

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 2
"What Used To Be Enough"

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PART ONE:

1 INT. TENT NEAR FREEHOLD - DAY

1

WE OPEN BY REPLAYING A SNIPPET OF 020104 SC. 22

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 know 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.

DISSOLVE TO:

2 EXT. FREEHOLD CAMP - DAY

2

YELLOWYYN IS WALKING THROUGH THE CAMP.

NARRATOR

You'll recall it was thus that Yllowyyyn was unceremoniously dismissed from the quarters of Queen he ostensibly served. To his credit, he did do as Jen asked him.

YELLOWYYN STOPS WALKING AND OPENS A TENT.

YELLOWYYN

Billy.

BILLY

You could knock, Weenie.

YELLOWYYN

It's a tent.

BILLY

One of these days you're gonna walk in on me and your mom.

YELLOWYYN

Jen's called for you. Seems urgent.

BILLY

Well what're you shittin around for then?!

BILLY SPRINTS OUT OF THE TENT AND AWAY FROM US.

NELSON

Yo wait up!

NELSON JOGS AFTER BILLY.

ANOTHER TENT OPENS, PANNED. NIA SPEAKS FROM HERE.

NIA

She's up? I must go to her, give me just a moment.

YELLOWYYN

If you wish. She's not forbidden you.

Ylloyyyn **sighs**.

YELLOWYYN RESUMES WALKING.

NARRATOR

Ylloyyyn spent a few minutes wandering the Freehold camp, aimless and frustated. At last though, he did bring himself to the tent where Sir Brennen slept, the old knight having watched over Regan through the night.

AFTER ANOTHER BEAT OF WALKING, YELLOWYYN STOPS AND OPENS ANOTHER TENT.

YELLOWYYN

Sir Brennen?

BRENNEN

(jolting awake)

Aye! Ah, Ylloyyyn. Is anything wrong with Her Majesty?

YELLOWYYN

I...thought you should know she's awoken.

BRENNEN

Ha! Excellent news indeed.

BRENNEN JUMPS OUT OF BED.

BRENNEN

I must go see her at once. How are her spirits?

BRENNEN BEGINS STRAPPING ON A BIT OF ARMOR AND A FEW WEAPONS.

YELLOWYYN

She is certainly spirited.

BRENNEN

Good good good. Let us go.

YELLOWYYN

Well, that is the peculiar thing.

(beat)

She was very agitated when she woke, I was sent away to fetch Billy, which I've done. But...when I politely suggested you might be of more help, frankly Jen insisted otherwise.

BRENNEN

That is odd...

NARRATOR

That was when Brennen saw the ash and soot on the bottom of his own boot, grim souvenirs of the fire in the forest.

BRENNEN

(remembers; tries to cover)

But if those are Her Majesty's wishes we had better heed them.

YELLOWYYN

They weren't, necessarily. It was Jen who gave me those instructions. And though the Queen did not object, we might still be within our rights to--

BRENNEN

--Nia says Jen has already surpassed in her in skills as a healer. Best to not interfere.

YELLOWYYN

Sir Brennen, I have tried to ask politely so now I must be blunt. Until Her Majesty declares herself there *is* no House Guernatal as far as the law is concerned, and therefore no Kalth'yr to House Guernatal. Which is to say I serve you and her at my own pleasure.

BRENNEN

Aye it's greatly appreciated.

YLLLOWYYN

I don't believe it is, and I must now insist that I be somewhat better informed as to Her Majesty's affairs.

BRENNEN

Your request is not unreasonable, Kalth'yr.

BRENNEN TAKES A FEW STEPS.

NARRATOR

Brennen approached Yllowyyyn and placed a strong but friendly hand on the Elf's shoulder.

BRENNEN

I'll voice your request myself, in the presence of everyone, as soon she's through this ordeal. Does that sound fair? That reminds me, Nia said she'd require willow bark to treat Her Majesty's pain. Come, let us go to the forest and gather--

YLLLOWYYN

--I will not!

NARRATOR

Yllowyyyn shrugged off Brennen's hand and backed away.

YLLLOWYYN

I did enough of your chores the other day atop General Riverfell's ramparts. The same day I saw you riding west as though Garedian's ghouls were on your tail. Now if you do not tell me what Her Majesty was doing out west, I shall go and ask her myself.

BRENNEN

Kalth'yr.

A long beat. Brennen might hem and haw here, but no matter what is clearly trying to stall.

BRENNEN

You must understand, before you act rashly--

YLLLOWYYN

(exertion of a kick)
Very WELL.

SAND AND GRAVEL FLIES UP AND YLLOWYYN STARTS SPRINTING AWAY.

Brennen **coughs**.

NARRATOR

Ylloyyyn kicked a cloud of dust towards Brennen and took off in the other direction.

BRENNEN

Gods dammit!

BRENNEN RUNS AFTER HIM BUT A BIT SLOWER.

NARRATOR

The old veteran gave chase, but catching up to the famously nimble young Elf was a terribly tall task.

3 EXT. FOOTHILLS - DAY

3

THE SOUNDS OF SHOVELS DIGGING. GRUNTS OF MILD EXERTION.

NARRATOR

Meanwhile, In the foothills south of the ruined keep at Blackhold, Ry'y lo-Th'yyt - Lord Commander of the Elven Knights of the Wood - oversaw the digging of a large pit, filled with dry wood. Her usually stern features broke into a smile as she watched a small group of her out-riders approach. They lead a cart, loaded with the broken, mangled bodies of Orcs who had been lucky enough - I use the term loosely here - to briefly escape captivity and extend their lives by a few short hours.

A CART ROLLS UP.

RY'Y

Ahh, Sergeant Sa'amynn. I see you've had good hunting.

SA'AMYNN

Yes Th'ayyd. And might I say how these new horses earned their keep.

RY'Y

I should hope so, with how much I had to fight the High Council to get them.

SA'AMYYN

Ah, Th'ayyd...Far be it from me to question any of your orders. But might I inquire - purely for my own edification - why we did not march them back across the Black Mountains before the culling? To the unlearned, it would seem that would reduce the risk of escapees being found by the Memyet.

RY'Y

(snippy)

Because, *Sergeant*, I have the experience to know these are certainly not the only loose threads for us to cut after a battle such as we've had. It's a week's ride across the Mountains in perfect weather. Perhaps you'd prefer us to be stranded over there for a fortnight while the Eastern realms spiral out of our control?

SA'AMYYN

(cowed)

I...thank you for your tactical insight, Th'ayyd.

RY'Y

Now get these unloaded and throw them in with the rest.

SA'AMYYN

(with some exertion)

Yes, Th'ayyd.

A BODY HITS THE DUSTY GROUND. THIS KEEPS HAPPENING PERIODICALLY UNTIL THE NEXT SOUND CUE.

SA'AMYYN

Shame that these old Orcs are such poor sport. Hyuh! Our new recruits could use better target practice.

RY'Y

The time for sport has passed, *Sergeant*. We must always mind the hierarchy of objectives. This business was far too sloppy for my liking.

SA'AMYYN

It won't happen again...

(with a big strain)

...Th'ayyd.

ANOTHER BODY HITS GROUND BUT THIS ONE'S WATERLOGGED.

RY'Y

Why's this one all wet?

SA'AMYYN

Found her in the river east of Freehold. Perhaps she was fool enough to think the water would hide her stink.
(*very proud*)
Might have floated all the way to Brimshire if we hadn't ridden so hard.

RY'Y

Well then it seems you should have ridden harder still. Or was I unclear about the importance of discretion?

SA'AMYYN

Th'ayyd, she was already--

RY'Y

--Did I ask you to speak, Sergeant? Gods I ought to have the lot of you flogged, but I'll need your sore asses in a saddle every waking hour to fix this mess. Now please tell me her pup is in the pile with the rest.

SA'AMYYN

Her pup, Th'ayyd?

NARRATOR

Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's already-stern face curled into a snarl.

RY'Y

You left the pup behind?!

SA'AMYYN

She was alone, Th'ayyd.

RY'Y

Are you ignorant or willfully stupid? Orcs wear that garment for one purpose only: nursing their young.

NARRATOR

Ry'y gestured towards a strip of cloth, slung from the dead Orc's shoulder to her waist.

SA'AMYYN

With all due respect, Th'ayyd, we detected no others nearby, and were quite thorough in our search. If she had a child, we would have heard it. They may be savage, but surely not even a savage would run without her babe.

RY'Y

Surely?

NARRATOR

Ry'y walked briskly towards her underling, drawing her shining sabre from the sheath across her back.

A SWORD IS QUICKLY UNSHEATHED.

SA'AMYNN
(surprised)
 Th'ayyd!

NARRATOR
 And then she knelt by the corpse.
(sighing)
 Sweet listener, I should very much prefer to spare you the gruesome particulars of what happened next. But if there is one thing I hope that you have learned from our story thus far, it is that sometimes, the less one wants to know how the sausage gets made...well, the more one needs to learn it.

SOUND OF METAL RIPPING THROUGH CLOTH

NARRATOR
 In one smooth motion, the leader of the Th'ar lo-Hyyl sliced through the cloth that covered the Orcish woman's naked chest, held up a breast in a mailed fist and roughly cut it from the woman's corpse.

A HORRIBLE WET SLICING

NARRATOR
 She tossed the appendage to her lieutenant, who caught it fluidly.

RY'Y
 Now what say you?

SA'AMYNN
 The flesh is waterlogged, Th'ayyd, but...you are correct. Her mammary glands are engorged. I shall go back to the river at once. The child could not have gotten far on its own.

RY'Y
 No, Sergeant, I'm certain your bungling has done enough harm for one day. I'll return to the river and find the little wretch myself. You go south to that cave. Bring me back this shield of so-called legend and perhaps you can keep your rank.

SA'AMYNN
 I'm...to go alone, Th'ayyd?

RY'Y
 Take a recruit with you. If you die I'd have some reconnaissance on the trap that killed you.

SA'AMYYN
 (gulp)
 Th'ayyd, if I may...

RY'Y
 What is it?

SA'AMYYN
 We passed a memyet inn, upriver of this corpse,
 perhaps--

RY'Y
 --Yes, yes. I know the one. A good suggestion, Sa'amyyn,
 though not enough to outweigh your errors today.

SA'AMYYN
 Yes, Th'ayyd.

Beat.

RY'Y
 Were my orders unclear?

NARRATOR
 Sergeant Sa'amyyn saluted his commander, then scurried
 away.

FOOTSTEPS SCURRY AWAY.

NARRATOR
 Ry'y lo-Th'yyt gathered the fabric she had torn from
 the Orc's body. She studied the cloth - adorned with
 clumsily stitched yellow birds, frayed, worn, loved.
 She brought it to her nose and breathed deep.

4 EXT. THE HORSE'S HEAD INN - CONTINUOUS

4

NARRATOR
 Not far away, at least not nearly far enough for my
 liking, Arlene and Madam Bailey worked outside the
 Horse's Head. Arlene, somewhat awkwardly attempted to
 fold sheets, while Bailey, also awkwardly, held the,
 mercifully, sleeping child.

BAILEY
 I tell you, Anna, another night like that and I'll have
 to put you in the stables. I can't have my guests kept
 up all night with this one's caterwaulin'. Course, now
 he sleeps, the little monster!

ARLENE

I'm so sorry, Ms. Bailey. I'm sure Gayle will be back by tomorrow, at the very latest. We'll secure a better place for him.

BAILEY

Galadon's Grapes, girl! You'd think you never did laundry a day in your life! You don't roll it into a ball; you lay it out flat and - argh! Here take the wee one, let me do this.

NARRATOR

Arlene gingerly accepted the swaddled, sleeping bundle from Madam Bailey.

Bailey **grumbles** ad lib.

THE BABY STARTS TO CRY.

ARLENE

(murmuring)
Oh Gayle, please, please hurry.

Arlene **sings** a new lullaby.

ARLENE

(singing)
For she's gathered her skirts above the knee.
And she's gone to the wishing well to see
If the man that she loves waits for her
All alone at the wishing well.

MAGICAL REVERB DRIFTS INTO THE SONG AS THE BABY CALMS.

NARRATOR

And as Arlene sang to child, utterly ignoring the finer points of linen care, she absently fingered the embroidery on its blanket - adorned with clumsily stitched yellow birds, frayed, worn, loved.

5 INT. TENT NEAR FREEHOLD - DAY

5

NARRATOR

Now I needn't remind you that while Yllowyn had been wandering the Freehold camp, Billy and Nelson had arrived at Regan's sickbed and heard her tale of grisly slaughter. Nia had arrived shortly thereafter. The queen was understandably loathe to repeat her story for the third time in an hour, but her hand had quite literally been tipped when Nia discovered a skull-shaped burn-mark on her palm. And so we'll pick up the tale with Nia having just heard of the horrors of that western forest. She sat wide-eyed, as the color left her face.

NIA
Galadon's mercy. Such wanton cruelty.

Regan is still **struggling** to speak
from her damaged throat.

REGAN
Yeah, well, those fuckers don't know *me*. I'm gonna show 'em wanton cruelty. Now someone go get me that pointy-eared piece of shit.

NIA
Yes, we must ask Yllowyyn to tell his parents on the High Council.

REGAN
What? Nia, are you--did you hear what the fuck I just said?

NIA
Surely such barbarism, such butchery, is not condoned by the Elven leadership.

NELSON
Why not?

NIA
Nelson, the Elves are...they are agents of order and blessed among the peoples of this world.

NELSON
What order? The order where hundreds of kids get shot?

NIA
No! That's my point. Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's actions are clearly some monstrous perversion of the High Council's intentions. And if they know about it they can put a stop to it.

REGAN
Or more likely they can put a stop to us, to keep us quiet. Now I'm serious, somebody go get me that splinter-pole fuck. You're squeamish about killing him? Fine. We could use a hostage. But keep him the fuck here.

NIA
Your Grace. You were quick to point out Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's secrecy regarding this sortie. Wouldn't that indicate her not wanting the High Council to know?

REGAN

Or more likely the High Council not wanting any of us sorry sonsabitches to know.

NIA

What need would the High Council have of secrecy? When dealing with external threats to the Human Realms - which is to say Orcs - the Council's will is law.

REGAN

(straining to get up)
Oh fuck it.

SHE CRASHES TO THE FLOOR.

REGAN

(Fresh pain)
Cock wart!

NIA

Where in Galadon's name are you going, Your Grace?

REGAN

Since I'm the only one who seems to care about keeping us alive, I have to go get that two-faced asshole myself.

CUT TO:

6 EXT. FREEHOLD CAMP - SIMULTANEOUS

6

DAYTIME SOUNDS THAT WERE MUFFLED THROUGH THE TENT IN THE LAST SCENE ARE NOW VERY VIVID.

NARRATOR

At that exact moment, Regan would not have needed to look terribly far for Yllowwyn.

YLOWYYN RUNS TOWARDS US.

For after his futile argument with Brennen, he was sprinting towards their tent, and was just now close enough that his Elvish ears could more or less make out the proceedings.

TAIL END OF THE LAST SCENE SHOULD WAFTS TOWARDS US.

REGAN

(muffled through tent; distant but getting closer)
Since I'm the only one who seems to care about keeping us alive, I have to go get that two-faced asshole myself.

