG AHEAD.*

NARRATOR

They reached the turret to find...

*ANOTHER SENTRY GROANS IN PAIN.*

NARRATOR

...another of their comrades in a heap on the floor.

GUARD 1

Erik!

GUARD 2

Check the corners!

*FOOTSTEPS MOVE QUICKLY AROUND THE TINY ROOM AS FLINT STRIKES STEEL.*

NARRATOR

And when the torches were re-lit...

*A TORCH CATCHES FIRE. THE THIRD GUY GROANS AGAIN.*

GUARD 1

Harold, look!

NARRATOR

...the two sentries saw their comrade--well, fine. He was holding onto his genitals and rocking back and forth in pain.

GUARD 1

THE GHOST HEXED HIS COCK!

NARRATOR

But the elder sentry also noticed that the red and silver Redmoor pennants which had adorned the tower had been replaced with hastily fashioned blue and gold. Guernatal colors.

GUARD 2

Erik, what's happened?

GUARD 3

*(strained through pain)*  
All he said was "death to usurpers."

NARRATOR

The younger shot the elder a desperate look.

GUARD 1

Believe me now, Bors?!

GUARD 2

*(mostly to himself)*  
Aye, maybe we ought to tell the sergeant about this.

16 EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF FREEHOLD CAMP - DAY

16

NARRATOR

Four days after the battle of Freehold, some degree of normality and routine had taken hold in the camp near the fort. After breaking their fast, the Pennsylvanians had been dispatched to fetch water.

*THREE SETS OF FOOTSTEPS AND SLOSHING BUCKETS OF WATER.*

BILLY

Do you think we'd have to get hit by lightning again to go back? 'Cause that sucked.

NELSON

Or just click our heels three times and say "there's no place that's home because my identity is too complicated."

JEN

Oof. Too real.

BRENNEN

*(distant)*  
MAKE WAY!

BILLY

Oh, shit.

*BRENNEN'S HORSE GALLOPS TOWARDS US FROM VERY FAR AWAY*

JEN

Not good.

NELSON

Not good.

*BRENNEN'S HORSE THUNDERS PAST US AND RECEDES TOWARDS THE CAMP.*

BRENNEN

Make way for the wounded!

*THREE BUCKETS OF WATER HIT THE GROUND.*

NARRATOR

The three of them dropped their water, and sprinted back towards the camp.

*THREE SETS OF FOOTSTEPS RUN OFF.*

17 EXT. CENTRAL FREEHOLD CAMP - CONTINUOUS

17

BRENNEN

*(heading towards us)*  
Make way, make way!

*THERE'S COMMOTION IN THE CAMP AS BRENNEN GALLOPS TOWARDS US.*

YELLOWYYN

What in Galadon's good graces?

NIA  
Oh dear.

*BRENNEN REINS IN HIS WHINNYING HORSE.*

BRENNEN  
Both of you, help me get her down!

18 INT. BRENNEN'S TENT - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

18

*A BODY PLOPS DOWN ONTO CUSHIONS.*

NARRATOR  
They hoisted Regan onto a field couch in Brennen's tent.

NIA  
What's happened?

BRENNEN  
There was a fire in the forest. When I found her she'd already fainted.

NARRATOR  
Regan was breathing, but her breaths were shallow and pained.

She takes **short gasps** for air.

*THE TENT FLAP OPENS.*

JEN  
What happened?

NIA  
Fire.

BRENNEN  
One wrist is broken and the other hand is burned.

NARRATOR  
Jen got close to Regan, and noticed that a sickly blue tinge had just begun to overtake her lips.

JEN  
Wrist and hand'll have to wait. She's not getting enough air. Do we have any medicine that stops swelling?

NIA  
None that works quickly. That's why I use ice.

JEN

Okay Brennen, can you saw off the bottom of a cup or something? Make a tube.

NARRATOR

He set to it.

*SOUNDS OF SAWING CONTINUE UNTIL BRENNEN'S NEXT LINE.*

JEN

Nia, you're gonna cool her throat while I try to hyper-oxygenate the air she's getting.

*(aside, self-doubt)*

As soon as I figure out what the Selbiric shadow of an oxygen molecule feels like.

NARRATOR

Jen cupped her own nose and mouth and closed her eyes to concentrate.

