

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 3
"Bridges"

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

1

*Environment is exactly what it was at the end
of Ch. 2 Pt. 5*

Replay:

RY'Y

*Now take a moment to still yourself so as not to
flinch. Helps if you look down.*

ARLENE

*Goodbye, Gwen. I'll wait for you in Galadon's green
garden.*

Ry'y's bow creaks.

Cue the pigeons.

RY'Y

Agh! What the devil?

YLLLOWYYN

*Sorry! Sorry! Those are mine! I left the cage open by
mistake, I'm terribly -- By Galadon's
Grace! Lord Commander?! Well fancy meeting you out
here.*

RY'Y

Yllowyyn. Good evening. What brings you --

YLLLOWYYN

Is that...is that Arlene Redmoor?

NARRATOR

For a highborn lady such as Arlene to find herself facing seemingly certain death at the hands of a Knight of the Wood was unexpected. But even more unexpected was that her execution should then be stayed by the miraculous arrival of a flock of pigeons. Honestly, the odds of a biped ever being rescued by bird simply beggar belief. And the Lady Redmoor did not waste the opportunity.

ARLENE

(almost incredulous)
Yllowyyn.

YLLLOWYYN

*What are you doing out here, Lady Redmoor? Why aren't
you at--*

ARLENE

(trembling but urgent and desperate)
 --Kalth'yr, I beg your aid!

*
 *

ARLENE

The Lord Commander intends to murder me and make it look like Orcs! A violation of the Second Concordat! as a noble-born daughter of the House Redmoor, I petition you for redress before the High Council.

RY'Y

She is lying, Yllowwyn! She's a traitor and she would use your acquaintance with her to turn you against the law, your morals and your better judgment. Do not fall for it!

*
 *
 *
 *
 *
 *
 *
 *

YLLLOWYYN

(stoned giggling)
 ...Whaaaaaaaaaat?

*
 *
 *

ARLENE

Perhaps you should ask the Lord Commander why she's followed me to this empty field with weapon in hand. So you've something to tell *your parents on the Council* when I turn up murdered.

*
 *
 *
 *

RY'Y

And perhaps, Kalth'yr, the Lady Redmoor can explain that she is harboring an enemy of the Realm.

*

YLLLOWYYN

An enemy of the realm?

RY'Y

Yes, and she is caught red-handed. Even now she clutches to her breast the foul spawn of an Orc.

YLLLOWYYN

The spawn of an Orc? Lady, is this true?

ARLENE

(gulp)
 I believe its mother was an Orc, but it--

RY'Y

--And so having forsaken the laws of the Concordat, she has also forfeited its protections.

YLLLOWYYN

Lord Commander, while I certainly do not wish to challenge your authority in this matter, I must still--

--From afar, D'ayv's pigeon call whistle.

RY'Y
In Galadon's name, what now?

YELLOWYYN
Ah. That would be my...bird minder.

RY'Y
Your what?

Another whistle.

NARRATOR

Sensing Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's distraction, Arlene began to edge towards the water. She held the infant tight to her chest, preparing to run.

Ry'y quickly pulls her bow to full draw.

RY'Y

Move one inch more, Lady, and I'll shoot you where you stand.

The bow creaks.

Two horses approach, along with the rolling wheels of the pigeon cart, and the continuing whistle.

RY'Y

(stage whisper; threatening)
Speak one word out of turn and you'll get the same.

NARRATOR

With the bow raised, Yllowwyn saw the crude, flint-tipped arrow nocked thereon. At this juncture, I'll only say that is unfortunate how mortal minds are sometimes late in solving a puzzle, even when they've seen clearly all the pieces.

RY'Y

(still a threatening whisper)
I need barely a second.

NARRATOR

Then Ry'y lowered and unslung the bow, as D'ayv crested the hill. *

As D'ayv's horse, cart, and whistle draw closer, the pigeons calm down.

NARRATOR

As D'ay-vaad approached the stream, the three already standing beside it were eerily still. And soon, the pigeons' frenzied flapping calmed, then stopped altogether as the birds returned obediently to the arms of their erstwhile master.

D'AYV

Yllowyyn! There you are! I thought I'd lost you! Now, what did I tell you about that bird cage? The first rule of bird cages is that you gotta lock 'em up tight as can be, you goose! These proud creatures are just itchin' to fly away! Aren't you, babies? Now don't you worry - no real harm done. D'ayv got here just in time. You can count on D'ayv. We'll just pop 'em back in their cage, there you go, yes, yes you lovely things. Who loves you? Daddy D'ayv loves you. Yes he does!

NARRATOR

Even Arlene could not help but look perplexed at this, shall we say, exchange.

RY'Y

And who is this...
 ("*numb nuts piece of shit*")
 ...upstanding young Elf?

YLLOWYYN

Th'ayyd Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, allow me to present D'ay-vaad, the eldest child of--

D'AYV

--Lord Commander?! As I live and breathe! It is truly, truly an honor! I am your *biggest fan*! I've got tapestries of all your great battles. I'd love for you to sign one if you'd - now, give me just a moment, I know I've brought one of them!

RY'Y

Do you hold any ranks or titles, D'ay-vaad?

D'AYV

Not as of yet, Th'ayyd, but it'd be my honor and pleasure to assist you in any way you wish.
 (*sees Arlene*)
 And who's that over there? Hello! My name's D'ay-vaad.

RY'Y

I'm afraid the three of us were discussing a very sensitive matter, D'ay-vaad. I appreciate your offer of help but I must ask that you leave us some privacy.

D'AYV

Oh.
 (*embarrassed but recovers*)
 Oh, of course Th'ayyd! My sincerest apologies. Let me just water the horses, then I'll be out of your hair lickety-split.

RY'Y

Leave the horses, we'll keep an eye on them.

D'AYV

All right, then. Come and wet your whistles, sweet darlings.

D'ayv walks the horses to the edge of the water.

D'AYV

If you'll look after them, I'll just...head back across the hill. And send a pigeon to the White Forest letting them know we've met up.

RY'Y

(turns on the charm)

Why don't you wait just a bit on the pigeon, young squire? There might be much more to report very soon.

NARRATOR

Perhaps it was merely the canib root he'd ingested. But this slightly odd request only darkened the growing unease plain on Yllowyn's face.

D'AYV

Of course, Th'ayyd. Work smarter not harder, that's what I always say.

RY'Y

("Please go away.")
Brilliant.

NARRATOR

This thrown-away, insincere affirmation was in fact the highest compliment young D'ayv had ever been given - from his idol no less. He beamed ear to ear as he walked away.

D'ayv starts walking away.

D'AYV

(receding)

Just holler the second you need old D'ayv.

NARRATOR

And as D'ay-vaad walked back over the hill, Arlene's eyes flicked furtively to the drinking horses, a few strides away.

D'ayv's footsteps are gone completely.

RY'Y

Now. As to the traitor that stands before you, Yllowyyn, would you excuse her treachery and betray the realm?

ARLENE

Kalth'yr, please. If I've committed a crime it was not out of any malice. Whatever its mother was, this child has harmed no one. He looks capable of harming no one. Perhaps I have gravely misjudged, but before I am killed on the spot, I beg of you. Grant me the right to defend my name and my honor. That is all I ask.

RY'Y

She asks too much, given the gravity of her crimes.

YELLOWYYN

Th'ayyd, you will find in me no opponent of swift justice. But conscience does compel me to say that in my years at Guernatal's court, I saw nothing in the Lady's behavior to ever suggest ill-will towards the realm.

RY'Y

Then perhaps, Kalth'yr, you're not as keen an observer of Memyet as you like to think.

YELLOWYYN

Th'ayyd?

RY'Y

Allow me to paint you a picture of a noble-blooded Memyet girl, born to a mother killed in childbirth and a father thereby inconsolable. It is no secret that the late Lord Redmoor was rarely awake and sober in his latter years.

ARLENE

(tears welling up)

Unless you have lived my life, Lord Commander, you could never--

RY'Y

--And so it fell to her twin brother to care for her and their house. Her famously ill-tempered twin brother, who is rumoured in the most hushed of whispers to be many worse things besides.

ARLENE

You've cataloged my father's failings and my brother's sins. Am I to be charged with these?

RY'Y

No my Lady, you're to be charged with treason, I'm just walking the Kalth'yr through what he may have missed.

(back to Yllowyyyn)

So this Lady, always either neglected or mistreated by the men charged with caring for her, is given in marriage to Antonin Mooncrest. And by her presence here it is safe to say she objected to that match.