YLLOWYYN STOPS RUNNING. WE SHOULD NOW GET THE EFFECT OF YLLOWYYN'S TELESCOPIC HEARING.

REGAN

(telescoped)

Yllowyyn's been lying to our faces all this time while his buddies murder children.

NELSON

(telescoped)

Yeah, while crying mothers watched.

REGAN

(telescoped)

If it was up to me I'd cut his cock off and feed it to him, but one way or another we gotta keep him here before he rats on us to his friends. Cause if I was them, I'd be thinking about tying up loose ends right about now, starting with the dumbass humans poking around my shit.

NIA

(telescoped)

Fine. So we keep the Kalth'yr here. But I must say he may surprise you with his loyalty.

REGAN

(telescoped)

I doubt that.

NARRATOR

I need not tell you the look of dejection that came over Yllowyyn's face as he heard this all.

FOOTSTEPS RUN UP TO US.

BRENNEN

(out of breath)

Kalth'yr. Let us please talk through this.

REGAN

(telescoped)

Billy, get Brennen. Tell him I'm alive but he needs to shackle Yllowyyn right now.

BILLY

(telescoped)

On it.

TENT OPENS AND LITERALLY TWO FOOTSTEPS

NARRATOR

As Billy stepped out of Regan's tent, he came face-to-face with Yllowyn and Brennen, standing a mere twenty yards away. For a brief, tense moment, Billy and Yllowyn locked eyes.

BILLY

(playing it cool)
Yooooooooo, Weenie. Been out here long?

BRENNEN

What is going--uupf!

A QUICK HIT AND THEN RAPID FOOTSTEPS

NARRATOR

Yllowyn threw an elbow into Brennen's gut and darted away.

BILLY

Shit.

BILLY STARTS RUNNING.

BILLY

(while running)
We're supposed to shackle him!

BRENNEN GRABS BILLY'S ARM AND STOPS HIM SHORT.

BRENNEN

(wind knocked out of him)
Save your breath, lad. You'll not catch him on foot.
Gods help us.

7 INT. TENT - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

7

NARRATOR

In a frantic near-sprint, Brennen all but dragged Billy back into Regan's tent.

BILLY AND BRENNEN BURST INTO THE TENT.

BRENNEN

What has Yllowyn just heard?

REGAN

I'll tell you later, first get him.

BRENNEN

He's gone.

REGAN

He's--well fucking go get him! Now!

BRENNEN

He's a faster runner and rider than any of us. We'll need to out-maneuver rather than out-race him. But I must know what he's heard to do that.

(whispers)

Does he know you were spying on the Th'ar lo-Hyyl?

REGAN

Not unless he's been there a while.

BRENNEN

That is well.

REGAN

But he knows we know about his friends being child-killers and that I intend to make 'em pay for it.

NIA

And he probably did hear Her Majesty threaten to dismember him.

BRENNEN

(a verbal double-take)

Dis--What do you mean, "child-killers"?

REGAN

Short version? What Ry'y lo-Th'yyt didn't want us to see out west was she was marching hundreds of Orc women and children until they couldn't walk and then shooting them all to death.

BRENNEN

Ah. Clearly there's been a grave misunderstanding, which I think I can explain. Would...you like help off of the floor?

REGAN

(struggles immensely to hoist herself into bed)

There's...no...mis...understanding. Fuck me!

(catches her breath)

No misunderstanding. Saw it with my own damn eyes.

BRENNEN

To start, there is no difference in the savagery of male and female Orcs, both are equally vicious.

NELSON

Uh, can I push back on that just a little?

REGAN

Yeah, I'll push back: You're fucking wrong, Brennen. These women were unarmed, and they were trying to protect their children. And I'm short on time and patience for you to second-guess me.

BRENNEN

I would not second-guess Your Grace. Only offer hard-earned wisdom to better inform your decisions. Now, you say "children," but I must wonder--

REGAN

--Chil. Dren.

NARRATOR

To emphasize her point, Regan held up the palm of her burnt hand for Brennen to see. It still bore the unmistakable impression of the infant Orc's skull seared into her flesh. Despite himself, Brennen recoiled slightly.

BRENNEN

What is Galadon's name is that?

NIA

It struck me too. It appears to be the visage of one of their young. A...babe, it seems.

BRENNEN

No, you're mistaken. A smaller breed perhaps, but Orcs don't have wee little babes. They are pulled nearly fully grown from pits of mud.

JEN

Okay that's obviously not true. There's a lot I don't know about this world, but...flies don't spontaneously generate from meat. I really doubt that sentient humanoids just pop out fully grown from mud.

BRENNEN

I know it beggars belief.

REGAN

But my eyes fucking don't! And I know what a grieving mother looks like, Brennen.

BRENNEN

Of course the summary execution of unarmed prisoners of war is troubling.

REGAN

It's a GODS DAMNED SIGHT more than troubling but sure, close enough. We need a plan and fast.

BRENNEN

Aye, this is where your decision to spy complicates matters. That will make very hard to explain how you came by this knowledge, but I'll think of something.

REGAN

Hard to explain to who?

BRENNEN

The Elven High Council of course. A petition should be made for redress.

REGAN

Oh come the fuck on!

NIA

Thank you, Sir Brennen.

BRENNEN

Obviously, Commander Ry'y lo-Th'yyt has to be made to give an account of herself. Provisions for prisoners of war are made very clear in the second Concordat.

REGAN

Is *anybody* fucking listening to me?!

BRENNEN

Your Majesty, they will be the first to condemn and to discipline her for her troops' overreaction in the field.

REGAN

Overreaction?

BRENNEN

Aye, my Queen.

REGAN

This was a well-planned massacre!

BRENNEN

Did Ry'y lo-Th'yyt give an order to kill them all?

REGAN

She didn't say it out loud, but that's not--

BRENNEN

--Then what you witnessed was a tragic failure of discipline. For which the Lord Commander must answer.

Regan is now doing her best to
scream through a wounded throat.

REGAN

You're not hearing me! They were disciplined. They didn't look panicked. They looked like their dicks were hard for anyone to do something so they had an excuse to start shooting.

BRENNEN

I understand that what you witnessed seems callous, Your Grace. But I speak from experience when I say that these things can get out of hand. To be in close quarters with such dangerous creatures as the Orcs are will put the best soldiers in the world on edge.

REGAN

How in the FUCK have I become the moral guidepost of this outfit? Tell me something, Brennen, if you're such an expert in combat. You see a little mewling thing that can't even walk latched onto its mom's tit. Under what circumstances is that thing gonna scare you enough to shoot it? Anything?...Nothing coming to you? Good! Because if you have an answer for that you're an awful soldier and a gods damned coward to boot.

BRENNEN

Your Grace, it is right and good for a Queen to be outraged by needless violence. But that outrage must be properly directed and right now the proper course is to tell the High Council and let them tend to their own affairs. With your leave, I'll go to them and--

REGAN

--Fuck no, do you have a death wish?

BRENNEN

If I go quickly I can lessen the harm of your... misunderstanding with Yllowwyn.

REGAN

Brennen, listen to me. I know right in my guts the second the Elves find out we know what we know, we're gonna have the world's biggest bulls-eyes on our backs. You go there you're just gonna get yourself killed first. So no do you not have my leave.

BRENNEN

What would you have me do then, Your Grace?

REGAN

If you can't stop Yllowwyn getting to the White Forest, then draw me up a battle plan.

BRENNEN

A battle plan?

REGAN

What's my first move, last resort and end game if I wanna survive a war against the Elves?

BRENNEN

Why in Selbirin would we go to war with them?

REGAN

I'd go to war with them 'cause they're fucking monsters and 'cause fuck 'em. But we're gonna be at war whether we like it or not once Yllowwyn rats.

BRENNEN

I can't do that, Your Grace.

REGAN

You can't?

BRENNEN

To start with, it's not a winnable fight.

REGAN

Then make it a survivable fight.

BRENNEN

You survive it by not fighting it!

REGAN

We survive it by not sitting around waiting to die!

BRENNEN

Your Grace...The Elves are the keepers of Order in this world. And the Orcs are agents of chaos. This is the one fight in which I will not back you.

REGAN

I command it.

BRENNEN

Aye, I feared you might. I'll not do it.

REGAN

Nia, my memory's hazy. Would you please remind us all of the vow Brennen of Greyfield took when I knighted him.

BRENNEN

I know what I vowed, Your Grace.

REGAN

Say the words, Nia.

NIA
Perhaps we should all let our hearts and tongues cool before--

REGAN
--Say the fucking words.

NIA
(*gulp*)
Sir Brennen, you swore you would bring honor to your liege in all you do, and obey her every order, may Galadon help you.

BRENNEN
Aye why don't you go on, Nia.

NIA
Your Grace, in exchange you vowed you would never give your Knight a command which would bring disorder or disgrace.

BRENNEN
This command of yours would bring untold disorder. And to the memory of all my fallen kin, and to all the people - armed and unarmed - who I've seen savaged and brutalized by the Orcish hordes, it would bring intolerable disgrace. And so I must refuse.

REGAN
Leave, Brennen. Get out of my tent.

NIA
Please let us not do this. Whatever we are about to face we need each other more than ever.

BRENNEN
It is Her Majesty's right to dismiss me if I--

REGAN
--I ain't dismissing you from shit. At least not yet. I want you to think, Brennen. I'll give you until dawn tomorrow, and I hope you realize how much that means I value your help. But whatever you say to me when you come back in here, you better be gods damned fucking sure you mean it.

BRENNEN
Aye. That I shall.

THE TENT OPENS. BRENNEN'S FOOTSTEPS RECEDE.

NARRATOR
And then Brennen was gone, a dread silence filling the tent in his formidable wake.

END OF PART ONE.

PART TWO:

8 EXT. CAMP NEAR FREEHOLD - DAY

8

THROUGHOUT THIS SCENE, SWORDS PERIODICALLY CRASH AGAINST SHIELDS. LISTEN THE ACTORS FOR VOCAL CUES OF WHEN THEY'RE MEANT TO BE SWINGING.

NARRATOR

With little to be done as our party awaited Brennen's decision, Billy and Nelson had taken to practicing their swordsmanship in the camp outside Freehold.

Billy and Nelson **swing swords** and **raise shields** throughout.

NELSON

Look dude.
(*swings sword*)
My parents were literally experts on this.

BILLY

Yeah, on earth.
(*swings sword*)
What if we're missing something here?

NELSON

There's no way, that every - hup! - single - hyah! - Orc is so evil that they gotta shoot kids.

BILLY

You sure you're not...
(*swings*)
...reading your own stuff into this?

NELSON

Oh like you're not?
(*swings*)
If it looks like a genocide and quacks like a genocide, you don't just wait and see what's up.

BILLY

(*swings*)
But what if we make things worse by getting in the way?

NIA APPROACHES THEM.

NIA

(*walking by*)
Gentlemen.

AND SHE KEEPS WALKING.

NELSON

(out of breath)
Oh hey, wait up wait up.

THE BOYS STOP FIGHTING

NIA

Yes?

NELSON

(still out of breath)
Got a minute?

NIA

Yes, but just. Jen is alone trying to medicate you-know-who, Galadon help her.

NELSON

We've been talking, you know 'cause of everything. And maybe you can clear this up. What do you know for an objective scientific fact is different between humans and Orcs?

NIA

You mean aside from the many reports of savagery?

NELSON

I think you could pick the right pieces of anyone's history and make them seem savage. So yeah, aside from that.

NIA

Well it is true that in antiquity, both humans and Orcs lived in a brutish state of near-constant war, amongst themselves as often as betwixt each other. But our ancestors had it in their nature to come together for a greater good - to learn a common language, to see the wisdom of the Concordats, and generally to treat with each other in a civilized manner. This was not true of the Orcs.

NELSON

Maybe the Orcs just had it worse under the Elves so it wasn't worth it roll over.

NIA

My ancestors did not "roll over," Nelson. Under the Elven peace, these realms have enjoyed three thousand years of stability, which Galadon help me I've been asked to help break.

NELSON

Aren't there like four civil wars going on right now?

NIA

Of course there's been conflict. But it's chivalrous now. No longer does a losing clan face total annihilation. And there are the countless Elven technologies and magicks from which we've benefited during the peace.

BILLY

You do still shit outside though.

NIA

This is exhausting. Where would you prefer we shit?

NELSON

What he's trying to say, I think, is that three thousand years is actually a really long time to still be, you know, fighting wars with horses and castles. Maybe the Elves are holding you back on you.

NIA

If you boys would like a history lesson, I can refer you to some excellent books, but then I ought to see to Jen.

NELSON

No offense Nia, but that doesn't really answer my question. What's different about humans and Orcs that no one could possibly argue about? Or is there anything?

NIA

Well, skin and eyes, I suppose.

NELSON

That's it?

BILLY

What's up with their skin and eyes?

NIA

Their skin is an ashen grey, and their eyes can be anywhere from the yellow of bile to the red of blood.

NELSON

Sorry. THAT'S IT?

NIA

Can not the scales of a serpent betray the potency of its venom?

NELSON

Nia, I can't believe you're...they're evil because they *look different?*

NIA
It could be the other way round. Some foul or vicious behavior that creates the appearance.

NELSON
Do you not hear yourself? You sound like such a hypocrite.

NIA
(insulted)
In what way have I contradicted myself?

BILLY
I think he means cause you're both, you know, black.

NIA
(doesn't understand at all)
What? What does that mean?

BILLY
Well like your skin.

NIA
My skin? What's black about it? It's a shade of brownish tan I suppose, lighter than Nelson's and darker than Sir Brennen's.

NELSON
Jesus, Nia. Where I'm from, anyone who looks like you or me, our skin is the first thing people notice.

NIA
Yes well it does cover most of our bodies.

NELSON
No I mean people assume stuff about us.

NIA
(laughing it off)
Well it would be fair to assume our ancestors came from warmer climes.

NELSON
Yeah but that's not what I mean. It's like, you know...

BILLY
That you're not smart and
you're lazy and you steal.

NELSON
Yeah no one asked you,
Billy.

BILLY
I'm not saying it's true! I'm just saying that's what people think. Some people.

NIA

But that's absurd.

NELSON

You don't see how that's the same as what you're saying about Orcs?

NIA

If you went around looked at all of our palms and lips, you'd see all of us share the pink of vitality and health, which the Orcs lack. All of us, that is, assuming Regan has not murdered Jen by now.

BILLY

Yeah man, I'm...actually kinda worried about that. Maybe we can talk to Nia more later? For Jen's sake?

NELSON

(frustrated)
Okay, fine, just think about one thing for me, Nia. Would the Elves be anywhere near as powerful as they are right now without Orc gems?

NIA

I don't know Nelson, but the more docile Orcish tribes work in the mines and trade their gems to the Th'ar lo-Hyyl, so that's an argument against widespread slaughter.

NELSON

What do they trade for?

Beat.

NIA

Just because I do not have every answer you seek, it does not necessarily mean you are right. Now if that is all...

NARRATOR

She nodded curtly to the boys, and then strode off.

NIA WALKS AWAY.

BILLY

Should we, uh, keep training?

NARRATOR

Nelson glared at Billy.

BILLY

What?

