

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
BOOK II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 2
"What Used To Be Enough"

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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 high 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!

Yllowyyn **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 Yllowyyn'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, Yllowyyn'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.