ARLENE

My flight is a matter of human law, and does not imply--

RY'Y

--Now perhaps she just disliked Lord Mooncrest. Or perhaps...she's not the marrying kind of Lady, if you take my meaning.

YLLOWYYN

I'm not sure I do.

RY'Y

Well we all know how closed-minded some Memyet can be regarding who puts their loins where.

ARLENE

Don't you dare.

RY'Y

Oh don't mistake me, I think it's absurd how hung up your kind get on such trivial variations in preference. But the fact is they do. And Yllowyyyn, I'm sure in your years at court, you noticed an exceptional closeness between the Lady here and her handmaiden.

ARLENE

You've no proof for what you're implying, and even if you did--

RY'Y

--Imagine, just imagine. The daily indignity of being desperately in love with the person right beside you, but never being able to express it. Unless I'm gravely mistaken, and the Lady wishes to look us in the eye and tell us the handmaiden is nothing more than a servant to her.

NARRATOR

Arlene raised her furious eyes to the two Elves, but could not bring herself to form any words.

RY'Y

And so this woman, with every reason to resent and despise the order into which she was born, with ample motive to burn the world down around her, stands before you holding that larval terror. Who could say what she is liable to do with it?

YELLOWYYN

You may speak wisely, as ever, Th'ayyd. Yet I cannot seem to shake my unease at her summary execution.

RY'Y

That's why the decision is not yours, Kalth'yr. You've seen much, but you are still young. And quite likely your parents have yet to make you fully aware of the intricacies and delicate nature of the peace that exists between The White Forest and human noble Houses. I must always act in the best interests of *both races*, even as I regret any appearance of callousness. Now stand aside.

ARLENE

Yllowyyn, please.

YELLOWYYN

Th'ayyd, I've realized...it's not the sentencing that disquiets me. It is the air of...subterfuge.

RY'Y

I beg your pardon.

YELLOWYYN

What need have you to use an Orcish arrow?

ARLENE

Because she is lying! She means to murder me and blame it on--

*

RY'Y

--Enough of your slanders.

Bow drawn again

NARRATOR

Ry'y drew and slung the bow again to shoot but this time Yllowyyn moved in front of it.

*

RY'Y

(cold fury)

Kalth'yr. If I didn't know any better, I might wonder whether you had spent too much time at the human court, and forgotten your own heritage.

YELLOWYYN

My first and foremost loyalty is to the High Council.
And I would not see them deceived.

RY'Y

Deceived.

RY'Y GIVES A DISDAINFUL SNORT.

RY'Y

When you were wetting your nice feather bed and sucking on your cream-fattened wet nurse, I was shitting in a frozen ditch and drinking muddy snow to stay alive, as I kept watch over a gods-forsaken mountain outpost you've never even heard of. While you were serenaded to sleep with jewel-studded harps, I was listening to the war cries of savages who would rape and murder everyone I knew if I didn't hold the line.

By the time your parents handed you the title you now wield, I had forgotten more deaths than you have ever seen. Everything you have - Everything! - the luxuries and privileges yes but also the simple fact of having room to live - was made possible by the constant vigilance of me and my predecessors, and by the blood and guts of my fallen siblings-in-arms.

And now, you ride in one battle, and you think - you dare to think - that you know better than me how to protect this world I've bled for.

A beat, as Yllowyyn chooses his words.

YELLOWYYN

Th'ayyd. There is much I do not presume to know. And I meant you no disrespect.

RY'Y

Well you *have* disrespected me. And you continue to do so as you obstruct me in my duties.

YELLOWYYN

But I know this much. As Kalth'yr to Guernatal, it is my duty to report to the Council on important matters regarding that House. And that House is fallen. Ardel Redmoor claims the High Throne. The commander of Guernatal's armies calls Lord Redmoor a regicide and usurper. And Lord Redmoor's twin sister is about to be killed in a deserted field by the Lord Commander of the Knights of the Wood. So by all means, Th'ayyd, do what you think you must.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyn stepped aside.

One footstep.

YLLOWYYN

But unless you've saved one of those Orc darts for me, and are prepared to lie about my murder to my parents' faces, the High Council will hear of what's happened here.

An interminable beat.

RY'Y

Well if that's how you feel about it Yllowyyn...
(really weighing her options)
 ...perhaps *some* concessions are acceptable. The Lady Redmoor shall have a trial.

ARLENE GIVES SOMETHING BETWEEN A SIGH AND A GASP.

NARRATOR

Arlene did not even attempt to conceal her sigh of relief.

RY'Y

Provided she consents to be bound, hooded, and gagged as we transport her to the White Forest.

ARLENE

I consent, so long as Yllowyyn is permitted to speak at my trial.

RY'Y

But that thing she is holding has no rights whatsoever. On this point you'll find me immovable. The Orc spawn dies before we leave here.

ARLENE

But he's hurt no one, he's even more innocent than I.

RY'Y

Do not tempt your astonishing good fortune, my Lady.

YLLOWYYN

Very well.
(has a thought; takes a risk)
 And...lest my loyalties be questioned further, I'd like to put the creature down myself.

ARLENE

Yllowyyn! Have a heart.

RY'Y

As you wish, Kalth'yr. Though I'm afraid I must insist it be done in my sight.

Yllowyyn walks to the water.

NARRATOR

Arlene stared desperately at Yllowyyn as he approached her.

ARLENE

Please. Don't.

Yllowyyn

Lady, see reason. Look how hated it is in this world. Allow me to do it a mercy. I promise I shall do so as quickly and painlessly as I can. *

NARRATOR

Tears streamed down Arlene's face, but she did not budge.

Yllowyyn

Please, my Lady.

The baby cries.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyn reached out and took hold of the child.

Sounds of a soft struggle.

NARRATOR

With his Elvish strength, he did not have to try very hard to pull it from Arlene's hands.

Crying intensifies.

ARLENE

(through tears)
Forgive me, Gwen.

NARRATOR

But as Yllowyyn held the child, and despite his heightened perceptions, the Elf could not discern a single significant difference between the Orcling and any of his Memyet friends.

Cut to a very brief flashback:

Yllowyyn

Sibling, what do you know of Orcs?...I'm curious of late as to what separates them from the Memyet.

YLLODYK

Well mostly the Black Mountains I suppose...Is a brown horse truly that different from a white one?

Back to present.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyn raised his eyes to meet Arlene's.

He takes a moment to steel himself.

NARRATOR

He knew that any sound he made, however quiet, would be clear as day to Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's Elf ears. But he also knew Arlene could not have spent her whole life at court without at least some skill in reading lips. And indeed, though Arlene was at first too perplexed to react, she understood Yllowyyn perfectly well when he silently mouthed...

All other sound drops out.

YLLOWYYN

(highly enunciated and kissing mic)
Ride.

Beat.

Sound smashes back in with a whoosh of movement and a horse whinny. The baby starts bawling and will continue do so through the end of this scene.

NARRATOR

With Elvish dexterity, Yllowyyn vaulted onto D'ayv's horse with one arm, cradling the infant in the other - not recommended for non-Elvish parents.

There's a thunder of hooves.

NARRATOR

And charged the destrier straight at Ry'y.

RY'Y

Dammit!

A bow shoots.

NARRATOR

With a killer's instinct, she instantly let loose an arrow trained perfectly at Yllowyyn's heart.

Stone pings off metal.

NARRATOR

But the flint arrow deflected off his moonsilver mail and instead lodged under his shoulder joint.

YELLOWYYN GRUNTS IN PAIN.

Another arrow shoots.

NARRATOR

As Yllowyyn involuntarily pulled his mount's head to one side, Ry'y loosed another arrow straight into its eye.

The arrow hits flesh. The horse cries out. We just start to become aware of more hooves approaching.

NARRATOR

The dying animal's legs gave out. Yllowyyn dove clear as the massive beast tumbled end over end in the direction of its charge.

A huge body flails across the ground.

NARRATOR

Ry'y lo-Th'yyt leapt back from the rolling carcass and lined up to put an arrow in Yllowyyn's eye at point-blank.

But now the other horse thunders right on top of us.

NARRATOR

But Arlene had charged her mount at the distracted General and was upon her. Ry's incredible reflexes saved her life...

Bones snap.

NARRATOR

...But she failed to pull her legs clear of the thundering hooves.

RY'Y CRIES OUT AS MUCH IN FRUSTRATION AS IN PAIN.

RY'Y

I'll have your head for this you traitorous filth!

RY'Y STRUGGLES FURIOUSLY.

