

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 2
"What Used To Be Enough"

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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.