NELSON

Fucking Fox News over here. Hyah! Tah!

TWO SWORD HITS AGAINST A SHIELD

9 INT. TENT NEAR FREEHOLD - EVENING

9

NARRATOR

Meanwhile, by Regan's sickbed...

Regan does a **huge, overdramatic spit-take.**

JEN

Regan, goddammit, just drink the goddamn tea.

REGAN

No, I hate it!

NARRATOR

By now, perhaps you can, listener, imagine Regan's displeasure towards being nursed as a convalescent by her comrades.

JEN

What are you, five?

REGAN

Yeah, five fingers deep in your mom.

Jen gives an **exasperated groan/yell.**

NARRATOR

For those of you already well versed in the art of storytelling, you may recognize that calling it "displeasure" is what we in the business call an "understatement."

THE TENT OPENS AND NIA STEPS IN.

NIA

Good afternoon, Your Grace.

REGAN

Oh good it's the fucking temperance brigade.

NIA

(*fuck you too*)
Doing especially well I see.

NARRATOR

Regan's health had not miraculously improved in the two days since her near-encounter with immolation, but her spirits had...well, plummeted as you can plainly hear.

REGAN

You still running a cloister or can I have a gods damned drink yet?

NIA

Your Grace, the herbs will speed the healing; strong drink will hamper it. If you would heed--

REGAN

--I ain't gonna heed a thing from someone who has to fake it even when she fucks her own hand.

JEN

Regan, please listen to us.

REGAN

Listen to you? You? Let's think through that one, shall we, sunshine? If I listened to you, the Elves would know who I am. If I listened to you, we would have put ourselves straight in the hands of those motherfuckin' butchers. For all I know, if I listened to you, I'd been marching with them instead of watching. Is that it? Am I forgetting any other great places your "counsel" woulda put me?

NARRATOR

Jen looked stung, but offered no reply.

NIA

Just because her advice was not proven right, does not mean it was bad advice, or ill-given. Now may I change your bandage?

REGAN

No, it fucking hurts.

JEN

Guh! That's why you're supposed to drink the tea.

REGAN

Fuck a tea.

JEN

Will you stop being such a baby.

NARRATOR

In her frustration, Jen grabbed Regan's wrist to unwrap the bandage.

TWO QUICK HITS; A WHOOSH OF MOVEMENT; A KNIFE SPRINGS OUT.

NARRATOR

I need hardly tell you, this was a misstep. For, with a speed forged through honed instinct and practice, Regan had spun around, grabbed Jen's arm, and pulled a small, concealed dagger out from somewhere on her person. This despite the cast on her dominant arm and the bandages on the opposing hand. Regan held the polished blade between them, wincing through her pain but holding steady.

JEN

(trying not to move)
Regan...

REGAN

(that really hurt to do)
You don't ever put a finger you wanna keep on me in anger.

JEN

(caaaaaalm down)
That's my bad. Let's just--

NIA

--Put that weapon away, you FOOL!

NARRATOR

This, coming from Nia, shocked both Jen and Regan out of their stalemate.

REGAN

(really fucking testy)
Come again?

NIA

Speaking freely here, *Your Grace*, for someone who swears disdain for all manner of pomp and pretense you are perhaps the most prideful person I've ever met. You dare call me vain for fretting about scars, yet you refuse to acknowledge your own! And I don't mean the ones on your body. You'd rather wound your friends than admit you are wounded.

REGAN

I don't have friends and this is the fuck why, cause--

NIA

--Refusing to acknowledge friends is not the same as not having them. That young woman you've seen fit to bare steel at? Despite your abuses and insults, I've seen her confide in you, counsel you in good faith, fight by your side, and keep herself up at night navigating the confoundingly precarious politics of holding your confidence while still minding your well-being. *That* is a friend.

NARRATOR

Regan did not yet let up, but her eyes flicked over to Nia more than she might have allowed at her most composed.

NIA

And somehow, she is the best friend you have. If you cannot see that, then I struggle to imagine your reign lasting more than a few weeks. So please, in the name of whatever it is you respect...put the blade away.

NARRATOR

For a moment all was quiet. Regan's breathing slowed, and her eyes stilled, and then she flipped her knife back to its unseen pocket and at last released her grip on Jen.

REGAN

Happy?

NIA

Not nearly.

REGAN

Well, I guess that's too--

NIA

--I believe an apology is in order.

REGAN

Are you shitting me?

NIA

I am certainly not.

REGAN

What are you, my fucking school marm?

NIA

There's a saying my parents were fond of. "Galadon rules alone. All other kings hold court." So let's examine the standing of your court, shall we? Your best tracker and archer has run off, probably after overhearing you swear to dismember him. You have exactly one knight, whom you've backed into an impossible corner. You've nearly stabbed your closest confidant and best mage and healer. And you've *royally pissed off* your second best mage and healer. You are not on the path to prosperity, victory, or effective governance. And I promise you, by merely uttering the words "I'm sorry," you will not spontaneously burst into flames.

REGAN

I'm shouldn'ta drawn on you, Jen.

JEN

(it's not fine)
It's fine.

REGAN

I'm sorry, okay?

JEN

(she's not over it)
I'm over it.

REGAN

What do you want from me?

NIA

If someone threatened you with a knife, would you accept mere words by way of apology?

REGAN

What, then? Lick her ass?

NIA

I think you should surrender your weapons.

JEN

(scoffing)
Yeah right.

REGAN

Yeah right is right. No fucking way.

NIA

It would be a show of good faith to all of us.

REGAN

Nia I swear I don't have patience for this shit.

NIA

Well I do. And I am not in pain.

A silent stare-down ensues.

Until...

REGAN

Agh! Fuck you and your religious fucking conviction. Fine. Find me some brandy, and I'll give you all my ranged weapons.

NIA
And combustibles. And blades over six inches.

REGAN
Nine inches, and you leave me the bottle.

NIA
No. You can have one sip every two hours.

REGAN
Five sips every six hours, and I decide what a sip is.
In return you get...every weapon that's currently
outside of my body.

NIA
Very well. If only because I shudder to legislate
the...particulars of that last condition.

REGAN
Better hop to it.

NIA
Come along, Jen. We shall return once Her Majesty has
decided to comport herself in a more becoming manner.

NARRATOR
Nia gave the smallest curtsy that etiquette would
permit a clerical acolyte to give a Queen, then left.

ONE SET OF FOOTSTEPS EXITS...

NARRATOR
Jen made no such gesture. In fact, as soon as she was
certain the Queen's eyes were closed, Jen made a rather
different sort of gesture in Regan's direction, before
also walking out.

...FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER.

10 EXT. WHITE FOREST - DEAD OF NIGHT

10

A HORSE TROTS UP TO US AND SOMEONE DISMOUNTS

NARRATOR
Though he had ridden hard to return to the White Forest
as quickly as possible, Yllowyn now found himself in
want of the will to open his parents' door. But when he
looked back over his shoulder, in the direction of
Freehold, he remembered the bridges burned there.

REGAN

(replay)

Ylloyyyn's been lying to our faces all this time while his buddies murder children. If it was up to me I'd cut his cock off and feed it to him...

NARRATOR

That's metaphorical bridges, not literal. Indeed, if Ylloyyyn had gone around Freehold committing arson I'm not sure there would be much room for redemption in his particular story. Anyways. With queasy guts and reddening cheeks, the young Elf put his hand on the door, steeling himself for what awaited him inside.

Ylloyyyn **sighs**.

11 INT. YLLOWYYN'S PARENTS' FOYER - CONTINUOUS

11

HUGE DOOR CREAKS OPEN, TRIGGERING A SERVICE BELL.

NARRATOR

With yet another blasted creak, the massive door swung open. As it did, the once still home came to life as servants sprung from their beds to care for the unexpected guest.

SOUNDS OF PEOPLE MOVING AROUND

YLLOWYYN

Please let my parents know I've arrived.

NARRATOR

Ylloyyyn handed his pack to a passing servant, watching as she walked towards the living quarters.

BA'AT

Ylloyyyn?

NARRATOR

Ylloyyyn looked up to see his father Ba'at Lo-Yl coming down the stairs.

YLLOWYYN

Greetings, my Sire. You must forgive me for...arriving at so late an hour.

NARRATOR

Ylloyyyn knelt to greet his father in the traditional manner.

BA'AT

Oh, child, stand. There is no need for that.

NARRATOR

Ba'at grabbed his son's arm to help him up.

YLLLOWYYN

But...after how...

BA'AT

All of that is in the past now, dear child.

(beat)

Although House Guernatal is without a successor, it is clear Sir Brennen remains a great asset in the realms of men. You were wise beyond your years to see that.

YLLLOWYYN

Ah, yes, well about Sir Brennen--

WYYN

(panned; to an unseen servant)

--And you should have known to retrieve me right away!

NARRATOR

Just then Ylllowyyn's mother, Wynn Lo-Dyk, emerged from the hall towards the living quarters, berating a servant. At the sight of her child, Wynn's mood appeared to change.

WYYN

Ylllowyyn! Our warrior has returned. The battle at Freehold has been the talk of the wood these past few days.

YLLLOWYYN

Sire! My deepest apologies for disturbing you so late in the night.

WYYN

Oh nonsense my dear child. You've represented our name and family well. There is no need to apologize for being here.

YLLLOWYYN

But...thank you. I was so worried after our last discussion that you would not have me back.

BA'AT

Let us go sit and you can recount the battle to us.

NARRATOR

Ylllowyyn finally allowed himself to relax in his parents' home and in doing so found that he was quite tired from the strain of the ride. He followed his father towards the parlor with his mother close behind.

12 INT. YLLOWYYN'S PARENTS' PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

12

CHAIRS ARE PULLED OUT AT A TABLE.

WYYN

Would you like anything to eat, Yllowwyn?

YLLOWYYN

No, thank you, I'd just as soon--

WYYN

--I'll ring for Ruby.

WYYN RINGS A HAND-BELL.

BA'AT

Now as to the battle. We've been dying to hear.

YLLOWYYN

Ah, yes. Well the story in fact begins when Lord Commander Ry'y lo-Th'yyt sought Sir Brennen out as he left the Wood. As it happens, she--

--THE BELL RINGS AGAIN, MORE URGENTLY.

WYYN

Ruby?

(aside, to Yllowwyn)

That blasted girl grows lazier each day.

YLLOWYYN

It's quite alright, sire, I could scarcely eat a thing.

WYYN

Nonsense. We pay enough to feed and house her. RUBY!

WYYN RINGS HER BELL FRANTICALLY FOR SEVERAL BEATS. THE DOOR BURSTS OPEN.

WYYN

There you are. Have you gone deaf, girl? Bring meat and wine for Yllowwyn.

NARRATOR

The mortified-looking human servant girl bowed her head low, and scampered out of the room as frantically as she had entered.

QUICK, SCURRYING FOOTSTEPS, AND THE DOOR CLOSES.

WYYN

I do declare, the help these days.

BA'AT

Shall I have her whipped?

WYYN

If she did not understand the first two times I doubt a third would make the difference.

NARRATOR

Amidst this exchange, Yllowwyn searched his parents' faces for a hint of compassion towards the pathetic creature they had just berated. He could not rightly say he saw any.

YLLLOWWYYN

Why not trade her with another house?

BA'AT

And risk her behavior there reflecting how we run our house? I think not.

WYYN

I think we must remind her of the comfort in which her family is permitted to remain.

NARRATOR

At the mention of the human girl's family, Yllowwyn could not stop a look of worry from creeping over his face.

WYYN

Anyway, Yllowwyn, you were say--what's the matter dear?

BA'AT

Was it the battle? I forget your experience has been limited to skirmishes before. There's no shame in being troubled, you know. But you must remember that the feeling will pass in time, and that your actions were right and just.

YLLLOWWYYN

It is not the battle, exactly.

BA'AT

Well then what? You are free to speak your mind under this roof.

YLLLOWWYYN

I am afraid it would not be my own mind I would be speaking, just a wild story brought back from...a Memyet soldier.

WYYN

Oh?

YLLLOWYYN

I sincerely doubt the tall tale, and yet I find myself unable to forget it completely. It involves the killing of a great many Orcish prisoners by the Th'ar lo-Hyy1.

NARRATOR

The briefest of looks passed between Yllowwyn's parents.

BA'AT

Ry'y lo-Th'yyt is not known for recklessness or wanton cruelty. If she exercised her power of summary execution, which is of course her right, I'm certain she did so with good reason.

YLLLOWYYN

Yes, of course. It's only...to hear this soldier's gossip, many of these Orcs were, well, they appeared as children. And their mothers seemed to care for them as Memyet do.

A long, lingering beat.

BA'AT

I see.

WYYN

What a peculiar story.

YLLLOWYYN

Like I said, truly a tall tale if I've ever heard one. For of course, Orcs care no more for their relations than they do for their hated foes. Isn't that right?

WYYN

Yes of course. I'd pay no mind to this wild gossip. The undisciplined rabble of Memyet fighters are known to tell any manner of tale in the wake of battle. I trust this wasn't one of Sir Brennen's men who said this? He seems too noble to allow such talk within his camp.

YLLLOWYYN

No...man of Sir Brennen's said this.

BA'AT

Good. Brennen may be our last best hope to restore order to the realms of men. It would be a shame if he suffered such fools in his ranks.

WYYN

Do you know how many Memyet have heard this fanciful nonsense?

YLLLOWYYN

Very few. I'd not have heard it myself save for our gifts of perception.

BA'AT

That is well. Memyet are susceptible to gossip.

YLLLOWYYN

I must wonder why anyone would lie about such a ghoulish thing?

WYYN

Who can say?

BA'AT

Knowing the type as I do, I'm sure this soldier sought to use this lie to advance in some perverse way his own selfish ambitions.

YLLLOWYYN

Well I suppose I can believe that. Though it is a relief to hear it said out loud. Forgive me for troubling you.

BA'AT

Not at all, child. What must parents do for a child nearly grown, besides help him find the path if he's gone astray?

YLLLOWYYN

The Urrkyet really are most different from the Memyet, aren't they? In a way that renders sympathy misplaced?

WYYN

It is the difference between a lap dog and a rabid wolf.

YLLLOWYYN

Yes. I do wonder sometimes whether it's quite fair to compare the Memyet to dogs.

BA'AT

(jovial, not cruel)
Maybe not to the dogs.

WYYN

(amused)
Oh hush, you.

BA'AT

Joking, joking.

YLLLOWYYN

I only mean that, having spent much time among them now, I have seen the Memyet display a tremendous complexity of thought and breadth of passion. Far more than I'd been led to think possible.

WYYN

Yes, well, it can't be denied that some of them have left a meaningful mark on history here or there. There will always be the odd few who transcend the limitations of their race. Perhaps Sir Brennen is one such.

YLLLOWYYN

But then, by that same logic, mightn't we expect the rare exceptional Orc to be noble enough to love its child? And feel the pain of losing its kin?

WYYN

They would love for folks to think that.

BA'AT

Ylllowyyn, have you ever heard of the blueback spider?

YLLLOWYYN

I'm not sure I have.

BA'AT

What the blueback spider loves to eat above all else is the common robin. Now you, being schooled in the hunt, might wonder how a beast which crawls on its belly through the muck might prey upon one which flies on the wing through the blessed air.