NARRATOR

She tried to stand, but had no use of her badly broken legs.

RY'Y

Lieutenants! Lieutenants!

Arlene's horse slows a little.

NARRATOR

Arlene reined in her mount just enough for the prone Yllowyyyn to grab onto the bottom of the saddle.

YLLLOWYYYN

I've got it. Go!

The horse whinnies then gallops off again, dragging something thudding behind it. This whole mess recedes into the distance

YLLLOWYYYN

(receding with the horse)
Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow.

RY'Y

(cursing Yllowyyyn with all she's got)
Mem-rhypaas! Mem-kylab! Urrk-Hyylyet!

NARRATOR

As Yllowyyyn finally hoisted himself up behind Arlene, the two fugitives were already a hundred yards from Ry'y.

RY'Y

Oh fuck it all. D'ay-vaad! D'ay-vaad! D'ay-vaad get over here!

DISSOLVE TO:

2 INT. TENT NEAR FREEHOLD - VERY LATE NIGHT

2

It's maybe an hour before dawn. There are still nighttime insects, but maybe a few birds are also stirring to life.

NARRATOR

There was still an hour or so left of darkness when Nia came to the tent where Jen and Billy lay sleeping.

The tent opens.

NIA

(whispers)
Jen?

JEN

(half-asleep)
Mm?

NIA

You wanted me to wake you.

JEN

(waking up)
Mmmmm. Yeah...thanks.

NIA

I can take your turn if you wish. I doubt I'll be able to sleep.

JEN

(through a yawn)
No, no, I wanna be around. Hey Billy?

NARRATOR

She gently shook her paramour's shoulder.

BILLY

(also half-asleep)
Nnnnnnnngh.

JEN

I'm getting up.

BILLY

(earnest and valiant effort)
Nnnnnnnnokay. Okay. I'm up.

JEN

You can sleep, it's really okay.

BILLY

(yawning)
I said I was gonna wake up and help.

NARRATOR

It's a shame that Billy chose to rub his eyes at that exact moment, as he missed the very warm smile that Jen gave him.

BILLY GIVES ONE MORE **BIG YAWN.**

JEN
Brennen back yet?

NIA
No, not yet.

JEN
How's Regan holding up?

NIA
She's improving, little by little. She's had solid food.

JEN
That's good.
(laughs)
I just tried to picture you feeding her.

NIA
(chuckles too)
Oh, Gods no. Her feeding herself is truly a sight to behold though. Of all the things that have surely been said about Her *Majesty*, no one could ever deny that she is skilled with a knife.

JEN
Yeah, I know, it's like a theme in our relationship.

NIA
Ah, yes. My apologies.

JEN
And she kept the food down?

NIA
Yes. It's been near to four hours now.

NARRATOR
And then these two physicians and lovers of wisdom simultaneously remembered certain facts about animals and what happens to their food.

*

THE NARRATOR'S BIT MAY CONTINUE AD LIB.

*

JEN
Oh.

NIA
Oh.

BILLY
What?
(beat)
Ohh.

NIA

Well, it's a bit old-fashioned, but I've read that in the old bathhouses one might have used a rag affixed to a stick.

JEN

That'll work for now, I guess.
(then, playful)
 Hey do me a favor and let me roll this idea out to her?

3 INT. REGAN'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

3

NARRATOR

A few minutes later, in Regan's tent...

JEN

(coy; fucking with her)
 I'm sorry, I don't really understand. What's the problem you're having?

REGAN

I swear on Galadon's left tit, if you--

JEN

--Relax tough guy. Nia had a good idea - rag on a stick. She's rigging it up right now.

REGAN

(reluctant beat)
 Okay, well-played, you smarmy piece of shit.

NARRATOR

Jen gave a wildly exaggerated curtsy.

REGAN

Hey, Brennen's not back yet, is he?

JEN

No one's seen him since last night.

REGAN

Right.

JEN
He'll be back.

REGAN
I'm not trying to be cold. But we're not gonna have time to wait for him.

JEN
He'll be back.

4 EXT. RIVER CROSSING - SIMULTANEOUS

4

A horse gallops through the night - We're on it. There's a river in the distance that draws closer.

NARRATOR
Sir Brennen was, as you know, with Gwen, riding towards the Horse's Head Inn by the fastest land route available to them. At this very moment, they were approaching a bridge - a bridge which, when the rivers were high, was the only crossing for several miles.

BRENNEN
This could get a wee bit bumpy.

NARRATOR
A brief note on this bridge: it's a bit of a sore spot for me, as I was friendly with several of the oaks who were felled to build it. Still I must admit, the design was rather clever. After years of using rafts to cross the river, only to wind up a good bit downstream of where they intended, those who needed to cross eventually resolved to tie several rafts together spanning the width of the ford. This design meant the bridge was minimally disruptive to the flow of the river and the creatures therein, required no stone to build, and yet was sturdy enough that horses could be made to cross it. In fact, the only shortcoming to this design, at least as far as I can tell, is that if the ropes were to be severed, the whole thing would very quickly float away downstream.

BRENNEN
Are you ready?

GWEN
You just tell me if I'm holding on too tight.

BRENNEN
(*struggling to breathe*)
It's all right.

NARRATOR

And by now I hope you know me well enough to realize this design flaw is about to become very important. For as Brennen and Gwen approached the bridge from the north, they heard a peculiar sound coming from the south, across the river.

YLLLOWYYN

(screaming his lungs out from very far away)
SIR BRENNEN!

As this scene proceeds, Yllowyyn (and the horse he's on) should very gradually draw closer to us.

BRENNEN

Did you hear that?

YLLLOWYYN

SIR BRENNEN!

BRENNEN

Is that...

NARRATOR

On the horizon, a horse became visible.

We start hearing its hooves, very distant but getting closer.

BRENNEN

...Yllowyyn?

YLLLOWYYN

SIR BRENNEN!

BRENNEN

(shouting back)
KALTH'YR?!
(to Gwen)
Who's that he's riding with?

GWEN

(incredulous)
I...think it's Lady Arlene.

YLLLOWYYN

CUT! THE! BRIDGE!

BRENNEN

What's he saying?

NARRATOR

Brennen cupped his ear in his hand.

For the next line ONLY, EQ on Yllowyyn gets a tiny bit brighter and clearer. Like if you were cupping your ear.

YLLOWYYN

CUT! THE! BRIDGE!

BRENNEN

Cut the...no that can't be right.

NARRATOR

And then over the horizon appeared six more riders. In the distinctive way that gave moonsilver its name, the lunar light caught the opalescent armor of the Th'ar lo-Hyyl.

BRENNEN

Oh, Galadon help us.

YLLOWYYN

CUT THE BRIDGE!

Brennen's horse stops short and a heavily-armored Brennen dismounts.

NARRATOR

At one end of the bridge, Sir Brennen dismounted and readied his axe.

Now we're right with Yllowyyn so those hoofbeats are extremely present.

NARRATOR

And on the other end, Arlene spurred her mount furiously forwards.

YLLOWYYN

Don't let up, my Lady.

Hoofbeats switch from cold earth to hollow wood with a little splashing.

NARRATOR

And as soon as Arlene's horse made it across to the north bank...

Back to cold earth.

NARRATOR

...Sir Brennen swung his mighty axe, severing the bridge's ropes.

BRENNEN

Hyah!

*Splintering wood, and tense ropes snap away.
This happens twice.*

*Yllowyyn's horse recedes; Brennen mounts up
again.*

NARRATOR

Then he got back on his horse, and fled after Yllowyyn.

Another set of galloping hoofbeats recedes.

NARRATOR

The two steeds raced back in the direction of Freehold, as the ruined bridge drifted apart behind them. Look, I know it's a bit on-the-nose as far as metaphors go, but what can I say? What happened happened.

*Six more galloping horses approach but stop
short.*

NARRATOR

And as the Elf Knights were forced to stop at the now-impassable crossing, they could only watch as their quarry disappeared into the night.

END OF PART ONE.

PART TWO:

5 INT. CASTLE GUERNATAL (EASTERN STOREHOUSE) - NIGHT

5

There's a hollow wind outside, and maybe owls and wolves - just general spooky nighttime ambience.

NARRATOR

The night was dark and gloomy near Castle Guernatal. The Eastern Storehouse, once a vibrant hub of servants coming and going at all times, had been all but abandoned of late.

A bell tolls midnight.

At the stroke of midnight, two lonely guards kept their watch. These were the only two men in Redmoor's infantry without the clout or cleverness to barter their way out of that charge.