*JEN'S SPELL CASTING PAD FADES IN.*

Jen **coughs**.

*PAD CUTS OUT ABRUPTLY.*

JEN

*(sputtering)*

Nope, that's nitrogen. Take two.

*PAD FADES BACK IN.*

BRENNEN

Here.

NARRATOR

Nia placed Brennen's sawn off cup over Regan's mouth and nose.

JEN

Okay, I think that's it. Nia you good?

NIA

Yes, I'll soothe her throat.

*A DIFFERENT PAD FOR NIA FADES IN AND ALMOST SORT OF HARMONIZES WITH JEN'S.*

NARRATOR

As Nia placed her hands on Regan's throat, Jen wrapped hers around the cup and focused deeply. A breeze passed through the room, and the world around that cup seemed to twist.

JEN

Regan? Regan? Regan? Can you hear me? Regan. Aeron  
 Regan, can you hear me? Need you to wake up.  
 (beat)  
 Maggie. Maggie. Can you hear me, Maggie?

NARRATOR

With apparently great effort, Regan groaned and  
 groggily opened her eyes.

JEN

Good, Maggie. Good. Stay with me. I need you to take  
 deep breaths.

NARRATOR

Regan shook her head "no."

JEN

It's gonna hurt like a bitch but you're not gonna get  
 enough air otherwise. I want you to inhale while I  
 count to three. Ready? In!

Regan sucks in a **strained, painful  
 breath.**

JEN

Two, three, and out.

Breathing continues based on  
 dialogue cues.

JEN

In, two, three, and out. In, two, three, and out.

This continues ad lib. for several  
 beats, as we SLOWLY

CROSS FADE TO:

19 SAME - EVENING

19

*SOUNDS OF THE EARLY EVENING.*

Regan's **breathing** is still wheezy,  
 but it's regular and not as pained  
 now.

*REGAN'S BREATHING SHOULD BE FRONT AND CENTER. THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE SHOULD HAVE A TOUCH OF PAN AND REVERB - SHOULD SOUND LIKE IT'S HAPPENING JUST A LITTLE BIT OFF TO THE SIDE, BUT SHOULD DEFINITELY STILL BE CLEAR AND AUDIBLE.*

JEN

She's stable, at least.

NIA

That was extremely well-done, Jen. I dare say the finest physicians I've ever met could learn a thing from you.

JEN

Thanks, I'm just glad it worked. Brennen, you killed it with that splint.

BRENNEN

Mm. Once you've set your own bone it's not too hard to do on others.

NIA

Her burn is cleaned and bandaged with a good salve. It will scar, but with exercise she'll retain use of the hand.

JEN

Do we have anything for pain?

BRENNEN

Bryce may have some poppy milk to spare.

NIA

That will greatly slow the breathing though. Not sure we can risk it at present.

JEN

We could get her drunk if we have to. Not ideal, but not as hardcore as an opiate.

NIA

I don't know how we'd even start to reckon the proper amount for the likes of her. And I'd not have her monitor her own intake. Why don't we start with tea of the willow?

JEN

Like a tree? Does that actually work?

NIA

It helps a headache. Sometimes.

JEN

We can start there. She'll hate it. Cross that bridge when we come to it I guess.

BRENNEN

I'll take the first watch. You both should get some rest.

JEN

Get us if anything changes with her, okay?

*TWO SETS OF FOOTSTEPS EXIT THE TENT. BRENNEN'S ARMOR CLINKS AROUND A LITTLE AS HE SETTLES INTO A CREAKY CHAIR. NOW HE'S DEAD CENTER TOO.*

BRENNEN

Gods in Selbirin. Was that worth it, Your Grace?

**END OF PART THREE.**



## PART FOUR:

20 INT. HORSE'S HEAD INN - NIGHT

20

*FADE IN NIGHT SOUNDS. AND A CRYING BABY.*

NARRATOR

Anna and Gayle had managed to get the infant back into their quarters at Bailey's inn without raising too many eyebrows. But caring for it was already proving a headache after a mere few hours.

GWEN

Shh, quiet. It's all right.

*A DOOR OPENS.*

ARLENE

Gods, I thought it would have tired itself out crying by now.