YLLLOWYYN

Does it weave a web?

BA'AT

That would have to be quite the web to stop a robin mid-flight. No, my child. When the mother robin is out feeding herself, it crawls into the nest.

YLLLOWYYN

And eats the eggs.

BA'AT

No, for it cannot digest the shell. It lays on top of them, and this is where its name is telling. On its back is a pattern which, from a distance, resembles the eggs of the robin. By the time the mother is close enough to notice the ruse, she is close enough for the spider to strike. And thus is her natural mothering instinct used against her by a vicious predator.

YLLLOWYYN

Ah. Quite devious.

WYYN

And it is thus with the Urrkyet. It has always been their goal to convince the Memyet of the lie that they are more like them than not. And in that they must never succeed.

YLLLOWYYN

They intend to...eat the humans?

BA'AT

Well I don't think they'd rule it out. But that's not what we mean. The Th'ar lo-Hyyl enforce the peace of the Concordats, yes?

YLLLOWYYN

Of course. And they are the mightiest fighting force in Iorden.

WYYN

Yes, quite.

BA'AT

If all the armies of all the Memyet allied together, which they have ever done in recorded history, they would still be hard-pressed to challenge the Th'ar lo-Hyyl. Likewise, this Traft devil just got more of the Urrkyet tribes to fight together than ever seen before. And they were routed by the Th'ar lo-Hyyl.

WYYN

(fawning mother)

Thanks in no small part to you, my child.

BA'AT

But if the Memyet were ever fooled into seeing the Urrkyet as their allies, and Galadon forbid they all fought together...

WYYN

One Knight of the Wood is worth thirty of any other warrior in the realm. But they might be outnumbered fifty, sixty, even a hundred to one.

BA'AT

And then all of this, everything you have come to cherish and depend on, would be in jeopardy.

YLLLOWYYN

I see.

WYYN

And that is why you must return to *your* Memyet just as soon as possible.

YLLLOWYYN

I must what?

BA'AT

You must return at once and stop the spread of this potentially ruinous lie.

YLLLOWYYN

But I've only just arrived home.

WYYN

Well this will *always* be your home dear. Now set to it.

YLLLOWYYN

I thought after the strain of battle and the ride here I might rest for--.

--KNOCK ON THE DOOR.

BA'AT

Enter.

BIG DOOR CREAK.

NARRATOR

(loooooong sigh)

You know, I'm not even going to comment on the doors anymore. I'll just let the absurdity speak for itself. Anyway, the serving girl Ruby entered once more bearing a tray of food far too large for her to comfortably carry.

WYYN

Ah, yes. Ylllowyyn will be taking that on the road, would you wrap it up?

THE DOOR CLOSSES AGAIN.

YLLLOWYYN

My sires, I fear that in light of recent turmoil I may no longer have the complete trust of the Memyet.

BA'AT

Well you had better go and get it back quickly.

WYYN

And under the circumstances I think we must be kept informed of your faring as often as possible.

YLLLOWYYN

How shall I do that?

BA'AT

We'll think of something. Now if there's anything you need from your chambers for your journey, you should go and fetch it.

NARRATOR

Yllowwyn's parents stood, as though to politely imply that Yllowwyn should do the same.

TWO CHAIRS ARE PUSHED OUT.

YLLLOWYYN

Yes, I...yes.

NARRATOR

Lacking any other option within the bounds of propriety, Yllowwyn took their cue.

YLLLOWYYN PUSHES OUT HIS CHAIR. HIS FOOTSTEPS RECEDE AWAY AND A DOOR CLOSES BEHIND HIM.

His parents wait a beat.

WYYN

I'll send for D'ay-vaad. He can be counted on.

BA'AT

Yes that's for the best.

(sigh)

It would appear Ryy lo Th'yyt is getting careless. I must call for a council meeting tomorrow.

END OF PART TWO.

PART THREE:

13 INT. YLLOWYYN'S BEDCHAMBERS - EVENING

13

NARRATOR

Daylight had just begun to depart the White Forest, and Ylloyyn had returned to his chambers to gather supplies. Though as these things often go, his heavy heart had weighed down his feet. *Some* grew impatient at this.

A KNOCK ON A DOOR, PANNED HARD-LEFT

BA'AT

(through door)

Ylloyyn? Are you almost ready?

YLLOWYYN

Yes, sire, just a few more minutes.

THE DOOR CREAKS OPEN

NARRATOR

Oh for the love of all that is--no, no, no, no. You told yourself you wouldn't get worked up. It's not worth it.

BA'AT

My child, we've gotten you something to aid in your task.

YLLOWYYN

You have?

A METAL CAGE OPENS. THIRTEEN FLAPPING SQUAWKING PIGEONS BURST FORTH INTO THE ROOM IN A CACOPHONY OF CHAOS. THIS MADNESS CONTINUES UNTIL SPECIFIED OTHERWISE.

YLLOWYYN

Sire, what...what is this?

BA'AT

They're messenger pigeons, child. Will make it very easy indeed for you to stay in contact with us. Simply attach a message to one every three hours and it will return to us. Then we'll send it right back to you.

YLLOWYYN

But...I've no experience training birds.

BA'AT

Well you remember your old friend D'ay-vaad don't you?

NARRATOR

Then entered a male Elf, near to Yllowyyn's age.

D'AYV

Yllowyyn! My old dear friend. Good graces how long has it been?

YLLOWYYN

(not loving this)
Hello, D'ay-vaad.

D'AYV

Oh, we know each other better than that. Call me D'ayv!

YLLOWYYN

Very well, D'ayv. It has been many, many...many years.

D'AYV

And what a cruel accident that's been.

YLLOWYYN

Yes, an...*accident*.

D'AYV

And don't you worry your head about the birds, I'll take right care of 'em.

D'ayv does some kind of an
elaborate whistle.

THE BIRDS ALL RETURN TO ONE SPOT AND SETTLE DOWN.

D'AYV

See? All taken care of. Oh I am ever-so-excited we're taking to the road together. Will give us a chance to catch up.

BA'AT

You'll be ready to go in just a moment, won't you Yllowyyn?

YLLOWYYN

Yes it won't be much longer now.

BA'AT

Well then...

D'AYV

I shall await you in the foyer, old friend.

THE DOOR CREAKS THEN CLOSSES SHUT.

Yllowyyn gives a **dismayed sigh.**

NARRATOR

Ylloyyyn sat on his bed and buried his head in his hands.

A KNOCK ON GLASS, PANNED HARD-RIGHT

Ylloyyyn

(tired)

Oh what new doom is this?

FOOSTEPS CROSS RIGHT AND A WINDOW OPENS.

Ylloyyyn

Yllodyk?

Ylloyyk

Well there my baby sibling is in the flesh.

Ylloyyyn

What are you doing out there?

Ylloyyk

Well I was trying to come in here and hide from D'ay-vaad. Thought he'd come to propose to me for the umpteenth time. But clearly it's you who has the news to share.

Ylloyyyn

I'm not sure I'd call it news exactly.

Ylloyyk

Did you bring your Memyet back again? Is that what's got our parents in a tizzy? Are the Memyet here, can I see them?

Ylloyyyn

No, sibling, but it seems I'll be returning to them very soon.

Ylloyyk

You do look troubled if I might say.

Ylloyyyn

In truth 'tis been an eventful week. I left here on quite bad terms with our parents, rode into...more than a few battles, was welcomed back with open-arms only to then be rushed back out the door. I came here hoping to gather my thoughts, and now they are more jumbled than ever.

Ylloyyk

I know that feeling. You know what's good for that?

CUT TO:

14 INT. YLLODYK'S BEDCHAMBERS - A LITTLE WHILE LATER

14

Ylloyyyn and Yllodyk both **giggle uncontrollably** while **chewing**.

NARRATOR

And so did the pair sneak out of Ylloyyyn's window and into Yllodyk's chambers to partake in that kindest of herbs, cannib root. Grown in the White Forest no less, so you know it was that good-good.

YLLODYK

(giggling)
But why the pigeons?

YLLLOWYYN

(giggling)
They want me to stay in touch. I need to send a bird back every three hours.

YLLODYK

(fake somber)
Well good thing you have D'ayv to keep you company.

Silence.

The **explode in laughter**.

After it slowly dies down...

YLLODYK

Oh, he really is the worst.

YLLLOWYYN

I can't believe our parents looked well upon his marriage proposal.

YLLODYK

Add it to the list of my failures in their eyes.

YLLLOWYYN

Speaking of which, they wanted me to leave hours ago. You're like to incur their wrath by sheltering me here.

YLLODYK

Well, I get blamed for all of your bad decisions no matter what. Might as well try to be a good sibling. Need another hit?

YLLLOWYYN

Don't mind if I do.

(MORE)

YLLLOWYYN (cont'd)

(chewing)

I don't know what they have against this stuff. It's given us from the earth and makes every thing so... pleasant.

YLLODYK

They don't like it because it lets you see through their lies.

NARRATOR

But at this, some of the euphoria on Yllowwyn's face was replaced with a tinge of worry.

YLLLOWYYN

What do mean? What lies?

YLLODYK

Just like...the whole system. You picking up what I'm putting down baybruh?

YLLLOWYYN

No. But I really wish I were.

YLLODYK

It's like...wouldn't you rather be a sparrow than a snail?

YLLLOWYYN

I...suppose so.

YLLODYK

Rather be a hammer than a nail?

YLLLOWYYN

I don't know what in Galadon's name that means.

YLLODYK

Ba'alophyyl explains it much better than I can. You should talk to him.

YLLLOWYYN

That's your...paramour?

YLLODYK

Mm.

YLLLOWYYN

Still?

YLLODYK

That hard to believe?

YLLLOWYYN

It is hard to keep track.

YLLODYK

You're still an ass, baybruh.

They both **chuckle**.

NARRATOR

But the worry had not left Yllowwyn's face. He looked to his sister, searching for some opening to vocalize his concerns. This effort was undercut by Yllodyk's attempts to pour honey into her mouth directly from the jar.

Yllodyk makes **tongue-stuck-out noises** then breaks into **laughter**.

YLLOWYYN

(beat)

Sibling, what do you know of Orcs?

YLLODYK

(swallows honey, then...)

The Urrkyet? Very little, poor wretches. Why do you ask?

YLLOWYYN

I'm curious of late as to what separates them from the Memyet.

YLLODYK

Well mostly the Black Mountains I suppose.

YLLOWYYN

I can't tell if you are joking.

YLLODYK

Here's what I can say for sure. As you know, I'm something of a connoisseur of Memyet songs.

YLLOWYYN

So you've said.

YLLODYK

Turns out the oldest songs of the Memyet in the far west aren't terribly different from Urrkyet songs. That implies a shared culture at some time past. Or at very least that they once broke bread together.

YLLOWYYN

How do you know what Orc songs are like?

YLLODYK

Ba'alophyyl has traveled over the Mountains. You forget that he was Kalth'yr to Ironhertz before that all went to Selbirin.

(MORE)

YLLODYK (cont'd)

(dreamy sigh)

He's so worldly. He learned a few songs and brought them back to me. But now...I'm not saying they're exactly the same, but I think the fall from Man to Orc is less of a sheer cliff and more of a gentle slope.

YLLOWYYN

But...the skin and the eyes. Surely that's a stark contrast.

YLLODYK

Is a brown horse truly that different from a white one?

YLLOWYYN

Our parents likened the divide to the one between a lap dog and a rabid wolf.

YLLODYK

"Lap dog" is a telling choice of words. I'm sure that's a comforting thought for them. Must ease their sleep.

YLLOWYYN

(getting really worried)

What do you mean "ease their sleep?"

YLLODYK

Has it ever occurred to you that there is far more of humankind living under this one roof than there are members of this family?

YLLOWYYN

I...suppose I hadn't considered that.

YLLODYK

In the very room where we eat, there is one entrance for us and three for our servants. If they were barely removed from savage beasts, wouldn't we all be in terrible danger?

YLLOWYYN

Then...does that same thought not disturb your sleep?

YLLODYK

The Memyet *like* me. I talk to them about music. You see I always try to put positive energy out into the world and trust that it'll return to me.

NARRATOR

But YllowyyN in that moment looked the picture of anything but positive energy.

YLLODYK

What's the matter, you freakin' out? Here, grab hold of this quilt, let it be your constant.

WYNN'S VOICE COMES IN MUFFLED FROM DOWN THE HALL

WYNN (O.S.)

Yllowyyn? This is getting absurd, child.

YLLODYK

I think you'd better go. I can only shield you so much.

YELLOWYYN

Yes, I...thank you. We must talk again soon. Perhaps I would like to speak to your Ba'alophyyl.

YLLODYK

That can be arranged. Here, take some root for the road.
(*whispers*)
Oh, and if D'ay-vaad asks I'm not at home.

YELLOWYYN

Of course.

NARRATOR

And then Yllodyk proceeded to hide herself under her bed.

YELLOWYYN STANDS AND WALKS TO THE DOOR. IT OPENS.

WYNN (O.S.)

Yllowyyn?

YELLOWYYN (O.S.)

(*petulant*)
Coming.

15 EXT. FREEHOLD CAMP - EVENING

15

A CAMPFIRE CRACKLES AT NIGHT AS CHEAP UTENSILS STRIKE BOWLS.

NARRATOR

At the camp near Freehold, Billy, Jen, and Nelson were taking their evening meal. They'd grown accustomed to doing this in the company of their full Party, but... well I'll leave it to Billy to remind you of the situation.

BILLY

(*through full mouth*)
So this all went to shit quick, huh?

JEN

(swallowing)

Should we be jumping on this? You know, to do something?

NELSON

Like what?

JEN

I don't know. I mean I know we talked about hanging around until the Elders or whatever and until Nia could do some research. But who knows when that's happening now. Or if. Maybe we should try to move the timetable up.

NELSON

I'm not going anywhere until this Orc stuff gets dealt with.

(takes a bite)

We helped make the mess, we gotta help clean up.

BILLY

This isn't kindergarten, dude. You heard how they were talking, shit's about to get real.

NELSON

Shit's already real.

BILLY

Even realer then. I'm just saying I don't think we all have to die just because you've got...black white guilt all of a sudden. No offense.

NELSON

Can't see *any* reason why that would offend me.

JEN

I'm not saying we peace out first chance we get. But I'm still on team keep our options open. We were always gonna have Nia help us with research right? So maybe we can do it sooner than we thought. That's all I'm saying.

NELSON

Okay, fine. We'll talk to Nia. But I'm staying until we fix this, and you should too. It'd be pretty fucked up to bail right now.

JEN

You're not wrong. This just *could* get to a point where there's nothing we can do. No sense being a martyr just to prove a point.

NELSON

That's...literally what a martyr means, but--

JEN

(bite)

--So who's gonna talk to Nia?

NELSON

I will. I should talk to her anyway.

BILLY

I haven't seen her since this morning. Anyone mind if I kill the stew?

DISSOLVE TO:

16 EXT. POND NEAR FREEHOLD - SIMULTANEOUS

16

NIGHT SOUNDS AND A FEW GENTLE SPLASHES. VERY SERENE.

NARRATOR

Now at that moment, Nia had taken to the side of a small pond, just far enough away from the Freehold camp as to be quiet. There, she knelt in silence with her hands clasped.