BERNARD

(antsy and scared)
Just two more hours. Just two more hours.

CARL

(not sure of this himself)
I've heard he doesn't come out when there's a full moon, so maybe--

--Stomach growl

CARL

Oh, chaos, what was that?!

BERNARD

Just my stomach. I ain't eaten today.

CARL

Well what'd you do that for?

BERNARD

Mess hall closed early. One of the cooks said they saw him.

CARL

Oh. Right.

BERNARD

Carl? D'you ever think--

WHISPERER

--LEAAAAAAAAAAVE.

This hangs in the air for beat.

CARL
(holding back panic)
 Bernard?

BERNARD
(having a genuine dis-associative episode)
 Aye Carl?

CARL
 D'you hear that?

BERNARD
 Yes I did, Carl.

WHISPERER
LEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAAVE.

CARL
 Reckon we ought to go fetch the Sergeant-at-Arms?

BERNARD
 Reckon it's a bit too late for that, Carl.

CARL
(trembling)
 What? Why?

BERNARD
 Why don't you look to your right, Carl?

SCARE CHORD!

CARL GIVES A **COMICALLY HIGH-PITCHED SCREAM.**

NARRATOR
 Inches away from poor Carl stood a hooded figure in black, blending almost perfectly into the night. Its face was masked too, but that was not what caught the guards' attention. Rather it was the knife the figure held, pointed forwards.

CARL
 Is that a dagger I can see in front of me?!

WHISPERER
 Spread these words I tell you now: these halls will know not peace, until Ardel the Usurper's black stain is removed from this land. Avenge the King's foul and unnatural murder.

NARRATOR

As you know by now, dear listener, this was not nearly the first of such occurrences around Castle Guernatal.

WHOOSH TO:

6 FLASHBACK MONTAGE - VARIOUS AROUND CASTLE GUERNATAL

6

Knitting needles clink together.

SEAMSTRESS

I swear Siggi, if I don't mend m'lady's cloak 'fore next it rains...Siggi?

NARRATOR

And as the spectre's message spread...

SEAMSTRESS **GASPS**.

WHISPERER

These halls will know not peace...

WHOOSH TO:

Hands splash in a washbasin.

TAILOR

Thomas. Be a dear and fetch me that black dye?

NARRATOR

...So too did the sense of trepidation...

THE TAILOR **STARTS AS WELL**.

WHISPERER

...Until Ardel the usurper's black stain...

WHOOSH TO:

A knife scrapes against a whetstone.

BUTCHER

Lucius, there you are. You've gotta cut *around* the bones, you dunce. My knives are always going dull.

NARRATOR

...amongst each and every person who heard tell.

BUTCHER

What are you standing there slack-jawed f--

--HE ALSO **GASPS** IN SURPRISE.

WHISPERER

...Is removed from this land.

WHOOSH BACK TO:

7 INT. CASTLE GUERNATAL (EASTERN STOREROOM) - RESUME LAST

7

WHISPERER

Avenge the King's foul and unnatural murder.

NARRATOR

So when the two guards in the storehouse saw the spectre they had already heard so much about...

WHISPERER

I am the Spirit of Justice. By gods. Remember me. Now leave!

NARRATOR

...They turned and fled.

Both guards scream.

They go running down the corridor.

NARRATOR

And once they were gone, the spectre lowered its hood. And as you, dear listener, are perceptive, clever, and no doubt exceptionally good looking, I doubt you'll be surprised to learn this was in truth no apparition from beyond the grave. No, of course, this haunting figure was what had become of our Lord Antonin Mooncrest. His grimy face fell into an almost religious reverie as looked at the wheels of cheese and barrels of apples and salt meat he had just won for himself.

ANTONIN

(little private prayer)

Bless Galadon and damn Ardel Redmoor.

Antonin ravenously devours some apples.

The apples crunch and squirt juice.

8 EXT. CAMP NEAR FREEHOLD - DAWN

8

There's a small fire amidst the birds of morning.

NARRATOR

The sun had just begun to inch over the horizon near Freehold, but Billy and Jen had already broken their fasts.

Footsteps approach and sit.

Everyone in this scene speaks to each other with a kind of stilted nervousness.

NELSON
Yo.

JEN
Couldn't sleep?

NELSON
Not really.

One more set of footsteps.

NIA
Good morning, Nelson.

NELSON
Hey.

NIA
Billy, Jen. You've managed to eat I see. That is well. Nelson, you should try and break your fast while you can. We know not what the day might hold.

BILLY
Anyone seen our guy?

NIA
Not yet. Though I am confident Sir Brennen will keep his word.

A beat.

Some wind picks up.

NIA
The sky in the west is pink, and cloudy. It snowed in the mountains last night. Perhaps the storm is headed our way.

NARRATOR
All right, Nia, I'll thank you to leave the metaphors to me. Everything's gotten a bit too literal, what with burning bridges and storms on the horizon, don't you think?

She wasn't wrong about last night's snow though.

9 EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - THE PREVIOUS NIGHT

9

A gale force blizzard whips around us.

NARRATOR

Allow me, listeners, a brief interlude. Our thoughts, as we consider Orcs and Elves and Men - and what each is and seems to be and isn't at all - must drift to the West. West of Blackhold, to the Black Mountains themselves. Foreboding land, to be certain. Sparsely populated by men who choose to live in solitude, tucked away in caves and cabins precariously perched on precipices.

(pause)

Oh yes, definitely still got it.

(continues)

Where the winter, when it starts, falls thickly, suddenly and as surely as night itself. No, not a very good place for wood sprites, and not for you either, I should think. Not even to vacation. But if one should take it upon themselves to cross from one side of the Mountains to the other, one would do well to travel before the height of the winter storms. For once they start, the mountains are nigh impassable, and even now, this early in the season, the snow blew down in a horizontal blur.

Footsteps trudge slowly through snow.

NARRATOR

Jethro the Woodsman had lived a long time in this desolate landscape. And while, as I said, it was a life most harsh, Jethro found that the calm press of the drifting snows helped him to focus on only the things that mattered to him. To each his own, I suppose. We join him - and you'll see why soon enough, I promise you - as he trudges steadily through the valley, his pack overladen with supplies to last the winter and a mangy old dog at his heels.

JETHRO

(singing to himself)

*Rough the winter winds do rage and rage, *
*'nother year hath turned a page. *
*Blow, gust and freeze you bitter sky, *
*For your cold can't freeze I. *
*Spark the fire up and warm the hearth, *
*Merrily, now gather 'round. *
*Though we won't see the sun or the green of the leaves, *
'Til the snow doth melt from the ground.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*

The dog sniffs, then growls, and bounds away a bit.

JETHRO

Woah now, Caleb! Stay on the path, ya hear? You fall into a snow pit, I ain't going in after your raggedy old hide.

The dog barks urgently and with alarm.

JETHRO

You smell something, boy? Whatcha got there?

A weight hits the ground followed by faster footsteps.

NARRATOR

The old man lowered his pack to the ground, his back quite grateful for even a brief reprieve. Cautiously, he walked toward the mound of snow his hound was inspecting. He saw then, that the ground around it was stained the color of rust. Or perhaps, blood?

The wind flares up.

JETHRO

Caleb! Don't touch that I said!

Hands brush away snow.

NARRATOR

Brushing aside the drifted snow, he discovered a hand...and then an arm...and then, yes, you see where this is going. Tucked into a small depression in the side of the craggy pass, he found a body.

JETHRO

Ach! Skin's all blue and grey already.
(*then, puzzled*)
Still bleeding, though, ain't he?

NARRATOR

And then the body twitched.

TRAVELER

(*badly shivering*)
W-wait. Help. Help me.

10 INT. JETHRO'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

10

The storm continues outside, but we're inside with a merrily crackling fire.

NARRATOR

Now you'll recall that when we last saw General Traft, he was fleeing the battle of Freehold, with his tail between his legs. Not literally. Orcs don't have tails, as you should have figured out by now. And anyway, the general of the Orcish forces had only one Orc parent. Neither here nor there at the moment...just reminding you.

His armies routed and his Templar allies as feckless as the chaos god they served, Traft had sought to make his way back across the Black Mountains, to regroup with the Orcish nations and nurse his severely wounded pride. However, winter having fallen early, and without gear to protect himself from the storm, Traft found himself trapped between a rock and a...well, a lot of snow. Which was where this Jethro fellow had found him, and brought him in to his humble home and hearth.