*THE CRYING ONLY WORSENS.*

GWEN

You try holding him.

ARLENE

*("If I must")*  
Very well.

*IT COUGHS*

ARLENE

*(half-hearted)*  
There, there.

*AND IT DOES STOP CRYING.*

GWEN

I think he's taken a liking to you. It's that beautiful voice of yours.

ARLENE

Bailey seems to have believed our account in any case. Though she's certainly not pleased.

GWEN

Well I know this won't do for long. I been thinking on it. Think I'd better go to Freehold.

ARLENE

And speak with Bryce Riverfell?

GWEN

I'll tell Ms. Bailey I'm asking the General for help finding the child a permanent home, which ain't even really a lie. Bet a token from Ms. Bailey'd get me an audience with him no problem.

ARLENE

And while you have his ear...

GWEN

General Riverfell met Traft the half-breed once. If ever we had a friend who knows about Orcs, it's him.

ARLENE

When must we leave?

GWEN

Well, I think I'd better go alone, don't you?

ARLENE

Alone?

GWEN

I don't think it'll do to subject the wee little thing to the road, so one of us'll need to look after him here. And you're more like to be recognized at Freehold.

ARLENE

But I don't know the first thing about caring for a child. Let alone this one.

GWEN

Ain't that much to it. If he cries, you either feed him, clean his behind, or put him to bed.

ARLENE

You can't really intend to leave me alone with it.

GWEN

I don't want to but I don't see any way around it. Do you?

ARLENE

Well just give me a moment to think, can't you? Rather than just deciding on your own and sneaking up on me with it.

GWEN

I'm sorry. I'm sorry it's so sudden, but the sooner I go the sooner he doesn't have to be our concern anymore.

ARLENE

Fine, since you've made up your mind to abandon me.  
*(beat)*  
 Forgive me, Gw--Gayle. I know you are right. Only I am  
 frightened.

GWEN

I know. I am too, but we've been in far worse danger  
 than this before.

ARLENE

Yes. But you've been with me for it all. I'm realizing  
 now, you've not been out of my sight for more than an  
 hour since we left the keep. Saying goodbye is harder  
 than it should be.

NARRATOR

Gayle approached Anna, and took her hand with great  
 care.

GWEN

It's all right. It'll be all right.

ARLENE

I love you.

GWEN

I love you too.

ARLENE

Our time here has been the happiest time of my life. In  
 fact I think it is the only time I've ever known  
 happiness. If something happened...  
*(only half-joking)*  
 If you do not return to me just as soon as you can then  
 I shall never forgive you.

GWEN

*(a little flirty)*  
 Well that won't do at all.

Gwen **kisses** Arlene, but it's short-  
 lived.

NARRATOR

Gayle kissed Anna, but Anna pulled away after just a  
 moment.

ARLENE

Lately I've felt as though I'm flying. Have you ever  
 had a dream like that? And yet a part of me expects to  
 come crashing to the ground at any moment. Gods forgive  
 (MORE)

ARLENE (cont'd)

me, I can't help but think this...child will be the instrument of my downfall.

GWEN

That's why I'm going to Bryce. So it doesn't have to be ours. And it's not but a few hour's ride. With the battle won, the supply trains'll be running again, and Bryce's men'll be back guarding the road. I'll be safe.

ARLENE

You'd better.

GWEN

And you too. Keep your wits about you, hear? I wouldn't be leaving if I really thought he was any danger to you, but if there's any change...just stay safe, love.

ARLENE

Yes. For you I always will. When must you leave?

GWEN

Guess it depends on the supply trains. I'll have to talk to Ms. Bailey.

ARLENE

And you'll be gone overnight?

GWEN

Depends on the supply trains too. But I imagine I could.

**A slightly longer kiss now.**

ARLENE

Then make sure you leave time to say goodbye properly.

NARRATOR

And then a smile overtook Gayle's slightly reddening cheeks.

*GWEN WALKS TO THE DOOR, OPENS IT...*

NARRATOR

And she did not break her lover's gaze until she was out the door.

*...THEN CLOSES IT BEHIND HER.*

21 INT. ICE CAVE - TIME UNCLEAR

21

NARRATOR

There is one more incident I must tell you about, before we return to the predicament of Queen Aeron Regan and her retainers. And this one is set in a glacial cave off the southern coast of Iorden.