We take in the night sounds for a good long beat.

NIA

Holiest Galadon, God of Order and Lord of all Lords. Watch over your children in this their time of trial. Deliver us from chaos, show us the path that should be, and grant us the courage to walk it, now, and at the moment of our deaths.

BRENNEN

Amen.

NIA

(startled)

Sir Brennen. I didn't see you there.

BRENNEN

Forgive me Nia, I didn't mean to surprise you.

NIA

It's all right.

(beat)

What brings you down here?

BRENNEN

forgive me if this is an intrusion, but i thought, you being a woman of the cloth and all, we might pray together.

NIA

(surprised)

Oh. Why...yes, of course.

(chuckling)

When I was a girl I aspired to lead the prayers at some small country chapel, like my parents did. Feels like ages ago.

NARRATOR

Brennen knelt beside her.

BRENNEN

(straining a little)

If you were a girl ages ago...

TWO ARMORED KNEES HIT THE GROUND.

BRENNEN

...Then I'm a relic.

Beat.

NARRATOR

They both traced circles around their hearts with their fingers.

A slightly awkward silence...

NIA

I...well we've already said the common prayer. Is there anything in particular you'd like to ask for, Sir Brennen?

BRENNEN

Is it sacrilege to wonder if it makes any difference what we ask for?

NIA

(chuckling at first)

I certainly hope not. In my experience, it's a coin toss.

(then more like a Sunday school teacher)

But, the primary reason to pray is to listen for the voice of Galadon. On very good days, we may hear Him.

BRENNEN

Then that is what I wish. To hear the voice of Galadon.

NIA

Yes. Of course.

NARRATOR

Nia bowed her head again, but took a moment to collect her thoughts this time.

NIA

(off the cuff; struggling)

Lord Galdon, we beg of you...guidance. To know injustice when we see it, and lies when we hear them. This we pray.

Then there's a very long beat of just the nature sounds.

It drags on.

BRENNEN

Is there another prayer you might say?

NIA

I couldn't promise it would do anything the first two didn't.

BRENNEN

(just a little bitter)

Nothing in any of the books you read?

NIA

That is not why my Order reads books.

BRENNEN

I thought it was to bring wisdom.

NIA

Yes, but wisdom is no simple thing, and the path to it is ever-winding.

BRENNEN

Or you're just walking in circles, patting yourselves on the back the whole way.

NIA

Sir Brennen. Whatever the truth is of what we're being asked to face, it is not the fault of me. Or my Order.

BRENNEN

I don't know the scripture as you do, but does it not say that we are all but swords of Galadon and faith is the fire the forges the sword?

NIA

Yes.

BRENNEN

Then why does everyone of your ilk do all in their power to smother the fire? Reading heretics and infidels and chaos worshippers and Galadon knows what else.

NIA

We do not smother the fire, Sir Brennen, we quench the sword. I don't know arms *as you do* but what happens when you take a sword straight out of the forge-fire and set to fighting with it?

BRENNEN

That's not--

NIA

--The Order of the Quill teaches that learning and reason are the water, without which the sword of the faithful may be bent to crooked purpose.

BRENNEN

(temper rising)

Is that what you think then? That I am bent to crooked purpose?

NIA

That remains to be seen.

BRENNEN

(temper flares)

Just answer me one thing then! When you sit there praying, when's the last time you heard anything?

Beat. That one hits home.

NIA

(stung)

I hear something every time I pray.

BRENNEN

(bullshit you do)

Aye, is that so?

NIA

(backed into a confession)

Yes. It...just grows harder to make out what it is.

(beat)

When I was young I could hear Him as clearly as my mother calling me in for supper. Now it's as if I'm... trying to understand something shouted across a city square. And if you see that as a condemnation of how I keep my faith, I suppose I've no way to prove you wrong. But it is still the best way I know, and I'll not apologize for it.

BRENNEN

Nor should you I suppose, if that is your conviction.

NIA

I will however apologize if I've been less useful to you as a religious adviser than I ought to have been. Especially in this moment. You've seen more tragedy than you deserve. A crisis of faith would not be unheard of.

BRENNEN

(softens a bit)

My faith hasn't waned. I think that's the problem. I've just grown angrier the more Galadon has failed this world. I prayed after my father died. I prayed after Prince Uther died. I prayed after Queen Dagmar died. When King Gunther died, I stopped. I fear if I tried to now, I'd only have a curse on my tongue.

NIA

It's often those we love the most who make us the angriest.

BRENNEN

Now that is wisdom. You're right that this isn't your fault. You've been to us wise and good counsel. 'Tis not fair to expect you'd have every answer.

NIA

True. Though I fear we are all soon to be asked more than is fair.

BRENNEN

I think I must...walk some more.

NARRATOR

Brennen rose.

HIS ARMOR CREAKS.

NIA

Come find me again if you wish. I imagine I'll be here a while longer. And Sir Brennen? I hope you find what you are seeking.

BRENNEN

And you Nia. You'll make at least as good a priest as I have a knight.

NIA

A staggering compliment. If our paths must diverge, be sure to say farewell.

BRENNEN
Mm.

FOOTSTEPS RECEDE.

NARRATOR
And then he was gone.

17 EXT. SOUTHERN PLAINS - EVENING

17

NARRATOR
In the south of Iorden, Arden and Mag Uidhir had reached the crest of a small rise. Mag Uidhir took the opportunity to look behind them for signs of being followed.

MAG UIDHIR
I think we actually lost the wretch.

A CAMPING PACK IS UNFURLED.

MAG UIDHIR
Would ye help me pitch this tent, Arden?

ARDEN
Mmph.

MAG UIDHIR
Wait, that's--

ARDEN
--HYAH!

A HAMMER SWINGS AND A PIECE OF WOOD EXPLODES.

MAG UIDHIR
Well there goes the first stake. On second thought, I'll handle the tent. You can chop the firewood.
(beat)
Are ye sure Mac Connor's Shield is this far inland? I think we would be safer along the coast.

ARDEN
Shield this way. Ich ist siyur.

MAG UIDHIR
"I am sure" is the expression.

ARDEN
Bah.

MAG UIDHIR

You are gettin' much better. A few days ago you'd fly into a rage just at hearing the common.

ARDEN

Slave tongue.

MAG UIDHIR

Look I don't like how the war turned out any more than you do, but if we're to keep fighting we need to stay clear-eyed about where we stand. And everyone today speaks the common.

ARDEN

Mans.

MAG UIDHIR

Men, Arden. More than one man is men.

ARDEN

Mens.

MAG UIDHIR

No, that's when someone bleeds out of their--

*

NARRATOR

--That was when Mag Uidhir looked up, and saw where Arden was pointing. Emerging from a wood below were two figures, shambling towards the rise in a hurry. As they grew closer, it became clear they were shackled, but trying to run as fast as they could.

MAG UIDHIR

Sorry-looking bastards. This is why we should've stuck to the coast. Let me get...presentable.

NARRATOR

Mag Uidhir looked around in search of something to cover his more decayed bits. That was when two Elvish riders emerged from the wood, in apparent pursuit of the shackled figures.

ARDEN

Invaders!

MAG UIDHIR

(Exasperated aside)

Matron help me.

(Quickly)

Arden, let's take a moment to--

ARDEN

--AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

NARRATOR

But Arden was already sprinting down the hill...

ARDEN'S FOOTSTEPS AND BATTLE CRY CONTINUE BUT FADE INTO THE DISTANCE.

NARRATOR

...With hammer raised high.

MAG UIDHIR

[Long sigh.]

NARRATOR

And Mag Uidhir had no choice but to stroll down after him.

18 EXT. VALLEY BELOW - CONTINUOUS

18

CHASE MUSIC POUNDS AS TWO MEN RUN FOR THEIR LIVES, PANTING. THEIR CHAINS JANGLE.

TWO SETS OF HOOFBEATS THUNDER AFTER THEM.

NARRATOR

As the Elvish riders closed to within fifty yards of their quarry, they raised their repeating crossbows.

TWO CROSSBOWS LOADING.

NARRATOR

And then a strange sound filled their keen Elvish ears.

ARDEN

(running in from afar)
...aaaaaaaAAAAAAAHHHHHH...

SA'AMYYN

What in Selbirin?

ARDEN

(closer still)
...AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH...

ELF RECRUIT

Halt or you'll be shot!

ARDEN

(right up on us)
...AAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

TWO REPEATING CROSSBOWS SHOOT

NARRATOR

Both riders loosed bolts at Arden, but his gargantuan frame was more nimble than it had any right being.

SA'AMYYN

(scared)
Rhypoas!

A HAMMER SWINGS AND THEN A SICKENING CRUNCH. ONE HORSE STOPS RUNNING ENTIRELY AND THE OTHER STOPS SHORT AND WHINNIES.

NARRATOR

With one swing of his hammer, Arden nearly beheaded one of the horses. It fell, pinning its rider beneath its lifeless flank. The other rider reacted quickly and shot a bolt at Arden...

REPEATING CROSSBOW SHOTS

NARRATOR

...who rolled out of the way with catlike grace, dodging towards the Elf. Attempting to break away, the rider spurred his steed into a mad gallop.

ELF RECRUIT

Hyah!

HOOFBEATS BLOW PAST US.

NARRATOR

Arden readied a strike for the rider as he passed...

ANOTHER REPEATING CROSSBOW

NARRATOR

...but was struck in the shoulder by a bolt from the pinned Elf, whom you might recall was called Sergeant Sa'amyn.

THE RETREATING HOOFBEATS RECEDE A BIT...

ARDEN

Hmph!

SA'AMYYN

(a curse)
Yy kylab!

NARRATOR

Arden, barely distracted by the new wound, strode towards Sa'amynn, who shot once more.

CROSSBOW SHOOTS.

NARRATOR

But Arden knocked the dart away with the shaft of his hammer.

METAL PINGS OFF OF WOOD.

NARRATOR

Before the Elf could shoot again, Arden brought his hammer down on the crossbow...

WOOD SMASHES ALONG WITH SOME FLESH.

SA'AMYNN

Yaaaaaagh!

NARRATOR

...Splintering it, along with its wielder's hand. Then Arden turned his attention back to the other rider, who had turned and was lining up for another shot.

THE HOOFS BEATS COME BACK TOWARDS US. BUT THEN SOMETHING HEAVY CLANKS AGAINST METAL.

NARRATOR

But this one was struck by a javelin from an unseen source. It did not pierce her moonsilver armor, but did stun her out of her chance at Arden. And Arden made the most of the opportunity.

A HAMMER SWINGS AND THEN A SICKENING CRUNCH. THIS HORSE SLOWS TO A STOP.

NARRATOR

Arden returned to the pinned and lamed sergeant.

FOOTSTEPS START AND THEN STOP.

SA'AMYNN

(through intense pain)

Have you any idea what you're doing you damned fool?

ARDEN

Ja.

NARRATOR

Arden raised his hammer high.

ARDEN

You put men in chains. Men don't wear chains.

SA'AMYYN

Those aren't men, they're--

--*WHOOSH, CRUNCH.*

ARDEN

You shut up now.

NARRATOR

Arden now turned to the two he had seemingly just liberated. So astonished were they by what they had just seen that it only now occurred to them to be frightened of the giant, violent man walking towards them.

ARDEN'S PLODDING FOOTSTEPS

NARRATOR

They tried to back away but quickly tripped over their shackles.

CHAINS CLANK AND TWO BODIES FALL.

NARRATOR

Arden towered over them. Their faces were painted in smeared grey, and their pupils were a deep red. they raised their hands in abject surrender.

ARDEN

Are you friends to the Motherland or to the invaders who would ravage her?

NARRATOR

They looked at each other.

ONE MORE SET OF FOOTSTEPS APPROACH.

MAG UIDHIR

That'll do ye no good, Arden. These two actually *don't* speak the common. And come here, let me break off that dart.

A THIN PIECE OF WOOD SNAPS.

MAG UIDHIR

We'll have to wait 'til we've built a fire to pull the head out.

ARDEN

That was god sheoot, Mag Uidhir. What you mean no speak common?

MAG UIDHIR

"Throw." You mean to say "that was a good throw." And these new friends...

NARRATOR

At this, Mag Uidhir bowed to the two terrified persons on the ground before him. But in so doing, he accidentally revealed the decaying body beneath his cloak. The men recoiled.

MAG UIDHIR

(to the prisoners)

Ah, yes. You'll have to pardon my...condition. I promise you'll get used to it.

(to Arden)

You see Arden, these two are from west of the Black Mountains. This land split in a way since you've been aslumber. When I told you the Elves ruled and everyone spoke the common, that's true this side of the Mountains. On the other side though, well, the Elves can still do what they want to whom they want. But the old ways are not quite so dead and gone.

ARDEN

Men don't wear chains.

NARRATOR

Arden lifted his hammer high. The duo was paralyzed by fear until...

METAL CRASHES AGAINST METAL.

NARRATOR

...Arden brought his hammer down on their chains. But though the force was tremendous, the chains did not break.

ARDEN

Hmph.

ARDEN KEEPS HITTING THE CHAINS.

Arden **grunts**. The two men **flinch**.

NARRATOR

Arden hit the chain again and again as the two men sat mere inches from the swings, frightfully aware that the wrong move could land them below the head of the great weapon.

MAG UIDHIR

That'll never do, Arden. The Elves' metal-working is a fearsome thing. I've an idea though.

NARRATOR

Mag Uidhir went to the corpse of one of the fallen
Elves, and rummaged through his saddle-bag.

MAG UIDHIR

Ha! Here, try this.

NARRATOR

Mag Uidhir tossed Arden a key. Arden looked at the
device, looked at the chains...then began pummeling the
chain with the key.

TINY CLINKS OF METAL

MAG UIDHIR

No no no! You'll break the key, stop! Give it here.

NARRATOR

Mag Uidhir took the key from Arden and unlocked the
chains.

A LOCK CLICKS OPEN

ARDEN

Elf sorcery.

NARRATOR

Arden addressed the two prisoners and pointed towards
where the Black Mountains jutted over the horizon.

MAG UIDHIR

Goest oeste du?

NARRATOR

They nodded.

MAG UIDHIR

Well, so are we as it happens. Why don't we travel
together for a spell? Tell me, have ye ever heard of
Mac Connor's shield?

END OF PART THREE.

PART FOUR:

19 INT. TENT NEAR FREEHOLD - NIGHT

19

NARRATOR

We return once more to the tent near Freehold wherein Regan's *wounds* were being tended. And that introduction is going to apply on several levels because I am a good narrator and I love you.

THE TENT OPENS

JEN

Got your brandy.

REGAN

Give it here.

JEN

You made a deal.

A beat of silence.

THEN THERE'S JUST AN AVALANCHE OF STRAPS LOOSENING, CLASPS OPENING, AND OBJECTS OF METAL, WOOD, AND CLAY HITTING THE GROUND. IT SLOWS EVENTUALLY...

JEN

(thinks it's done)
Okay, you want--

--A FEW MORE WEAPONS HIT THE GROUND.

JEN

You done?

TWO MORE.

REGAN

Yeah.

JEN

Should I pour you this drink or is that a capital offense too?