JETHRO HUMS HIS WARMING SONG.

The dog barks, clearly desperate to be heard.

JETHRO

Hush now, Caleb! Our guest here don't even know which way is up without you trying to yammer at him.

The dog tries one more bark.

JETHRO

I said HUSH! TSK! TSK!

The dog whimpers.

JETHRO

Now let's see here...

Jethro dips a rag, picks it up, and rings it out.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

TRAFT LAPS THIRSTILY AT THE DROPLETS.

JETHRO

There you go. That's it, nice and easy.

TRAF T
(barely conscious)
 What's...where...

JETHRO
 Hush now, and rest. You've a mighty thirst, near to
 killed you. You'll sick if you drink too fast.

TRAF T NODS BACK OFF.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

11 INT. JETHRO'S COTTAGE - MORNING

11

*The blizzrd still rages outside but the fire
 in here is healthy and warm.*

NARRATOR
 It was not until morning that Traft's faculties began
 to return to him.

TRAF T
(waking)
 Where am I? What is this place?

NARRATOR
 He looked around the small cottage where he found himself.
 It was not the spartan place one might expect to find at the
 borders of a civilization. It was, however, in a shambles.
 Guttered candles languished in the corners, stacks of books
 littered floor and table alike, a map of constellations was
 pinned to one wall, and beneath it a compass, papers, quills
 and scribblings lay scattered haphazardly. Notably, the
 ceiling of the dwelling had been studded with tiny pieces of
 glass. Sunlight slanted through the single window, bouncing
 erratically about the shards. But even more notably, the
 fire was warm and the food cooking over it set Traft's
 stomach to rumbles. His hand went to his side, tenderly
 touching his bandaged wound.

JETHRO
 Morning to you. You slept mighty long. Happens when
 you're weary of the road. Or when you caught a pick-axe
 in the flank there. Nasty, nasty wound that.

A wooden bowl/spoon clatter on a table.

JETHRO
 Reckon you'll be wanting sommat to eat. Have your
 porridge and get some strength back. Drink that tea,
 too, before it cools. No cream, sorry to say, but eat
 and drink and do so with the blessing of the gods.

The dog barks furiously; desperate almost.

JETHRO

Hush yourself now, Caleb!

The dog keeps barking.

JETHRO

TSK! TSK!

Now it whimpers.

JETHRO

Into the cellar with you. Don't look me like that. Get!

One last whimper...

NARRATOR

With a final glance over its shoulder at Traft, the despondent-looking mutt sulked off.

TRAFT

He don't take kindly to strangers.

JETHRO

Don't take it personal. I'm sure he thinks he's helping.

(beat)

Ain't you gonna eat? I know you must be hungry.

NARRATOR

Traft, for his part, had been trying to size up his host and his food as quickly as he could. This was not lost on Jethro.

JETHRO

(good-natured)

Now if I'd any ill-will towards you, why'd I not've acted on it before, when you was all but dead to the world?

NARRATOR

Traft very nearly smiled, in spite of himself, before partaking greedily of the food in front of him.

*

A spoon moves rapidly in a mushy bowl.

TRAFT **INHALES** THE FOOD, HARDLY EVEN CHEWING.

TRAFT

(mouth full of food)

Forgive me. I've known some downright untrustworthy folks in my day.

JETHRO

Oh, now that I understand, boy. No apology needed.

TRAFT

You put salt pork in this?

Very brief pause

TRAFT

It's damn good. Didn't know you could raise pigs up past the tree line.

JETHRO

You can't. But you can sure freeze anything you venture out to hunt.

TRAFT

Well I thank you for your kindness. I'll not overstay my welcome, I aim to be on my way as quickly as I can.

JETHRO

Doubtful. The nine winds have started their gusting. Barely got back with my supplies for the season. You'll not be going over the mountains this year, that's for damn sure. Course...there's other ways of getting where you want to go, but--

TRAFT

--If you know another way through that pass, I'd pay handsomely to know it too.

JETHRO

But I don't recommend venturing out tonight.

NARRATOR

Traft gave no answer in either direction, but helped himself to another heaping spoonful.

He spoons up some more hot mush.

TRAFT

Sorry, I haven't even asked your name.

JETHRO

Called Jethro. A good workaday name, picked it myself. Wasn't always such.

NARRATOR

Then Traft happened to notice an oil painting, framed with precious but tarnished metal, propped up in a corner opposite an old looking glass. Two things struck him about this painting.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The first was the expressiveness of the eyes - remarkable even to such an unsophisticated critic as Traft. The second was the resemblance of the young, well-dressed subject of the painting to the ragged old man who sat before him. Traft gestured towards the painting.

TRAFT

Kinsman of yours, Jethro?

JETHRO

Oh yea, of a sort.

(pause)

Would you ever believe the man in that painting was sitting right before you even now?

TRAFT

'Spose I could. A man wears different faces throughout his life.

JETHRO

Feels like a lifetime ago. Always figured it were worth keeping. When a man's all by himself, it never hurts to remember what he once looked like.

TRAFT

Powerful thing a portrait. Lots of folks might take it for granted, but getting to choose how you wanna appear to the world...that's no small thing.

Spoon hits bowl again.

JETHRO

I'd ask your name, boy, but I think I already know it.

NARRATOR

Traft looked up from his meal.

*

JETHRO

Knowed it as soon as I saw that tattoo on your chest.

NARRATOR

Traft couldn't stop the brief look of panic from crossing his face.

JETHRO

Don't worry, I ain't fixing to turn you over to the Elves. Ain't got much use for them, truth be told.

TRAFT

(Still a little wary)

Is that so?

JETHRO

Greedy for power something fierce, says me. Rule all they touch with an iron fist, however much gold they like to plate it with.

TRAFT

(perking up)

Well if you've heard of me, you probably know I'm inclined to agree with that.

JETHRO

It's why I come all the way out here. Get away from all that, thought I. There's a wandering, pioneer spirit in my blood, my pa always said, going back generations. Go west, thought I! Go west. Where the land's still untamed, and a man can build sommat for himself.

TRAFT

You know, you might be surprised just how tamed things are west of the mountains. Where my people have built.

JETHRO

Aye, but that's just the rub ain't it? The Elves got they greasy fingers in that too. No, says I. No man'll ever be truly free in this world so long as the Elves rule it.

TRAFT

(pleasantly surprised; "I can work with this.")
Not often one meets a man who thinks like you do, Jethro.

JETHRO

Well, not many's been around so long as I have, seen what I seen.

TRAFT

Then you know it doesn't have to be like it is.

JETHRO

Nay, nay, it don't.

TRAFT

The Elves are on top now, but they are not invincible.

JETHRO

Not invincible, no. And for what it's worth, I ought to say I've no ill will toward your kind. Never believed what the Elves said about you anyhow. Seems to me it takes a certain kind of virtue to build something in so hard a land.

TRAFT

You continue to strike me as a very wise man, Jethro.

JETHRO

I dare say though, you may be thinking about freeing yourselves all wrong. Burning the world down around you and all.

TRAFT

(heard this before)
Ah. You think I'm too violent.

JETHRO

Nay, nay, not exactly--

TRAFT

(defensive; has had to give this speech too often)
--If a dog has a bone that he doesn't want to share, that's understandable. If he keeps that bone and then takes mine - and then takes yours?

JETHRO

Aye, put him down and get another dog. Or...find sommat you value that cannot be taken from you. For no matter where you go, or how many mountains you climb, you'll still be you when you get to the top. If you want for sommat, sometimes it's best to look within. Me? I care not for the world. Burn it, or don't. Run from it, or don't. But what if instead, you tried to turn the world inside-out.

TRAFT

Afraid I don't follow.

JETHRO

Tell me young man. Do you believe in the uncorruptible soul?

TRAFT

("Oh, great. One of these.")
Ah. I see. Tell you the truth, Jethro. I never much cared for priests and chapels if that's what you're asking. And I don't think there's anything in this world that's uncorruptible.

JETHRO

Well that's just it my boy. Uncorruptible don't mean a man can't be lead to do wrong. It just means that a man's will is what it is and ain't what it ain't. It can't age or decay or break like his body can. In that way it's the purest most perfect version of a man, no matter what ends it's applied towards.

TRAFT

One way to put it I guess.

JETHRO

Take my little old hand for instance.

TRAFT

Your hand?

NARRATOR

Jethro held out his hand so that the fire in his hearth cast a dancing shadow behind it.

JETHRO

No matter what I do, my hand can't pass through this table.

He knocks a few times on a wooden surface.