*ICE DRIPS AND A TORCH BURNS.*

RENAULT

There, he is nearly unfrozen, Mag Uidhir. Now what do you have to say?

NARRATOR

You'll recall that the necromancer Renault and the undead warrior Mag Uidhir were in the not-so-final resting place of Arden, a legendary hero of antiquity. Or at least of his corpse, which until very recently was frozen into a block of ice.

MAG UIDHIR

Well you know the reanimation is the part that requires true skill.

RENAULT

You doubt me still?!

MAG UIDHIR

Oh never, I'm just very interested to see how this turns out.

NARRATOR

Renault stood over the thawed remains of the enormous man, and bowed his head, concentrating deeply.

*AN EERIE MAGICAL SOUND FADES IN - THE SOUNDS OF WRETCHED LIFE. MIX SKITTERING INSECTS WITH ATONAL THE SHINING-ESQUE CHORUSES, ALL OVER A SPOOKY PAD.*

RENAULT

*(incantation)*

From meat we're born and to meat return, a cask of flesh our fun'ral urn. Ere our heart stops in its seat, and cease the drum of our life's beat.

MAG UIDHIR

How long'll it take ye tae beat yer meat over there? I'm decomposing as we speak.

RENAULT

Shut the fuck up, Mag Uidhir!  
*(back to chanting)*  
 Like tulip in a field of grass, like bird like bee like  
 snake like ass. As unto--

MAG UIDHIR

--Oh aye, like ass indeed.

RENAULT

Mag Uidhir, I swear to every god there is...  
*(continues)*  
 As unto man the gods gave breath...

NARRATOR

Listen, this dreadful thing had a few dozen verses to it. Loathe as I am to speak in Renault's defense, he was attempting a very difficult spell. But I see no need to subject you to the whole sodding thing, so we'll skip to the end.

RENAULT

By my will and might and practiced hand, I bid you wake on my command!

MAG UIDHIR

You've a practiced hand alright, ye fucking wanker.

RENAULT

Mag Uidhir SHUT THE FUCK UP!

NARRATOR

Despite Mag Uidhir's goading of Renault, neither could pretend not to perceive the dread stillness that had settled around them.

*THE MAGIC PAD SHOULD BE AS LOUD AS IT'S GONNA GET NOW.*

NARRATOR

By now the force of these magics felt fit to tear asunder the ice and living rock.

*THE MAGIC PAD DROPS OUT VERY SUDDENLY, WITH JUST A KISS OF REVERB.*

*BEAT OF QUIET.*

NARRATOR

And then...

Arden **gasps** and **grunts** gutturally, catching his breath.

NARRATOR

Arden's eyes shot open as his every enormous muscle twitched to life.

RENAULT

Ha! There, I have done it, Mag Uidhir!  
 (to Arden)  
 Stand, my friend. We've much to discuss.

*JOINTS POP AND SINEWS CREAK TO LIFE.*

NARRATOR

Arden the Annihilator stood to his full height, his corded, sinewy, form looming over the cavern; he was a fortress unto himself. His pitch-black hair fell to his shoulders in wild untamed locks, and his eyes burned like oil fires cutting through a blizzard. One was the blue of a summer sea, and the other...the other was the orange of a lit coal.

First he looked Renault thoroughly up and down. Then he looked to Mag Uidhir and nodded something like a greeting. Mag Uidhir bowed his head low. Then Arden's fearsome gaze fell upon his hammer, where it rest upon the altar.

RENAULT

Now our first order of business will be to avenge my recent defeat, nay, betrayal.

*HEAVY PLODDING FOOTSTEPS - ARDEN'S - WALK ACROSS THE CAVE.*

RENAULT

There is a harlot of a sorceress, who did everything she could to make me believe she loved me.

*A HEAVY SLAB OF IRON IS DRAGGED ACROSS STONE: ARDEN PICKING UP HIS HAMMER.*

RENAULT

And I, fool that I was, gave her my heart. But then she and three others came to the keep where I had found shelter. And stole from me a great treasure from ages past.

