

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 1
"A Cruel And Sullied World"

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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-everrr)

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.