JETHRO

I could try and break the table, but I'd break my hand first more like. But the shadow?

NARRATOR

He waved his arm next to the table to demonstrate.

JETHRO

Passes over, through, around the table ever which way.

TRAFT

(lost)

I suppose that's true.

JETHRO

You say you wanna get over the mountains and see your kin. And I say there's another way.

TRAFT

I've heard of passages from underneath the mountains from the old times. If you've got any maps, or--

JETHRO

--No, no, no, no. You're thinking about it all wrong. What if the mountains weren't even there?

TRAFT

(Okay, nevermind. This guy's nuts.)

Jethro, I thank you for your aid, but as you know, I have people who depend on me, and interesting as your thoughts are, I'm afraid I've no time for philosophy. I think it would be best if I returned to my people with haste.

JETHRO

Nay, nay, I told you you'll not leave here tonight.

TRAFT

I appreciate your concern. But I'm a man who values his freedom. Like you. So I trust you'll not think me too rude.

A chair is pushed out.

NARRATOR

Traft rose from the table to gather his things--and collapsed to a heap on the floor, his legs suddenly jelly.

His body crumples.

TRAFT

What the--

JETHRO

--There's black nightshade in your tea.

TRAFT

You lyin' bastard.

JETHRO

Like I said. You might travel tonight but not on your own two legs.

12 INT. TENT NEAR FREEHOLD - JUST AFTER DAWN

12

The birds of the early morning chirp.

NARRATOR

We'll return to the mountains and Traft's predicament in due time, I assure you. But for now I must take you back to Regan's tent near Freehold.

Tent opens.

NIA

Your Grace? Sir Brennen has returned.

REGAN

He's late.

NIA

The Kalth'yr is with him.

REGAN

You're shitting me.

NIA

That's not all. There is also--well, you'd better see for yourself. Time seems to be of the essence.

REGAN

You don't fucking say.
 ("Well?")
 Send them in.

*Note to mixer: For this scene to avoid Arlene/
 Regan sonic confusion, I think we should pan
 Nia and Regan slightly R and everyone else
 slightly L.*

NARRATOR

Nia ushered in Brennen, Yllowyyn, Arlene, and Gwen. The former two knelt immediately, and the latter two quickly followed suit.

BRENNEN
 Your Grace.

YLLOWYYN
 Your Grace.

REGAN

(cautiously impressed?)
 You put that arrow in him, Brennen?

BRENNEN

No, Your Grace. But I think you had better hear the account from him.

REGAN

Who's this with you?

BRENNEN

Allow me to present the Lady Arlene Mooncrest, born to House Redmoor.

ARLENE

Your Grace. Brennen tried to tell me something of your claim on the ride here. I must admit, it's all a bit of a blur. But, I know for a fact my brother's claim is false. And if Brennen and Yllowyyn recognize you as Queen then that is enough for me.

REGAN

See? Who says I can't build a court Nia? All right, everyone get up except the Elf.

NARRATOR

The queen's subjects complied, which was when Regan's gaze fell upon Gwen.

REGAN

Wait, don't I know you from somewhere?

GWEN

Aye, Your Grace. We met beneath Castle Guernatal.

REGAN

Right, that was you. Sorry if I scared you. Brennen, you know you owe this woman your life?

BRENNEN

Beg pardon, Your Grace?

REGAN

I was fucking gone from that castle, 'til this one appealed to my better spirits.

BRENNEN

(shocked)
She...how did--

REGAN

--Story for another day. Right now the splint needs to start talking.

NARRATOR

I cannot stress enough the novelty of the Elf's demeanor in this moment. Far from the youthful bravado to which you are surely accustomed, he instead remained kneeling, kept his eyes on the ground, and spoke in muted tones.

YELLOWYYN

Your Grace, I have made many and terrible mistakes, and I owe an accounting for each and every one. But I swear on my life and honor that willfully deceiving Your Grace was never among them. What I now know, I could have never believed had I not seen it for myself.

REGAN

Yeah? What's that?

YELLOWYYN

Ry' lo-Th'yyt is...she was prepared to murder the Lady Arlene, in cold blood and without a trial, and to falsely blame the murder on Orcs. All to conceal what the lady had found.

REGAN

Which is?

ARLENE

This, Your Grace.

The baby fusses.

NARRATOR

Arlene approached Regan, carrying her swaddled bundle.

GWEN

We found him next to a dying Orc, Your Grace. We think it was hers, on account of she spent her last breath begging me to save it. Only it looks like every other babe I've ever seen.

BRENNEN

It is just as you said, Your Grace. My shame for having doubted you knows no words.

REGAN

I gather things didn't go to plan for Ry'y lo-Th'yyt.

ARLENE

The Kalth'yr risked his life to save mine. He took that arrow as he rode the Lord Commander down.

REGAN

You did *what*?

YELLOWYYN

She's hurt but still lives. She'll be upon us as soon as she's able. A few hours at the most.

REGAN

So hurt or not you both walked away. I know that gift. What's to say this isn't to throw me off your scent so you can spy for your Elf friends?

YELLOWYYN

Only my word, which I know is debased by my own deeds. I am at your mercy.

A knife is unsheathed.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyn unsheathed the gilded hunting knife, gifted to him by his parents years ago, and held it to his throat with the hilt facing Regan.

YELLOWYYN

If Your Grace wills that I answer for my errors with my life, then I've no standing to protest. But if you'll have me, I would do my penance by fighting beside you. A skilled tracker, born and raised of the wood-folk, will be no small advantage in the fight to come. Only you had better decide quickly, Your Grace. Ry'y lo-Th'yyt is furious, and she is desperate, and she is on her way.

REGAN

Look at me, Yllowyyn.

NARRATOR

Regan held the young Elf's gaze, unblinking, for quite some time.

Beat.

REGAN

You believe him, Brennen?

BRENNEN

I do, Your Grace.

Another beat.

REGAN

Stand up.

YLLOWYYN GROANS AND STRUGGLES A BIT AS HE STANDS.

His chain mail jingles.

REGAN

You fight for me now. And I'll bring you in on my plans if and when I decide it's wise. That clear?

YLLOWYYN

Admirably so, Your Grace.

REGAN

Nia, take him out of earshot. And dig that dart out of him.

NARRATOR

Nia and Yllowyyn both bowed low, and then exited the tent.

They open the tent and walk away.

REGAN

I take it you've had a change of heart, Sir Brennen?

BRENNEN

Your Grace, I still struggle to imagine any way we survive a war against the Th'ar lo-Hyyl.

(beat)

But there's naught to do now but try. I am at your service, without reservations.

REGAN

Good. Let's go to work.

END OF PART TWO.

PART THREE:

13 EXT. FREEHOLD - MORNING

13

There's a bustling military camp somewhere nearby, but it's off to one side and a little ways off.

Also, a baby is fussing a little.

GWEN

You sure you're all right, love?

ARLENE

I'm alive, and I've you beside me.

GWEN

Oh, my love...
(*beat, then bursts into tears*)
I'm so so so sorry.

Cloth rustles as Gwen pulls Arlene into a big, desperate hug.

GWEN

(*muffled against Arlene's shoulder*)
I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

NARRATOR

It was a tender and tearful moment, when Gwen and Arlene could finally catch their collective breath in the camp near Freehold.

ARLENE

My dear Gwen, you owe me no apology.

GWEN

I never should've left you on your own. If I ever thought you'd be in danger...

ARLENE

You couldn't have possibly known. And you left to keep us safe, remember?

GWEN

But if I hadn't talked us into keeping him, this never would've happened.

This sits in the air for a beat - truer than Arlene wants to admit.

ARLENE

Yes. Well...

GWEN

Don't try and deny it for my sake.

ARLENE

(struggling to respond)

We can only decide things with what we know at the time.

Beat. That wasn't good enough.

ARLENE

And you were right about one thing at least. If we had left him behind, I don't know if I could have ever faced my reflection again. You have always kept me my kindest self.

GWEN

In a world that keeps showing us how cruel it is. Might make me a fool.

ARLENE

We've made a choice. Together. Now we must make the best of it.

The baby full-on cries now.

ARLENE **SNIFFS.**

ARLENE

("Ew.")

As if on cue. Come. Let us see if we can't find some fresh linens for him.

14 EXT. NEARBY - SIMULTANEOUS

14

We're now in the middle of the morning hubbub, and we're walking through it, footsteps crunching beneath us.

NARRATOR

Bryce Riverfell did not know why Brennen had requested his presence so urgently in the nondescript tent on the outskirts of his camp.