*RENAULT'S FOOTSTEPS RETURN TO CENTER, RIGHT NEAR RENAULT.*

RENAULT

Ah, good. I see you've fetched your weap--

--ARDEN'S HAMMER WHOOSHES THROUGH THE AIR AND SLAMS INTO RENAULT'S CHEST - BREAKING BONES AND SQUISHING FLESH.

Renault gives a **cry** which turns into a **wheeze**.

THERE'S A HISS OF ESCAPING AIR AMIDST THE BURBLING BLOOD.

MAG UIDHIR

(struggling through raucous laughter)  
Ha! Arden! *Ní fhaca mé le fada thú.*

RENAULT

(with a collapsing lung)  
Ah, Mag Uidhir, could you remove my fifth and sixth rib from my right lung please?

MAG UIDHIR TAKES HIS SWEET-ASS TIME STANDING AND WALKING TO RENAULT. VERY SLOW FOOTSTEPS WITH CHUCKLES UNDERNEATH

MAG UIDHIR

So how's your "greatest feat yet" working out for you so far?

TWO SQUISHES AND RUSHES OF AIR AS MAG UIDHIR PULLS OUT THE TWO RIBS.

RENAULT

(air returning)  
Thank you Mag Uidir.  
(to Arden)  
Now, as for you, I gave you life, and you will--

--THE HAMMER WHOOSHES AND CRUNCHES AGAIN.

Renault gives a **formless scream**.

SOMETHING BONY BOUNCES AWAY ACROSS THE ICE.

NARRATOR

With this second blow, Arden had knocked Renault's jaw clear across the cave.

We can tell Renault is trying to shout a **stream of profanity**, but he can't actually form any words of course.

ARDEN

Mmph.



MAG UIDHIR

Well, then. The mighty Arden has spoken.

NARRATOR

Mag Uidhir gestured to Arden, and the two made for egress of the cave. In quite high spirits if truth be told.

*TWO SETS OF FOOTSTEPS WALK AWAY, BUT ONE SET STOPS.*

NARRATOR

But Mag Uidhir stopped once more before leaving.

MAG UIDHIR

I suppose I owe ye a word of thanks, what for reuniting me with the Annihilator and all. Fare thee well, Renault D'Esprit. If never we cross paths again, it'll be ages too soon. But ye weren't entirely useless.

*NOW MAG UIDHIR LEAVES.*

Renault **groans** once more.

NARRATOR

*(exasperated)*

And Renault blasted D'Esprit, never one to let the heinous mutilation of his flesh stop him from being an arse...

*BONES CLACK TOGETHER AS RENAULT SCOTS ACROSS THE GROUND*

NARRATOR

...Clawed his way after them.

22 INT. TENT NEAR FREEHOLD - DAY

22

NARRATOR

It had been more than a day since Regan's return, and though her condition had not worsened it had also not noticeably improved. The fallen queen had not stirred from where she was lain.

Jen was nearing the end of her watch when...

Regan **groans**.

JEN

Regan?

She **groans** again.

JEN  
You with us?

REGAN  
*(still very groggy)*  
Ohhhhhh my gods fuck everything.

JEN  
Well bowl me over. Morning sunshine.

REGAN  
...the fuck am I?

JEN  
Back near Freehold, thanks to Brennen. You were out for a while, I was worried you were in a coma. Damn, I guess you mighta been.

NARRATOR  
That was when the tent opened to reveal the one who would relieve Jen of her scheduled watch.

*TENT FLAP OPENS.*

JEN  
Heya. She's up!

YELLOWYYN  
Welcome news indeed. When she's feeling b--

REGAN  
--Son of a bitch!

*CUPS AND TRAYS CLATTER VIOLENTLY TO THE GROUND FOLLOWED SHORTLY BY THE THUMP OF REGAN'S BODY.*

She **groans** with frustrated pain.

NARRATOR  
Regan launched herself in Yllowyyn's direction but her legs betrayed her immediately.

JEN  
Woah, easy cowgirl!

REGAN  
Did you know, motherfucker?

YELLOWYYN  
Know what?

REGAN

Come down here and talk to me if you're not a yellow piece of shit.

The long sentence makes her **cough**.  
This should continue sporadically  
throughout the scene.

YELLOWYYN

Now wait just a moment. You're the one with questions to answer.