REGAN

Deal was I decide what a sip is.

JEN

Fine.

JEN CROSSES TO WHERE REGAN IS. PLACES THE BOTTLE DOWN ON A WOODEN SURFACE.

JEN
Need anything else?

REGAN
Need? No.

Jen waits, tries to give her a chance. Nothing.

JEN
Great. Don't drink yourself to death.

JEN STARTS TO LEAVE.

REGAN
(*"Fine, you got me"*)
Wait.

JEN STOPS WALKING.

REGAN
I like it better when we're talking.

JEN
(*bitter*)
Okay. Is there something you'd like to talk about?

REGAN
Look, I said I shouldn'ta drawn on you. You didn't deserve it, but you know why I did it.

JEN
I just thought we were past deadly weapons is all.

REGAN
I'm never past deadly weapons.

JEN
You know things about me I've never told anyone. Because I trusted you. And then you turn around and threaten to kill me.

REGAN
I didn't ask for your trust.

JEN
Then don't be surprised when we don't talk.

REGAN

Stop taking everything personal, okay? I'm real good at taking care of myself. People around me, not so much. Just who I am.

JEN

I don't know how to break this to you, but lately you've kinda fallen off your taking care of yourself game. So as long as you don't have hands you'd better start getting used to the general concept of friendship. Useful strategies for friendship include gratitude, and humility, and apologies. They usually don't include jiu jitsu and knives.

REGAN

You have boring friends.

JEN

I'm trying here, Regan. You gotta be at least a little open with me.

Nothing.

JEN

I'll try again later I guess.

REGAN

Okay you want open? I watched my eight year old sister shit herself to death in a rat-filled alley. She ate something rotten cause I couldn't find her a decent meal. I was ten. That open enough?

Jen doesn't know how to respond.

JEN

I--

REGAN

--After that, I kinda stopped planning to die of old age. Not trying to kill myself you understand, just... sorta knowing for a fact I was gonna die young.
(beat)

By all rights that fire in the forest shoulda been it for me. Woulda been, without you.

JEN

And Nia. And Brennen.

REGAN

And now I have to admit I'm glad it wasn't. So I guess that's my fucked up backwards way of saying thanks.

JEN

Well, you're welcome. I wasn't gonna just let you die.

REGAN

Like I said, thanks.

(almost her version of delicate?)

I should say...not that I didn't overreact, but general rule about touching people who don't wanna be touched...

JEN

I know, I know. you're right. You'd think I would know better. Sorry.

REGAN

Forget it. I'd say we're even.

JEN

We're all works in progress, I guess.

REGAN

And I know I'm not always the easiest to run with.

JEN

(chuckling at the understatement)

You're goddamn impossible sometimes.

(Beat)

But you also might be the baddest bitch I have ever met and God help me I think I admire you.

REGAN

Well, you could do worse I guess. You could do better but you could also do a fuck of a lot worse.

JEN

Whatever happened when you were ten...wasn't your fault.

REGAN

I know what you're trying to do. And I appreciate it. But not tonight. Tonight Maggie gets very very drunk. You're welcome to join me.

Regan **strains**.

THE BOTTLE SLIDES AROUND ON THE TABLE.

She **strains** again.

THE BOTTLE KEEPS SLIDING.

JEN

Would you like me to pour the drinks?

REGAN
Yeah that'd be good.

JEN WALKS OVER AND SITS DOWN. LIQUID IS POURED INTO TWO GLASSES.

JEN
To something resembling friendship.

GLASSES CLINK.

JEN
(*noticing something*)
Abupbup. What's that?

REGAN
What's what?

JEN
Poking out from your leg.

REGAN
I'm just real happy we made up is all.

JEN
Regan. You made a deal.

REGAN
(*long sigh*)
Fine.

CLOTH RUSTLES

NARRATOR
Regan rooted around in her trousers for a long, long moment, before finally producing one last dagger and presenting it to Jen.

JEN
(*ew.*)
Yeah you can just drop that on the ground.

CLANK.

20 EXT. FREEHOLD CAMP - SIMULTANEOUS

20

NARRATOR
It was late by the time Nia returned to the camp near Freehold. Nelson awaited her by her tent.

FOOTSTEPS APPROACH THEN STOP.

NIA

Hello Nelson. Is something the matter?

NELSON

I was gonna talk to you earlier but I saw you praying and I didn't wanna bother you.

NIA

That was considerate of you. Are you sure you're all right?

NELSON

Billy and Jen wanted me to ask you about how we got here.

NIA

Yes, I suppose our discussion did get cut a bit short the other day. And then with everything that's happened since...

NELSON

Yeah that's what I mean. Is there any research we can do, with everything all up in the air?

NIA

There will be much to sort out come morning, but there is little to be done tonight. You will have my help though, of course, when the time is right. I would not abandon you.

NELSON

Yeah, I know. Thanks.

NIA

If that's all for now...

NELSON

I'm sorry I got kinda mad before.

NIA

Think nothing of it. We've had a stressful day.

NELSON

It's easy to forget how different our lives are.

NIA

Funny. I feel I am often reminded how different our lives are.

NELSON

It's kind of kickass. That you get to look like you look and go your whole life and never feel less than anyone because of it. You're living the dream, you shouldn't have to take on my problems.

NIA

Some would argue that is precisely the role of a priest, but I take your point. And accept your apology. Goodnight.

NELSON

Hey are...are you okay?

She pauses.

NIA

I am very frightened, Nelson. You must understand, whatever their motives or virtues or vices, the Elves are the nexus of power in this world. If things are as you say, then those of us unwilling to ignore enormous evil must spend the rest of our likely short and brutish lives fighting a nigh unwinnable war. And in that case I would advise you and your friends to leave here as soon as you can.

NELSON

I wouldn't do that. This is my fight too.

NIA

Please. I don't want any of you to have to live through such times.

NELSON

Me neither, but...
(quoting)

But that is not for us to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.

NIA

That is very beautifully said.

NELSON

It's not mine. Even white South Africans have good ideas sometimes.

NIA

Get some rest Nelson. If you believe in prayer, pray for wisdom and courage and strength. But above all else pray that you are mistaken.

DISSOLVE TO:

21 EXT. ROAD FROM THE WHITE FOREST - NIGHT

21

*SOUND OF TWO HORSES AND A DOZEN OR SO COOING PIGEONS ON
A HARD-PACKED DIRT ROAD AT A LEISURELY PACE*

NARRATOR

On the road west from the White Forest, Yllowyyn rode with his new traveling companion, D'ay-vaad. Well, fourteen new traveling companions if you count the pigeons. Not a one of which seemed to appreciate the value of a contemplative silence.

D'AYV

So back to *Duel of Cronos*, I daresay *Gale of Wards* is by far the strongest book in the whole series. Don't you agree?

YLLOWYYN

As I have said, I only made it halfway through *Ash That Sings*.

D'AYV

Ah yes. Well you really ought to get through it. That second book can be a bit of a bore at times, but it's worth it to set up the third.

YLLOWYYN

Yes, well, for perhaps the sixth time, my Kalth'yr duties have eaten into my leisure time of late.

D'AYV

Oh yes you must tell me more about that when we've the time.

YLLOWYYN

I can say I miss my former traveling companions more and more with each passing minute.

D'AYV

I'd be happy to lend you my copy so you can catch up, but we'd need to ask for it when the next pigeon goes back. Sorry to say right now I only have a *Aunts on Wagons* with me.

YLLOWYYN

Wagons? That's not truly the title of the fifth book, is it?

D'AYV

Oh yes! When the prince from the east comes to court, he brings with him a collection of female family members to aid his finding a mate. But the prince's closest aunt is framed for the murder of Smaa lo-Dyk which is actually perpetrated by...oh.

YLLLOWYYN
(sighs)
 D'ayv...

D'AYV
 Apologies, I forgot you have not read that far. Truth be told, *Shrew That Knows* is most likely the weakest work of the series. So much time is devoted to the coronation ceremony of Prince Victor.

YLLLOWYYN
 But why would Prince Victor be crowned?

D'AYV
 I guess you'll have to wait and see.

YLLLOWYYN
(realizing, annoyed)
 Unless...Ah. King Valentin dies, doesn't he?

D'AYV
(sly)
 Maaaaaaybe?

YLLLOWYYN
(under his breath)
 Dammit D'ayv.
(out loud)
 Do you think we could stop for a moment, D'ay-vaad?
 Nature must run its course.

D'AYV
 Ah, yes of course.

THE HORSES ARE REINED IN.

YLLLOWYYN DISMOUNTS AND BEGINS TO WALK AWAY.

VERY BRIEF TIMEJUMP TO:

22 NEARBY - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

22

PIGEONS ARE STILL AUDIBLE BUT NOW DISTANT AND PANNED

NARRATOR
 Ylllowyyn walked until he was a comfortable distance from D'ay-vaad. Which under the circumstances was rather far indeed.

YLLLOWYYN'S FOOTSTEPS ENTER SCENE AND COME TO A STOP.

D'AYV

(shouting from where the pigeons are)

Best be careful! This reminds me of when the Watchmen of the Ward are attacked by the Dark Demons at the end of book...oh. Sorry!

Yllowyyyn **sighs**.

NARRATOR

Only then did he open the hidden pouch on his belt.

A DRAWSTRING OPENS.

YLLLOWYYN

Yllodyk you are truly a lifesaver.

NARRATOR

He placed a sizable helping of cannib root inside his cheek, and walked back towards the road.

23 BACK ON THE ROAD - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

23

PIGEONS ARE VERY PRESENT AGAIN.

YLLLOWYYN'S FOOTSTEPS APPROACH.

D'AYV

Feeling better?

NARRATOR

An unbidden smile began pulling at the corner of the Yllowyyyn's lips.

YLLLOWYYN

You know, I think am.

YLLLOWYYN REMOUNTS AND THE TWO HORSES BEGIN TO CLOP.

YLLLOWYYN

D'ayv, I believe I would like to hear your...synopsis.

D'AYV

You would? Are you sure you're ready?

NARRATOR

By now, Yllowyyyn's face and his eyes had begun to glaze over.

YELLOWYIN

Oh yes. Perhaps we could do it over a meal, I'm quite hungry.

24 INT./EXT. FREEHOLD RUINS - LATE NIGHT

24

AS BRENNEN WALKS DOWN A HALLWAY, SOUNDS OF MEN WORKING ARE ALL AROUND HIM. AND SO IS THE OPEN NIGHT AIR.

NARRATOR

It was a late hour as Brennen found himself wandering the keep's halls. In spite of the time, the men there scurried busily, repairing the fortifications, transporting equipment. But Brennen seemed to pay them no mind.

It was a while, therefore, before Brennen came to realise where he had wandered to: the entrance to Bryce Riverfell's study. The two guardsmen posted outside - both had seen their share of a fair few seasons - started to attention at Brennen's arrival.

GUARD #1

Sir!

BRENNEN

(himself startled)

I, ah...An audience with Riverfell.

BRYCE PIPES IN, PANNED AND THROUGH HALF A WALL.

BRYCE (O.S.)

Send him in, gents.

GUARD #1

Right. Go ahead.

BRENNEN'S HEAVY FOOTSTEPS WALK AWAY FROM US.

GUARD #2

Chaos below, was that *the* General Brennen? I never thought I'd live to see the day.

GUARD #1

Don't act so surprised, it's vulgar.

GUARD #2

Oh, right.

GUARD #1

(trying to act "over it")

I used to be an adventurer like him. Then I took an arrow in--

GUARD #2

--Yeah, we know Ecgbert. Not a day goes by we don't hear about your damn knee.

25 INT. BRYCE'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

25

THIS ROOM IS QUIETER. JUST A SMALL FIRE.

NARRATOR

The until-recently respectable study of General Bryce Riverfell was looking considerably worse for the wear of battle. The walls were damaged, papers were strewn about, and prominent on Riverfell's desk was a near-finished bottle of brown liquid, the scent of which hung sweet and heavy in the air.

Nevertheless, Brennen ceremoniously dipped his head as he entered, and Bryce saluted.

BRYCE

Sir Brennen.

BRENNEN

(a bit awkward)

Commander Riverfell, I request an audience with you.

BRYCE

An audience with me? What songs we playing?

BRENNEN

Songs? I don't...

BRYCE

(chuckling)

It's a joke. We can still joke, can't we?

BRENNEN

Apologies. I find myself slow to laugh of late, General Riverfell.

BRYCE

You should try. Sometimes it's all we've got. And I think you can call me Bryce in here. Drink?

BRENNEN

(slightly taken aback)
No, thank you.

BRYCE

Suppose that's presumptuous of me, now that you outrank me and all.

BRENNEN

It's not that. I'd just rather have my head clear tonight.

BRYCE

Mm. You know, it's funny.

BRYCE POURS ANOTHER DRINK.

BRYCE

The one thing I promised myself long ago to never do is sit in a room by myself and get drunk. I saw where it got my old man and it's nowhere I wanna go. But after this last battle...Truth be told, sometimes I feel so weak I wanna explode.

NARRATOR

Bryce threw back his drink.

He gulps and audibly winces.

BRYCE

I'll thank you not to bring me up on slovenly conduct charges.

BRENNEN

You've survived a nigh impossible challenge, General. Few would think less of you.

BRYCE

The real challenge is still to come I think.

BRENNEN

Rebuilding, you mean.

BRYCE

That's...part of it. How's, uh, how's things by you? One of yours was wounded the other day if memory serves.

BRENNEN

We got to her in time to save her life. And she seems...herself again.

BRYCE

All we dare pray for I guess. If there's any help I can offer...

BRENNEN

I thank you Bryce. I know you've little to spare right now.

BRYCE

I'd have nothing without you and yours bailing us out.

BRENNEN

Just doing my duty. Right then. I shan't take any more of your time.

NARRATOR

Brennen turned to leave.

BRYCE

That really all that brought you here in the middle of the night?

NARRATOR

Brennen stopped. But did not turn back around just yet.

BRENNEN

What do you fight for, Bryce?

BRYCE

That's a good question, Brennen. I've always said it's for the farmer who's counting on me to fight so he can just raise his crops in peace and kiss his wife at night. I woulda been him if my life broke just a little different.

BRENNEN

A fine reason I suppose.

BRYCE

Why don't you have a seat?

STEPS WALK TOWARDS US. A CHAIR IS PULLED OUT.

BRYCE

What's troublin' ya? Soldier to soldier.

BRENNEN

My whole life, I always fought for *him*. King Gunther, that is - peaceful be his rest.

Beat.

NARRATOR

Bryce had the sense to wait in silence for the grizzled knight to continue.

BRENNEN

I had barely eleven years when I took my first life. Templars of Discord burned my village, killed my father. One of them - our neighbor - was captured alive. I buried my axe in her black heart. My rage was all I had back then. Then His Majesty took me in. Fed me, sheltered me, raised me higher above my birth than I ever dared dream. When he said someone needed to die, I killed them, still with that boyish rage. And by the time the rage faded, I'd grown used to killing. I never had to wonder if I was doing the right thing. If Gunther asked it, I knew it my heart it was good and just.

BRYCE

You admired him very much.

BRENNEN

(Chuckles: did I ever?)

My admiration for him was so vast it would sometimes take my breath away.