FREEHOLD SOLDIER

(panned as we walk past him)

Bryyyyyyyyyyyce.

BRYCE
As you were, Private.

NARRATOR
But given the substance of the previous night's conversation with Brennen, he assumed it was not for small talk.

15 INT. TENT NEAR FREEHOLD - CONTINUOUS

15

Bryce opens the tent and walks inside.

NARRATOR
And as you know by now, there was much to fill him in on. Brennen and Regan did so as quickly as they could.

BRYCE
Okay, so...you're the High Queen?

REGAN
Damn right.

BRYCE
On account of a bloodline back to Gunther, that he planned to acknowledge before Ardel had him killed.

BRENNEN
Just so.

BRYCE
("Fuck it.")
All right.

Armor creaks.

NARRATOR
Bryce knelt, and bowed his head to Regan.

REGAN
You seem...easily convinced and not convinced enough, at the same time. Somehow.

BRYCE
All due respect, Your Grace, it sounds fucking daffy to me. But Sir Brennen would not lie about this.

REGAN
I'll take it, for now.

BRYCE

And the Knights of the Wood are coming to kill you, because you know that Orc babies are just like our babies.

REGAN

That's right.

BRYCE

Shit. We gotta get you outta here.

REGAN

You got a fortress, an army, and you claim to believe us, and the best you got is we gotta leave?

BRYCE

I'd do more if I could.

REGAN

If you wanted to and had any guts, you mean.

BRYCE

Listen, I've got a ruined fortress and half an army. And to be perfectly honest, you can wave that baby in front of whoever you want. Everyone here, to a man, owes his life to Ry'y lo-Th'yyt in that last battle. Could they be persuaded? Some maybe. But enough to make the difference? In the next two hours? I wouldn't bet your life on it, that's for damn sure.

REGAN

Okay, maybe you're right. But that leaves me right back where I started.

BRENNEN

I understand the imposition, Bryce. But if there's anything you can--

*

BRYCE

--I've got some gold socked away. It's yours. Should be enough for passage on a ship, and to keep the captain from asking too many questions.

BRENNEN

That's...exceptionally generous of you.

BRYCE

Consider us even. Besides, with the jewels we got from the battle I doubt I'll miss it much anyway.

REGAN

That's appreciated, General. Unfortunately, I ain't seen too many sea captains out here in the middle of the fucking flood plains.

BRYCE

No. But...
(*thinking aloud*)
...Supplies go back and forth to Seahold every day by river barge.

NARRATOR

Meanwhile...

16 INT. DIFFERENT TENT - SIMULTANEOUS

16

Same general location as prev. for ambiance, but changed up just a little to convey different location.

NARRATOR

...In another tent nearby...

NELSON

You guys know how I feel.

BILLY

Yeah, we got it, Malcolm X.

JEN

Billy, not helping.

NELSON

This isn't a fucking joke.

JEN

Nelson, the Elves are on their way here, right now. We're not giving up if we live to fight another day.

NIA

Jen is correct there, but I doubt fleeing right now will do you much good. The Th'ar lo-Hyyl know you were with us, I'm afraid. There is nowhere you could get before they arrive where they will not find you all the more easily.

JEN

So what then?

NIA

That is what Her Majesty and Sir Brennen are trying to decide.

BILLY

Don't we get a say in it?

BRENNEN
(panned, through tent)
 Nia!

NIA
 Not this time, it seems.

17 INT. REGAN'S TENT - A FEW MINUTES LATER

17

Back to where we were in the previous scene.

NARRATOR
 Brennen returned to his Queen's quarters with Nia and the three Pennsylvanians in tow.

The tent opens and five people walk in.

REGAN
 Thanks Brennen. Take care of the other thing?

BRENNEN
 Your will be done.

Then Brennen leaves again.

REGAN
 Here's the plan. We're borrowing a river barge.

NELSON
 And by "borrow," you mean...

REGAN
 So little faith. Riverfell knows.
(stage wisper)
 If we were stealing it, I'd say we're relieving him of it.
(back to the announcement)
 We'll take the barge east to the coast.

NIA
 That will leave us near Seahold.

REGAN
 Yeah I can read a map.

NIA
 No, it's only...I'm known in Seahold. I grew up there. It may be wise for me to disguise myself.

REGAN
 Hang on, I'll get to that part. But from Seahold, it's north to Armstrungard by sea.

NARRATOR

At the mention of Armstrungard, Jen flicked her eyes towards Nia, hoping to catch her attention. But Nia was lost in her own thoughts.

JEN

What's in Armstrungard?

REGAN

Ain't you been there? Sewer rats, horse shit, and cum mostly, but it's where I know how to hide. And we need to hide. This should go without saying but you don't tell a fucking soul where we're headed. As soon as it's safe to poke our heads out just a little bit, we start finding some rough-and-tumble, Elf-hating sonsabitches whose swords are for sale, and we surround ourselves with as many of them as we can.

BILLY

I didn't know we were so loaded.

REGAN

Loaded?

JEN

He means this all sounds expensive.

REGAN

We got the coin for the ship. The sellswords...we'll figure it out once we're in Armstrungard.

NIA

(not thrilled)

I imagine we'll be "relieving" a few people of their possessions.

REGAN

I'm open to suggestions. Here's the thing though. Anywhere we go on this river, the barge'll be pretty easy to see from the banks. Especially for Elves. So we gotta hide while we're on the barge.

JEN

("Go on...")
Okay.

REGAN

It's...not gonna be the comfiest trip you've ever taken.

18 EXT. RIVER BANK - SIMULTANEOUS

18

*There's a not-too-fast-not-too-slow river
right next to us.*

NARRATOR

Just then, on the banks of the river, Sir Brennen was busy hoisting a blindfolded Yllowyn into a barrel, which had until recently held overripe cheese.

BRENNEN

(straining to lift)
I'm sorry for the indignity, Yllowyn.

Yllowyn

(winces)
Mind the shoulder, mind the shoulder.

BRENNEN

Right, sorry.

*Some wood gets kicked as Yllowyn is lowered
into the barrel.*

BRENNEN

We'll find you a proper physician soon as we can. I hope you understand why this all is necessary.

Yllowyn

(inside a barrel with the top open)
Do I even dare ask where we're headed? In case I fall out and need to swim?

BRENNEN

Ah...

*
*

REGAN

(reverb-y flashback)
Tell him he's going over fuck yourself falls, and if he complains I'll kill his ass with a wine cork.

BRENNEN

Ah, Her Majesty declines to share that with you, per the agreed upon terms of your surrender.

Brennen slides the lid onto the barrel.

Yllowyn

(muffled through lid)
Very well.

Brennen hammers the lid shut.

Two pairs of footsteps.

ARLENE

We're ready, Sir Brennen. Have you gotten the milk?

BRENNEN

Nia is fetching it as we speak.

ARLENE

Then we've all we need.

BRENNEN

I am sorry about this, my lady. It is for your own safety.

ARLENE

I understand.

BRENNEN

Here, let me help you.

As Arlene climbs into her barrel, the baby bawls.

BRENNEN

The wee thing is terrified. But there's naught for it, I'm afraid.

ARLENE

(in an open barrel)
It's all right. Give him to me.

Brennen lowers the still-bawling baby into the open barrel.

ARLENE

*Young ladies be warned, hear what I tell *
*Go not into the woods to the Wishing Well. *
*Stay close to the path and do not stray *
For if you'll return I cannot say.

As Arlene continues to sing, the baby calms, even as Brennen slides on the lid and hammers it shut.

19 INT. REGAN'S TENT - SIMULTANEOUS

19

Same setting as before

NARRATOR

Back in Regan's tent...

JEN

(not awesome)
Barrels. Awesome.

BILLY

Come on, really?

NELSON

The river barrels are maybe the best scene in *The Hobbit* and maybe the worst scene in *The Hobbit* movie, so there's a real range of how this can go.

REGAN

We will need someone to steer the barge though.

JEN

Nose goes?

NELSON

(one nostril shut)
Shot-not-it!

REGAN

It's not too complicated. If we're about to hit a rock or something you just turn the rudder the other way. It'll need to be someone pretty strong though. And there's not much mistaking Brennen, even if we put a hood over him.

NIA

So then...

20 EXT. RIVER BARGE - DAY

20

We're right in the middle of a medium-speed river.