*REGAN DRAGS HERSELF ACROSS THE FLOOR, GRUNTING WITH EVERY MOVE.*

JEN

Ooooookay let's calm down before we get hurt.

REGAN

Yeah someone's gonna get hurt. Answer my question you splinter-pole fuck! Did you know?

YELLOWYYN

I don't what it is you've--

JEN

--Okay clearly she's delirious. Just leave for now.

YELLOWYYN

And leave you alone with her?

JEN

Send Billy.

YELLOWYYN

I think Sir Brennen would be--

JEN

--Billy, okay? Just trust me.

REGAN

Fuck you! Stay right the fuck here and answer me.

*YELLOWYYN LEAVES.*

NARRATOR

Ylloyyyn exercised his better judgment and departed. This only led Regan to intensify her admittedly futile pursuit.

REGAN

Get back here you chickenshit son of a bitch.

She **strains** with the effort of pulling herself across the floor.

JEN  
Okay, stop? Why don't we stop.

REGAN  
Get offa me.

JEN  
Why don't we go lay back down before--OW! Ow, who the fuck actually bites someone?

REGAN  
I said lemme go.

Her **coughing fit** intensifies.

JEN  
Yeah, not until your trachea heals. C'mon.  
(*lifting*)  
Up she goes.

Between the **coughs and wheezes**,  
Regan **grunts** from the strain of standing.

*TWO SETS OF SLOW, SHAMBLING, DRAGGING FOOTSTEPS.*

JEN  
(*still strained*)  
You know it's a good thing you didn't break my skin. They haven't invented tetanus shots yet, I coulda died from infection.

REGAN  
You tryna say my mouth is dirty?

JEN  
You? Gosh, never.

REGAN  
Bite my cunt.

Both **strain** one more time.

NARRATOR  
With great effort, Jen and Regan managed to get the latter's less than fully functional body back into her cot.

JEN  
So, you wanna tell me what--

REGAN

--Look at me, Jen. Children.

JEN

Children?

REGAN

Children, and unarmed women. Least a hundred of 'em, maybe two.

NARRATOR

As Jen watched Regan speak, she saw something that she had never before seen on the rogue's face.

REGAN

Some of the kids were still at their moms' tit. Some of the women were too old to walk.

JEN

You can rest you know, we don't have to talk about this now.

REGAN

Yeah we do.

JEN

You're looking pretty sick.

REGAN

You're looking scared, and I need you focused.

JEN

Yeah. I'm scared of what could make you feel sick.

REGAN

Well have a seat girlie, you're in for a ride.

*A CHAIR CREAKS AS JEN SITS DOWN.*

JEN

*(steels herself)*

Okay. A couple hundred women and children.

REGAN

It was a fucking massacre. The Knights of the Wood marched them half to death, and shot them all to shit when they started to drop. Then they burned the bodies.

JEN

That was the fire. Jesus Christ.

REGAN

You keep saying that. That a god where you're from?

JEN

Maybe. Debatable.

REGAN

Hope she's a good one, cause clearly ours are for shit.

JEN

I'm still just trying to process what you...Okay, a massacre. Why?

REGAN

Search me. Leaving no one behind who'd want revenge for the battle maybe?

JEN

And they just shot them where they stood?

REGAN

They marched them for days. No food, no water. Then this one kid, couldn'ta had a single crotch hair yet, he just collapsed, and they opened his throat right there. His mom freaks out, runs at the Lord Commander, and then they started shooting. Didn't stop until no one was moving.

JEN

That's fucking sadistic.

REGAN

No. I almost wish it was. If Ry'y lo-Th'yyt had been cackling like a maniac or flicking herself off or some crazy evil shit like that...at least I woulda known it was unusual, you know? But she just look bored. Like a farmer wringing a chicken's neck for the thousandth time.

*THE TENT FLAP OPENS VERY QUICKLY.*

BILLY

*(out of breath)*

Jen you okay? What's going on? Oh, dude. She's up.

JEN

Is anyone else coming?

*ANOTHER SET OF FOOTSTEPS APPROACH.*

BILLY

I think Nelson's following me.

NELSON

*(even more out of breath)*  
What's the matter? Oh, sweet, good to see you up. How you feeling?

REGAN

Shut the tent and sit down.