(covering a bit)

If you've never been in the presence of royalty, I don't think you can understand what that's like.

BRYCE

And now he's gone, and you're wondering why you still're fighting.

BRENNEN

I've been telling myself that as long as I can fight for his line...

NARRATOR

Brennen caught himself.

BRENNEN

...his legacy, that is, by combating the damned usurper Redmoor.

BRYCE

Arden Redmoor on the High Throne is something we should all take pains to avoid.

(sighs)

It's a privilege you had, though, Brennen. Not all soldiers get to serve someone they admire.

NARRATOR

Brennen caught the briefest flicker in Bryce's eyes just then - the look of a man realizing he may have said too much.

BRENNEN

Do you...not admire who you serve?

BRYCE

(tries to walk it back)

Like I said, I prefer to think my master is that common farmer trying to put food on the table. I admire *him*.

BRENNEN

Aye, but you took your oath before the Elves and the lords of men. Do you not admire them?

BRYCE

(slight chuckle)

If you hadn't noticed, my answer was what men of our trade might call a "tactical retreat."

NARRATOR

But Bryce saw by the look in Brennen's eyes that he would not relent.

BRYCE

("Guess we're doing this.")

I keep my oath. I hold my fort. No one ever said admiration was a job requirement.

BRENNEN

But...surely you think their cause is just.

BRYCE

Which one?

BRENNEN

Defending your people - OUR people - against the Orc hoards.

BRYCE

Yeah. Well...that's what's been fucking with me since the battle. Lemme ask you, did notice the weapons the Orcs carried into battle?

BRENNEN

I fought several bearing steel. I had presumed they had taken them off of our fallen by the time I arrived.

BRYCE

They were certainly ours, but I don't think they were taken off our fallen. See, the Smith I commissioned

(MORE)

BRYCE (cont'd)

them from - I've bought from him before. Fella from Ironhertz lands. Decent man, good for his word. So he and I took reasonable precautions against theft. Only people who know who those weapons were for and where they were being stored were me, him, and the one patrol I sent to collect 'em, who never came back. And even they didn't know what they were picking up.

BRENNEN

So the smith gave up the secret.

BRYCE

How else could Traft've gotten 'em?

BRENNEN

Poor devil. I can only imagine what tortures the Orcs--

BRENNEN

--We found the smith among the war dead. On the Orc front lines. Shot fulla Elf darts.

NARRATOR

Until the day he died, Brennen would swear that a frigid breeze blew through the damaged wall just then, and chilled his bones. All I can say is there was no wind.

BRENNEN

(playing defense now)

Some spell of the Templars might have been--

BRYCE

--If the Templars had that kinda magic, you think they'da used it once and only once on a backwoods tradesman without a minute of combat training?

BRYCE

Though we *should* talk about the Templars' interest in your--

BRENNEN

(sputtering inchoate rage)
That...That...That treasonous whoreson!

BRENNEN

Betraying his kinsmen for...for what? A handful of gems? I'm sorry you misjudged him so badly, Bryce. Clearly he was the furthest thing from a decent man.

BRYCE

Brennen, I trusted that man *because* his family was killed in an Orc raid couple years back. That sound like the makings of a mercenary to you?

BRENNEN

(starting to make some connections)

What...what could possess a man to do that?

BRYCE

I don't know. But I imagine it's not too far off from what made Traft the way he is.

BRENNEN

Traft is a half-breed savage.

BRYCE

So they say. But we met him. He really seem that savage to you? Shit he was less fix' for a fight than you and I were at his age.

BRENNEN

Agh! Enough of this damnable, Orc-loving nonsense. Not you as w--
(*catches himself*)
Not you, Bryce.

BRYCE

I'm not saying we should paint our faces blue and start burning things. Traft was stringing up little kids, I'm not gonna sit here and defend that. I'm just saying, if that shy little kid we met all those years ago could turn into Traft, and if this smith I know who lost his whole family could go along with him, then there is some very big part of this picture that you and I have not seen.

BRENNEN

So what then? Throw up our hands and surrender because maybe we're wrong?

BRYCE

You came to me. You asked me what I fight for. And I'm telling you honestly, I'm not quite sure. What used to be enough just...isn't anymore. I think the best thing you can do right now is to just get used to that.

NARRATOR

Bryce went to pour himself another drink...

BRENNEN

You're not making sense! Stop rotting your brain!

NARRATOR

...But Brennen swiped the bottle out of his hand.

GLASS SHATTERS AGAINST THE FLOOR.

NARRATOR

And in the wake of the crash, there was a stunned silence.

It lingers.

BRENNEN

I'm very sorry, Bryce. I should go.

TWO SETS OF FOOTSTEPS RUN IN.

NARRATOR

But before he could, the guards from the hallway barged in.

GUARD #1

What's happened?

BRYCE

It's all right, gents. Lost my grip is all.

NARRATOR

The guards shared a skeptical look between them.

BRYCE

I'm fine.

GUARD #1

If you say so, sir.

GUARD #2

There's a girl here to see you, by the way.

BRYCE

What girl?

BRENNEN

Seems I *really* should be going.

GUARD #2

She's come on the supply train from Bailey's inn. Think it was one of those two what rode with you before the battle.

BRYCE

No shit. Send her in. Brennen, I think you *will* wanna be here for this.

GUARD #1

(leaning out the door)
He'll see you now, lassie.

BRENNEN

Why? Who is she?

ONE MORE SET OF FOOTSTEPS ENTERS THE ROOM.

BRENNEN

...Galadon's mercy. Gwen?

26 INT. HORSE'S HEAD INN - LATE NIGHT

26

NARRATOR

At the Horse's Head Inn, Arlene was doing her best to tend to her duties. It was nearly the middle of the night and most of the patrons had left or gone to bed. But there were still a few in need of service.

MERRIL

Sister, be a dear and top me off? And how 'bout one of them cherry tarts? The world may be going to Garedian's arsehole, but it won't see me off without a bit of sweetness to lighten the journey.

ARLENE

Right away, sir. You're lucky, I think there are only a few left. They've been quite popular. Summer on your tongue, Ma Bailey says.

MERRIL

You seem familiar. You haven't been with Bailey long, have you?

ARLENE

Not very long, no.

MERRIL

Funny. I could swear I've seen you before. But then, I get around, I do. Merrill H. Marigold. Of Merrill's Mystical Moving Emporium. You've heard of me, yes?

ARLENE

I'm afraid I haven't. I lead a very isolated life before...before I came here.

MERRIL

Nonsense. I've sold to you before, I have. I'd never forget a face so pretty. Young girls do love their ribbons and bobs. It was up at the castle, I think!

ARLENE KNOCKS OVER A BEER.

ARLENE

Gods I'm so sorry! No, no! Let me! I'll clean it up right away, just please don't tell Ma Bailey!

MERRIL

T'cha, don't worry your pretty little head. When war times come it's tough to hold onto anything good. Things get all messy.

ARLENE

I thought, when I first came here, that my life was finally about to begin. It seemed like heaven.

MERRIL

Well that's the first time anyone's ever said that about a Bailey establishment. Sweet tarts and sour beer? Yes. But heaven? That's another inn, I think.

ARLENE

You should have seen how I used to live...but then all the fighting started. And this baby...I feel as if I haven't slept in weeks.

BABY BEGINS TO CRY.

NARRATOR

As if on cue, the child, which slept in a basket near the bar, began to wail. Arlene rushed to quiet it before Mrs. Bailey could hear its cries.

ARLENE

Shhh...shhh, I know.

Arlene **hums** a tiny bit of "The Singing Sister."

MERRIL

Oh, lass, you have a lovely voice. Even covered in spilled beer. You remind me of my own mother. Actually it's probably because of the spilled beer, if I'm being honest. Well, that and that song. 'Twas a favorite of hers.

ARLENE

Well, I'm not the mother of this child. His mother died.

MERRIL

Poor little thing. 'Tis a hard thing to lose a parent so young.

ARLENE

I thought I did the right thing, taking him in. Now I'm not so sure. He cries and cries. And nothing seems to soothe him, save singing. I cannot lose my place here. I've nowhere else to go.

NARRATION

Perhaps it was in memory of his own mother. Or perhaps our Merrill was getting soft in his old age. Or perhaps, as I like to think, despite all evidence to the contrary, there are still folk who will do good for no other reason than because it pleases them to do so, Merrill began to dig through his large pack. After a few moments of rustling, he produced a small wooden box. When he opened it a soft, tinny music floated out.

MUSIC BOX PLAYS SINGING SISTER. THE BABY QUIETS.

MERRIL

Ah, there! You see? Sweet sounds do tame the savage beast!

ARLENE

Oh! How lovely! Wherever did you find such a thing.

MERRIL

Hither and yon, my lass. Hither and yon. It is yours, if you want it.

ARLENE

I...doubt I could pay you what you'd ask for it.

MERRIL

I ask for nothing. Think of it as a kindness paid in turn for your own.

ARLENE

(simply)
Thank you.

MERRIL

And if you should happen to mention that you got this magical box from the great Merrill's Mystical Moving Emporium...well, I shan't stop you.

A HORN BLOWS IN THE DISTANCE OUTSIDE.

MERRIL

Me oh my. Never thought I'd see the day.

ARLENE

Why, what is it?

A DOOR FLIES OPEN MID-RIGHT.

NARRATOR

At the sound of the horn, Bailey burst in from the kitchen in a near-panic.

BAILEY

Anna! Run and get the finery. We've very important guests.

ARLENE

Who?

BAILEY

See for yourself.

BAILEY WALKS QUICKLY TO MID-LEFT AND OPENS A DOOR TO THE OUTSIDE.

SIX SETS OF HOOFBEATS APPROACH FROM THE VERY FAR DISTANCE.

NARRATOR

Through the threshold of the Horse's Head Inn, Arlene saw six riders approaching, opalescent armor shimmering in the moonlight.

MERRIL

Those, my lass, are the Knights of the Wood. That standard they fly is for the Lord Commander's personal guard.

END OF PART FOUR.

PART FIVE:

27 INT. HORSE'S HEAD INN - NIGHT

27

NARRATOR

Dear ones, when last we left our Miss Bailey, she was frantically preparing The Horse's Head Inn for the sudden arrival of a very prestigious guest.

Replay the following from Part Four:

BAILEY

Anna! Run and get the finery!

SOUND OF HORSE'S HOOVES APPROACHING OUTSIDE

MERRIL

Those, my lass, are the Knights of the Wood.

NARRATOR

Now I trust you recall that Arlene Redmoor's departure from Castle Guernatal was, if not strictly speaking illegal, then very much not the done sort of thing, and by necessity highly secretive. And if you do not recall this, I can assure you Arlene did.

BAILEY

Well, girl, don't just stand there gawking. Make haste!

ARLENE

(Panicked)

Knights of the--No! They can't see me! They mustn't.

(Hasty recover)

...because I'll spill the wine or burn the bread! I'm a terrible bargirl. I'll bring shame upon you, Miss Bailey. I know I will.

BAILEY

What am I supposed to do, serve them on my own?

(beat)

Agh! You're not wrong though.

BABY STARTS TO FUSS

BAILEY

Oh, no - not him too! Anna, take him. If *either* of you makes a scene, you're out. Last chance. D'ya understand?

NARRATOR

Desperately, Arlene began to gather the baby and his accouterments. Between the basket, the baby, the

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

bottle, and the music box her arms were more than full. It will forever be a wonder to me how such tiny humans manage to amass so many necessary items in such a short amount of time.

ARLENE

Of course, thank you. I'll just take him on a walk, we'll come back when--

BAILEY

(hissing)

--Don't be daft. It's near midnight. Just sit with him in the corner, pretend you're a guest and for Galadon's sake, keep quiet.

NARRATOR

Arlene had no time to respond.

DOOR SWINGS OPEN

NARRATOR

As the door swung open, she all but dove into a corner booth and turned her back to the inn's new visitors.

THREE SETS OF FOOTSTEPS CROSS THE THRESHOLD. WE DISTINCTLY HEAR SPURS JANGLING.

NARRATOR

Madam Bailey turned, beaming, to her new guests. Her arms open wide as if to hug the Lord Commander. She thought better of it and turned the gesture into an awkward, but enthusiastic curtsy.

BAILEY

Lord Commander! As I live and breath! Truly it is an honor to have your men grace us with a visit. If you're looking for the comforts of home, head to The Horse's Head Inn, that's what they say!

MERRIL

(snorting, under his breath)
Who's they?

BAILEY

(ignores him)

Can I get you a glass of our mulled wine? Or perhaps something stronger? Or sweeter? Or...

Bailey continues her **rambling offerings** ad lib.

BAILEY FADES AWAY AS WE GO INTO TELESCOPIC HEARING FX.

NARRATOR

As Madam Bailey babbled and bustled about the common room, Lord Commander Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's Elvish perception took in all.

WE FOCUS ON A FIREPLACE.

NARRATOR

A few patrons huddled near the fire, their attention on the new arrivals.

INN PATRON

(trying to whisper but perfectly clear)
That's really her, Lord Commander of the Knights of the Wood.

WE FOCUS ON THE BABY, JUST STARTING TO FUSS A BIT.

NARRATOR

A young mother cradled a sleeping baby in the corner, her face ducked against the child's soft swaddling. Ry'y trained her gaze on this cloth especially - frayed, worn, loved.

ARLENE

(trying to whisper but perfectly clear)
Hush, hush, be still.

Ry'y **sniffs** the air.

BAILEY

Oh, dear! Lord Commander! Are you ill? I've a tonic that will--

SNAP BACK TO THE REGULAR SOUNDSCAPE.

RY'Y

--Thank you, good woman, that won't be necessary. I don't plan on staying long. I'm here on business you see.

BAILEY

Business, my Lord?

RY'Y

The Knights of the Wood are making rounds in search of any Orcs that may have escaped us at the battle ground.

BAILEY

Mercy! Can you imagine?

RY'Y
Well yes, that's why I'm here.

BAILEY
Right. Well we've seen no Orcs here, thank Galadon!

RY'Y
Thank Galadon for the crops and the sunshine. As for keeping the Orcs away, we have only each others' constant vigilance to thank. It's for that reason that I'm afraid I must impose upon you and your guests to speak for a few moments.

BAILEY
Please do, Lord Commander! Best to be safe not sorry, that's the Bailey maxim.

Merril **snorts**.

RY'Y
Now as you all seem to be...
(clears throat)
...Upstanding men and women, I'm sure you feel compelled by conscience as well as law to report any Orcish activity to the nearest garrison.

BAILEY
Aye, but of course.

RY'Y
But the Orc is a crafty devil. He knows tricks and ruses to deceive all but the most trained eye. Which is why we must also be on the lookout for anything that even seems suspicious. Now has anyone seen anything out of the ordinary they'd like to tell us about?

Silence.

RY'Y
No one? The smallest detail might help, you never know.

Another beat of silence.

PANNED OFF RIGHT, THE BABY CRIES.

NARRATOR
Miss Bailey shot a glare towards Arlene and the child, but Ry'y lo-Th'yyt calmly turned to face them, with a painted on smile.

RY'Y
My word.

RY'Y WALKS. WE STAY CENTERED WITH HER AS THE CRYING BABY MOVES TOWARDS US, SO IT'S LIKE WE'RE WALKING TOWARDS IT. THE CRYING CONTINUES.