JEN

Regan told me something you both should hear.

NARRATOR

Regan repeated her tale once more. I'm skipping it, not because I think you should be spared the brutality, mind you, but because it'll never be said in Iorden that I lacked a good sense of pacing.

BILLY

Holy shit. Are...you sure?

NARRATOR

Regan shot Billy a look that could have melted moonsilver.

BILLY

Okay, okay, fine. But why though?

REGAN

I don't know. I always knew Elves were pieces of shit under all the jewels but I never knew it was like this.

NELSON

Oh.  
*(beat, then, pained...)*  
Ohhhhhh, Nelson you dumbass. How did I miss that? No one is Always Chaotic Evil. Regan, the jewels in Iorden are mined in the Black Mountains, right?

REGAN

Most of them, yeah.

NELSON

The same place the Orcs are from. And the Elves have a buttload of jewels.

REGAN

And they use them. To keep all the little lords and ladies eating from their hands.

NELSON

That's why they're killing them. It's a resource grab. Telling everybody they're savages just makes them easy to kill.

(MORE)

NELSON (cont'd)

(sarcastic jab at himself)

You know, like the exact same pattern that's happened a million times over that I didn't fucking see.

JEN

Be fair to yourself, Nelson. We didn't see it either. Just because it happened in *Lord of the Rings* or something--

NELSON

--I'm not talking about *Lord of the Rings*! I'm talking about Africa. America. Nazi Germany. The Middle East. Everything my parents ever taught me about - whoosh! Right over my head. I never met an Orc, and I just believed everything their enemies said about them.

BILLY

But we *did* meet Orcs, dude. They were the ones marching up on us with an army of death metal wizards.

NELSON

What would you do if you were them?

BILLY

I'm just saying it's not like you had no reason to think they're...savages or whatever.

NELSON

I mean imagine if you knew the Elves were slaughtering your children, wouldn't you be mad enough to...

...And here's the big one...

NELSON

Oh, God. Oh God Oh God oh Jesus everloving Christ.

JEN

(impatient)

What?

NELSON

We helped the Elves do it. Those women and children they killed were the families of the army we fought. We killed a lot of them.

Nelson is breaking his own heart as he speaks.

NELSON

I was so excited to just be the hero for once, I didn't stop and think. I didn't even ask, "who's telling the

(MORE)



NELSON (cont'd)  
stories?" For all we know, Orcs are just...people who look different.

REGAN  
I don't know about that. But I know what a grieving mother looks like. And that's what I saw.

NELSON  
Screw me, dude. Screw all of us but screw me first. My parents...  
*(probably crying a bit now)*  
My parents even tried to warn me in my dream.

REGAN  
You done flogging yourself yet? 'Cause whatever you should or shouldnt'a figured out, you ain't no fucking splinter pole and you didn't pull those triggers. So how's about we kill that smug motherfucker just walked out of here, tie his little nuts up in a golden ribbon and send them right back to his rich bitch parents?

JEN  
Wo-hoah, Yllowyn? No. No way.

REGAN  
You wanna get serious with these splints or not?

JEN  
Okay, first you are in no shape to kill anyone right now. And second...I'm pretty sure Yllowyn didn't know about this.

BILLY  
Yeah, Weenie's a dick but he's never been a monster.

NELSON  
I know he wasn't there, and I'm not saying he's a monster. But are you sure he had no clue about any of this? I mean you heard the way his parents talk about humans, imagine what they think of Orcs.

JEN  
Yeah, we need to talk to him. But can we at least try to keep the peace until he's had a chance to explain himself?

NELSON  
Wait peace for who? For those dead kids?

JEN  
For us, Nelson. For the four friends we have in this entire world to not be trying to kill each other. How's that?

NELSON

I can't believe you're putting our comfort over actually making a difference.

BILLY

*Comfort?* Are you fucking serious bro?

NELSON

Yeah, and I'd know. I spent all of high school trying to lay low and fit in because it was more comfortable than telling people to act right. But fuck that. Some shit cannot stand. C'mon Jen, What happened to the person who killed a child molester?

JEN

I'm all for kicking righteous ass, okay? But we can't kick anything if we're dead, and right now we're 3 kids and an ICU patient against the entire world.

REGAN

Hey I'll kick your fu--  
(*hacking coughing fit*)  
Kick your fucking ass if you--

She keeps **coughing** under the next few lines of dialogue, never quite finishing the sentence.

JEN

My point exactly. And yeah, I did stab that guy. I've done a lot of shit since I got here. *Including* electrocuting Orcs six at a time. We're saying the same thing, Nelson - we should have used our brains a second before going to war. That's all I'm suggesting now.

A beat. She's not wrong.

I don't think starting with Yllowyyn is the right move. I think maybe we start with--

*--TENT FLAP OPENS.*

NIA

Is she all right?

NARRATOR

Nia entered just then. Mortals do have this uncanny ability to enter a room just as they're becoming subjects of conversation.

NIA

I came as fast as I could. Yllowyyn said she was having some kind of fit.

JEN  
Seems herself now. Think waking up was just kind of a jolt.

NIA  
To be sure. May I feel your head?

REGAN  
You can feel my--

JEN  
--Regan.

REGAN  
*(a sigh, resigned)*  
Fine. If you must.

JEN  
She's helping you.

NIA  
*(just a bit insulted)*  
No fever. That's good.

REGAN  
I didn't mean nothing Nia, just not used to being fawned over.

NIA  
Well then you've an incentive to rest up so you can heal soon. But in the meantime I'm afraid you'll be unable to administer your own medical care, so here we are. I'd like to change the dressing on your burn. Do you have any pain there?

REGAN  
Fuck yes I do.

NIA  
That actually bodes well. It means the flesh is healing and not rotting.

REGAN  
Lovely. Hey now that you mention it, why am I not impressively drunk right now?

JEN  
Cause you're barely getting enough air in your lungs as it is.

NIA

Indeed. If you were to, say, accidentally overindulge, it could be very dangerous. I've picked some willow bark for you to--

REGAN

--Oh bite me. Fucking tree bark, you want me to eat tree bark?

NIA

No, it can be made into a tea. May I have your hand?

REGAN

I dunno, you any good in the sack?

NIA

Yes, very clever.

JEN

Come on. You wanna keep it don't you?

NARRATOR

Resigned, Regan held out her hand to Nia as if to say "get on with it."

*NEED A SOUND HERE THAT SUGGESTS A CLOTH BANDAGE BEING UNWRAPPED. CONTINUES UNTIL SPECIFIED.*

REGAN

Somebody look me in the eyes and tell me that tea will not taste like you strained piss water through a farmhand's small-clothes.

*BANDAGE WRAPPING PAUSES.*

A beat.

REGAN

Yeah exactly.

NIA

It *will* numb the pain. Somewhat.

*UNWRAPPING RESUMES.*

REGAN

Listen I've broken bones before but not without a good stiff drink. If I gotta stick this out with nothing but some shitty tea I'm gonna open my own wrists.

JEN

Oh yeah, with whose hand, drama queen?

REGAN

Your mother's if she'll pull it out of me for thirty seconds. Now where's the whiskey?

JEN

*(Touché)*  
Walked into that one.

*NIA FINISHES UNWRAPPING.*

NIA

Now then, let's have a look at--oh Gods.

NARRATOR

At the sight of Regan's palm, Nia went white, bordering on green.

REGAN

What, bad?

JEN

Shit, is it infected?

NIA

*(queasy)*  
No, I'm sorry. The scar just startled me.

REGAN

We talked about scars before, Professor. I'll live.

NIA

Just the shape of it took me aback. What did you say you burned it on?

REGAN

Felt like a rock.

NIA

I'm sure it was. Must be just one of those cruel coincidences, I'm sorry to say.

REGAN

Why, what've I got? A big old cock and balls burned into my hand?

NIA

Jen, Nelson. Would you take a look please?

*TWO SETS OF FOOTSTEPS APPROACH.*

NIA

Have I gone mad at long last or does that look like...

JEN

*(might hurl)*  
Holy shit.

*NELSON GAGS.*

NARRATOR

They looked, and there, red and raw and clear as day in  
Regan's living flesh was the grisly visage of a skull.  
*(beat)*  
By its size, an infant's.

NIA

*(with horror)*  
What exactly were the circumstances of this fire?

**END OF CHAPTER.**