RY'Y
Is this your child, my dear?

NARRATOR
Arlene, whose waxing courage would not allow her to raise her head to meet the Elf's eyes, vehemently shook her head no.

NOW THAT WE'VE MOVED, BAILEY IS PANNED LEFT.

BAILEY
It's not hers. It was found shortly after the battle.

RY'Y
And when I asked, you didn't think that out of the ordinary? Are you accustomed to taking in strange infants?

BAILEY
Not accustomed, no. But it didn't seem strange after a big battle like that. Forgive us, my Lord.

RY'Y
Mm. Precisely what I mean. Thankfully, there's no harm done this time. We're lucky in fact. There's a mother nearby what lost her little one in the chaos of fleeing the battle. I daresay that's the one right there.

BAILEY
You don't say!

RY'Y
We'll gladly take the poor dear off your hands and return it to its loving mother.

BABY IS STILL CRYING

NARRATOR
Ry'y reached her arms out for the child. At this, the almost visibly shaking Arlene gulped in a deep breath and finally raised her head.

Arlene puts on a **very bad cockney**.

ARLENE
Where's...
(catches her accent)
Where's the muvver from?

RY'Y

I'm sorry? You'll have to face me dear, my hearing's not what it used to be.

NARRATOR

Arlene Redmoor studied the child for a fleeting moment, still unable to hold its own head up, its soft face completely without malice or guile. And then, with grim resolve, she turned to face Lord Commander Ry'y lo-Th'yyt.

A CHAIR CREAKS.

ARLENE

Where's the muvver from?

NARRATOR

As the Elf looked the woman straight in the eyes, a hint of a smirk tugged at the former's lips.

RY'Y

My but it is hard to hear over the poor thing's wailing. Can you do anything to quiet it down?

NARRATOR

Arlene produced Merril's music box from her pocket.

A SMALL OBJECT HITS THE TABLE. THE MUSIC BOX BEGINS TO PLAY "THE SINGING SISTER." THE BABY CALMS.

RY'Y

Lovely tune. Now what was your question?

ARLENE

Where's the muvver from?

RY'Y

(stifling a chuckle)

I'm certainly no expert in the human dialects, but yours is a very peculiar accent. There's a hint of the peasantry from House Redmoor's lands. But no, that's not quite right. Where are you from?

ARLENE

(shaken)

Oh you know. Hivver and yon, innit?

Ry'y lets out a **big belly laugh**.

RY'Y

(still recovering from the laugh)

Hither and yon indeed. Funny, that's exactly where the mother is from.

(MORE)

RY'Y (cont'd)
(one more beat to stop laughing)
 Where she's from is her business. My business is to see that everything in this world is where it belongs. Come.

NARRATOR
 Ry'y lo-Th'yyt reached out for the child once more, but Arlene only pulled him closer to her.

RY'Y
 What is your connection to this child?

ARLENE
 None, m'lord. Only...suppos'n its not the one yer after. Wouldn't want it out in this cold fer nuffin, let alone get its muvver's hopes up.

BY NOW THE MUSIC BOX HAS STOPPED.

RY'Y
 She's from the milling town to the west of here, does that satisfy?

ARLENE
 Ven that's not the child at all, m'lord. I found 'im east by the water.

RY'Y
("Oh, shit.")
 By the water? Did you see anyone else nearby?

ARLENE
(shaky voice)
 No, m'lord.

RY'Y
 My dear girl, if you'll take us outside and show us the exact spot it would be much appreciated.

ARLENE
 Now, m'lord? But...it's so cold and I've not got a winter cloak. I can tell you the exact spot. Even draw it on a map if you got one.

NARRATOR
 Ry'y lo-Th'yyt took a quick inventory of the other faces in the room, entirely enraptured by the conversation.

Beat.

THE BABY STARTS TO FUSS.

RY'Y

Yes, I suppose that would be alright.

NARRATOR

She produced a scroll from somewhere on her belt and placed it on the table in front of Arlene.

A PAPER UNFURLS.

RY'Y

There you are. Take your time and be sure to find the right spot.

NARRATOR

And as she turned back to the rest of the room, Arlene briefly closed her eyes in a silent prayer of thanks.

THE BABY CRIES A BIT MORE.

ARLENE

(soothing)
Hush now.

A TINY MECHANICAL CRANK WINDS, AND THEN THE MUSIC BOX STARTS AGAIN FROM THE BEGINNING.

RY'Y

Now while I have everyone's attention, there's one more matter in which I could use your help. I assume you've all heard tell of the the disappearance of the Lady Arlene Redmoor?

NARRATOR

Arlene went white.

RY'Y

The Lady went missing mere hours after her marriage to Lord Antonin of House Mooncrest. Mooncrest blamed Redmoor, Redmoor blamed Mooncrest and now the two houses are at war. Lord Ardel Redmoor has alleged that the lady Arlene was kidnapped by her handmaiden, who disappeared along with her. He's offered a substantial reward for the return of his sister - alive of course. And the handmaiden, dead or alive.

A brutal beat of silence.

RY'Y

So if any of you have seen two unknown women traveling about together, one high born and one low...

THERE ARE MURMURS AROUND THE INN.

RY'Y
Anyone? Miss Bailey, you've many travelers come through here.

ARLENE
I'll show you!

RY'Y
Say again, dear?

ARLENE
I'll show you the spot outside. It...will be easier.

RY'Y
Ah! Splendid. And take the child. Perhaps we can clear this all up right now and I'll depart directly.

28 EXT. HORSE'S HEAD INN - NIGHT

28

A DOOR CLOSSES BESIDE US.

NARRATOR
As soon as they were outside the inn, Ry'y gave Arlene a very perfunctory bow.

RY'Y
Lady Redmoor, or should I say Mooncrest? My but we are resourceful.

Arlene has given up the accent.

ARLENE
Please my lord. Gwen did not kidnap me.

RY'Y
Gwen?...Oh, of course, the handmaiden.
(laughs condescendingly)
Yes I know she didn't kidnap you.

ARLENE
Our flight was my idea, I ordered her to help me. She mustn't be treated as a criminal.

RY'Y
Her treatment will depend very much on your actions, my lady. So. Let's take a walk, and you can show me where you found this child. After you.

ONE SET OF FOOTSTEPS...

NARRATOR

Arlene started off in the direction of the stream. Ry'y motioned to one of her lieutenants, who covertly handed her a cloth bundle a few feet in length. And then she followed after Arlene.

*AND THEN ANOTHER.*29 INT. BRYCE'S STUDY - NIGHT

29

NARRATOR

Now at that moment, the aforementioned handmaiden was in Bryce Riverfell's study at Freehold and face-to-face with Brennen, to the surprise of all three present.

GWEN

General Brennen!

BRENNEN

Gwen of Ruefield. Peace be praised.

GWEN

Thank all that is good! We feared the worst for you, after...everything at the castle.

BRENNEN

Aye. I've heard the tales the usurper Ardel is spreading about me.

GWEN

We knew for sure he was lying. But we also knew he'd have it in for you. What a relief to see you in one piece.

BRENNEN

How fares your lady? I pray she is not still...

GWEN

You've not heard? We fled the keep. On the day of m'lady's wedding as it happens.

BRENNEN

Is it so? Fortune continues to favor the bold it seems. That is well. Ardel was a cruel wretch when his rank was low. Now? I quake with fury to imagine.

GWEN

Aye. I'd never have left m'lady there alone with him on the High Throne.

BRENNEN

And I'll not leave him on the High Throne. Not for long. That much I swear to you.

BRYCE

(clears his throat)

As much as this reunion is warming my heart - it is, and I needed it - I need to ask why you're here Miss Gwen. Thought we both understood it was safest for you to stay at Bailey's.

GWEN

I'm here on m'lady's behalf. There's something I'm to ask you General Riverfell, and it's for your ears only. Though...I'm sure m'lady never imagined General Brennen would be here.

BRYCE

You know he's been knighted?

GWEN

He has?

NARRATOR

Gwen gave a curtsy and a beaming smile.

GWEN

Sir Brennen. Well-deserved and long overdue if I may say. When was this?

BRENNEN

It, ah, was a very private ceremony. I can tell you more later.

BRYCE

About this question, Miss Gwen...

GWEN

Aye.

(deliberates a beat)

I s'pose if there was anyone at Castle Guernatal m'lady would've trusted, would've been you Sir Brennen. Perhaps you can help as well. Only, do you think you could send your men a mite further away, General Riverfell?

NARRATOR

Bryce seemed confused, but saw the urgency in Gwen's eyes.

BRYCE WALKS TO THE DOOR.

BRYCE

(leaning out the door)

How's about you go for a stroll, gents? Appreciate it.

HE WALKS BACK IN.

BRYCE

Now then.

GWEN

Right. We've found a child.

BRYCE

A child?

GWEN

A wee little babe, can't have seen two moons yet. Its mother died in a field near the inn. M'lady and I have been caring for it, but we can't do that very long.

BRYCE

And you come to see if I can track down any of its kin.

GWEN

Well...that's the thing. See, this child looks normal in every way, sweetest little thing you ever saw, except it cries a lot. But the mother...looked like an Orc.

NARRATOR

Brennen and Bryce immediately locked eyes.

GWEN

I know it was folly to take 'im in but I couldn't leave 'im out to starve. First things first, is m'lady in any danger?

BRYCE

From the child? No. But you shouldn't have it.

BRENNEN

You say it looks just like a human child?

GWEN

Might get teased by other children for having such light eyes, but otherwise you'd never think it wasn't born of men.

BRENNEN

But the mother was an Orc?

GWEN

Looked so to me. Skin all grey and blue...though that turned out to be paint. But yes, bright red eyes.

BRENNEN

I think I must see this child with my own eyes. Where is your lady staying?

GWEN

At the Horse's Head Inn. You know it?

BRENNEN

Aye. Though I must be back before dawn. I'll have to make haste. I'm sure you can stay here, Gwen, if you're road-weary.

GWEN

I'll come. M'lady will be overjoyed to see you.

BRENNEN

I hope you don't mind a rough ride, then.

BRYCE

I'll try and think of something while you're gone. I don't want you two keeping that thing, but this is a big thing to ask.

GWEN

I know. Thank you, General.

BRYCE

Gods' speed. To both of you.

NARRATOR

And so did they depart, just as soon as they were able, in the direction of the Horse's Head Inn...

DISSOLVE TO:

30 EXT. STREAM NEAR THE HORSE'S HEAD INN - NIGHT

30

AMIDST THE SOUNDS OF THE DEEP NIGHT, THE BROOK BABBLES BEHIND US.

NARRATOR

...And Arlene's frightful midnight stroll with Lord Commander Ry'y lo-Th'yyt.

*TWO SETS OF FOOTSTEPS, A LITTLE WAYS APART ARE
UNDERNEATH THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE.*

NARRATOR

And oh, dear listeners, how neat and tidy it would have been if some timejump in our tale could place them at the inn in time to interrupt said stroll. But alas, Brennen and Gwen are still a few hours' ride away. They will not rescue Arlene.

ARLENE

This is the where I found the child.

ARLENE'S FOOTSTEPS STOP. THEN RY'Y LO-TH'YYT'S.

NARRATOR

As the lady came to a halt beside the stream, the Elf kept ten yards behind her.

RY'Y

Good.

THE BABY GIVES A COUGH.

RY'Y

I must ask you something now that we're away from prying ears. When you found this child was it near its mother?

ARLENE

I already told you--

RY'Y

--Now beware. If you lie to me about this, then I've no reason to believe you about the alleged innocence of your dear...Gwen, was it? So once more. Did you find this child with its mother?

ARLENE

(beat)
...Yes. I did.

RY'Y

And the mother did not appear to be of the human race, did she?

ARLENE

(voice cracking)
No. She didn't.

RY'Y

She appeared to be of the Orcish race.

Arlene speaks through tears.

ARLENE

Yes, she did.

RY'Y

(soothing)

There's no need to cry, my lady. Your honesty has served the realm well, and I thank you for it. I'd like to show you something, if you'd be so kind as to look to the horizon over yonder.

ARLENE

Alright.

(a beat while she sniffles)

What am I looking for?

WOOD AND LEATHER CREAK.

NARRATOR

Though Arlene was never the sporting type, she had known enough summers at court to recognize the sound of a bow being drawn.

ARLENE

(quiet rage)

You coward. You bring me all the way out here to kill me and you can't even look me in the eye?

RY'Y

There's a small joint behind the skull where it meets the neck. Piercing it causes instant and painless death. I'm unaccustomed to the primitive fletching on these Orcish arrows, but if you're still I'm sure I can strike that target. If you run or squirm or raise a ruckus however, I can be sure to hit you, but I can't be sure it'll be painless. You decide.

THE BABY STARTS CRYING.

ARLENE

You said yourself there are people looking for me. How do you hope to get away with this?

RY'Y

Like I said, Orcish arrow. It'll look like a raiding party. Now take a moment to still yourself so as not to flinch. Helps if you look down.

ARLENE

Gwen knows nothing about any of this. You must leave her be. Please.

RY'Y

A moment I said. Do not make me regret my compassion.

Arlene takes a **deep breath**. Resigns herself to her fate.

ARLENE

Goodbye, Gwen. We had songs and kisses and laughter for a few days at least. For that I'll gladly give my life. I'll wait for you in Galadon's green garden.

THE BABY IS SCREAMING ITS BRAINS OUT.

ARLENE

(quiet, through tears)
For she's gathered her skirts above the knee.
And she's gone to the wishing well to see
If the one that she loves waits for her
All alone at the wishing well.

THE SONG TAKES ON SOME MAGICAL REVERB AS IT GOES.

NARRATOR

Despite her decades of training, the Elf General found herself just the slightest bit distracted by some strange quality of Arlene's song.

Ry'y **inhales evenly** but audibly.

NARRATOR

(bitter)
 But, ever the *consummate professional*, she drew in her breath, waiting to time her release with the exhale.

BOW CREAKS

NARRATOR

And then...

THERE'S A BIRD COO AND A TINY LITTLE FART/SQUIRT

RY'Y

Agh!

NARRATOR

She was struck on the head by the droppings of a pigeon.

AND THEN THERE'S A TON OF WINGS AND SQUAWKING PIGEONS.

NARRATOR

Which was soon joined by eleven of its mates.

RY'Y
What the devil?!

NARRATOR
And then, cresting a nearby hill...

YELLOWYYN IS PANNED AND DISTANT BUT GETTING CLOSER.

YELLOWYYN
Sorry! Sorry! Those are mine!

YELLOWYYN'S FOOTSTEPS RUN TOWARDS US.

NARRATOR
...Came the erstwhile Kalth'yr to the until-recently-great House Guernatal.

YELLOWYYN RUNS RIGHT UP TO US.

YELLOWYYN
I left the cage open by mistake, I'm terribly--
(*stoned as hell and very excited*)
--By Galadon's Grace! Lord Commander?! Well fancy meeting you out here.

RY'Y
(*trying to hide her raging fucking fury*)
Yllowyyn. Good evening. What brings you--

YELLOWYYN
--Is that...Is that Arlene Redmoor?

END OF CHAPTER.