BILLY

*I'm on a barge motherfucker
take a look at me, /
My friends hiding in barrels
next to me. /
Can't go fast but I'm livin
large. /
Can't stop me motherfucker
cause I'm on a barge!*

NARRATOR

(hams it up)
Now dear listeners: When a party of adventurers is crammed into barrels aboard an essentially oversized raft, on a quickening river, helmed only by their most cocksure member, any number of calamities might befall them.

BILLY WORDLESSLY HUMS THE FAST PART OF "COME SAIL AWAY."
THIS CONTINUES THROUGH THE END OF THE SCENE.

NARRATOR

But none did, as it turns out. In fact, in spite of his so-called singing, Billy did quite admirably, his athlete's instincts serving him well. So we may safely turn our attention from that river, and back to Redmoor-occupied Castle Guernatal.

FADE TO:

21 INT. ARDEL'S CHAMBERS - AFTER NOON

21

We're inside a musty, dusty room in the early afternoon - want to capture that feeling when you're hung over and you slept in too long and now it's too late to do stuff and you feel like shit.

NARRATOR

The sun had already begun its slow and inevitable descent by the time the Bishop of the Castle came to the chambers currently occupied by Lord Ardel Redmoor.

Door creaks open very gently.

HEAD PRIEST
Milord?

ARDEL
GAH!

HEAD PRIEST
AHHH!

The Priest farts.

NARRATOR

Ardel and the Head Priest managed to startle one another as Ardel awoke from a dazed stupor.

HEAD PRIEST
My...my apologies, milord. I fright easily.

ARDEL
Curse you, you buffoon! Why would you rouse me in the dead of night?

HEAD PRIEST
But, 'tis past noon, milord.

ARDEL
What? You...

NARRATOR

And yet, sure enough, Ardel quelled his insults for the old man after he glanced towards the window. The noontime sun shone through the curtains.

ARDEL **GROANS**.

NARRATOR

Ardel tried to arise, but disturbed the several days' worth of papers strewn over his bed and person.

Dozens of messy papers flutter to the ground.

NARRATOR

I take a certain pleasure, I must admit, in telling you that Ardel had not been having an easy time of it in his new leadership position. I know of course that the best storytellers are those who can maintain a personal distance. That said...well, have you met Ardel Redmoor?

HEAD PRIEST

Milord, your subjects gather in the Great Hall for you.

ARDEL

What? Are they rioting? I'll have every one of their heads on a pike!

HEAD PRIEST

Oh goodness, no, milord.

ARDEL

Have they sided with the treacherous Mooncrests?!

HEAD PRIEST

With the Mooncrests, milord?

ARDEL

(frantic)
You doddering idiot. Of course! I have had reports of troop movements mustering on their end. There can be little doubt they are preparing to march, and biding their time until they can foment more chaos!

(whispers)

Indeed I've no doubt their spies are listening to us even now. Have been since my ascension.

HEAD PRIEST

How would they--

ARDEL

--Prior to my ascension in fact.

HEAD PRIEST

That...would be vanishingly difficult for them to achieve, milord.

ARDEL

Well...when I said "listening" I made quote marks in the air with my fingers, didn't you see the quote marks I made in the air with my fingers?

HEAD PRIEST

Apologies milord, my eyesight oft fails me. I must have not seen the quote marks you made in the air with your fingers.

ARDEL

Why do the rabble claim they are here?

HEAD PRIEST

Milord, it is customary for the lord of this keep to hear petitions from his subjects, one day each month. It is a tradition stretching back to days of yore, when I had only turned three score and--

ARDEL

--No no no no no, you blithering idiot. An audience? In public? The insurgents clearly wish to lure me out and attack. Undoubtedly Julius Mooncrest has paid all these *subjects* - air quotes! - to appear.

HEAD PRIEST

Milord, with respect these folk have worked this land for many years. There's not one among them not known by sight and name to at least one other among them.

ARDEL

Can't you treat with them? These peasants love their holy symbols after all.

HEAD PRIEST

Respectfully, milord, what with the recent death of their King, peaceful be Gunther's rest...

NARRATOR

The Bishop signed a circle around his heart with great earnestness. Ardel rolled his eyes.

HEAD PRIEST

...And then the tumult of the wedding...

NARRATOR

But a cold, sickly pit opened in Ardel's stomach at the thought of his sister.

HEAD PRIEST

...and now the looming threat of war, the populace is uneasy.

ARDEL

What do I care if they are uneasy?

HEAD PRIEST

Well, milord, I have found that the peasantry must feel as if the world around them is well-ordered and under control, if they are to do their work as normal.

ARDEL

If they are not doing their work then we shall flog them until they do.

HEAD PRIEST

If you wish to catch bees, milord, you may use honey or vinegar. Vinegar costs time and wastes good wine.
(on a tangent)
Honey needs bees, and...I forgot where I was headed with this.

ARDEL

Of course you did. Anyway why would I want to catch bees? Leave me alone.

HEAD PRIEST

Come now, milord, just one day this month. Then you may make sport or whatever our wish while the weather is still fair. I've already sorted the petitioners for you.

ARDEL

Agh! Very well. If it means you'll badger me with such pedestrian chores no longer. Summon the guards to escort me downstairs

*
*

22 INT. CASTLE GUERNATAL GREAT HALL - A LITTLE LATER

22

We're in a huge, torch-lit stone hall in a gothic castle.

NARRATOR

It was yet another half hour before Lord Ardel managed to drag himself down to the Great Hall of the Castle. And another half hour still before the Bishop completed the benediction that opened meetings of the court. You know, the one we've heard Nia say in about twenty seconds.

*

HEAD PRIEST

Show us the path that should be.

Long pause.

ARDEL
...Is that--

HEAD PRIEST
--And grant us courage.

Slightly longer pause.

ARDEL
...Are you--

HEAD PRIEST
--To walk it. Now.

A longer pause yet.

ARDEL
I--

HEAD PRIEST
--And at the hour of our deaths. Amen.

ARDEL
(relieved)
Amen.

GATHERED CROWD
(murmurs; barely attentive)
Amen.

HEAD PRIEST
The court is now in session. Let those with grievances or petitions come before the Honorable Ardel of House Redmoor, Lord Regent of this keep and of all the Human Realms.

NARRATOR
But Lord Redmoor clearly had no interest in appearing receptive. He sat with his arms crossed and made little effort to conceal his nervous fidgeting and darting eyes during the lengthy prayer.

HEAD PRIEST
Let John Butcher, the baker, step forwards!

ARDEL
(aside, to the priest)
The baker's called Butcher?

HEAD PRIEST
Yes, milord, his father was a butcher but his uncle was a baker. It was a whole to-do.

ARDEL
 Bit dodgy of him, don't you think?
(impatient)
 Very well, come forward.

Two timid footsteps.

Silence.

ARDEL
 Well?

BAKER
 My Lord, a fire has consumed my bakeshop. I am penniless.

ARDEL
 Well then I suggest you sell more toast and stop
 wasting our time. Next!

Amidst a few unhappy murmurs--

BAKER
(hopeless)
 Thank you, my Lord.

HEAD PRIEST
 Let the two mothers step forwards.

MOTHER 1
 My Lord Ardel, this woman claims to be the mother of my
 child.

MOTHER 2
 'Tis not so, my Lord Ardel! The babe is mine. And she
 is a lying harlot!

MOTHER 1
 She is the liar!

ARDEL
(sarcastic)
 I don't suppose you've ever tried splitting the baby
 with an axe or saw, have you?

*
 *

MOTHER 1
 'Tis a fair judgment. I will accept those terms.

MOTHER 2
 What? Never, milord! I would rather let this woman have
 the whole child than to tear my babe asunder.

HEAD PRIEST

(whispers to Ardel)

Methinks the tall one dost lie, milord.

ARDEL

Yes of course she's lying, you idiot! The child is the short one's.

MOTHER 2

Thank you for your wisdom, milord.

ARDEL

(flabbergasted)

I have to ask, why would you ever agree to that? I know you're lying and all and don't care about the child, but what even was your end game? What would you ever hope to gain with half a child?

MOTHER 1

...Well...I--

ARDEL

--You fascinate me. Put her in the stocks for a week.

MOTHER 1

You'll pay for this, Helga, you will.

MOTHER 2

The stocks? For trying to steal my child? With respect, milord, she should hang.

ARDEL

Two weeks in the stocks for the tall one for trying to steal the baby. One week for the short one for questioning my judgment.

The crowd grumbles at this blatantly unfair sentence.

MOTHER 2

What?

ARDEL

And one hour for the baby for causing such a nuisance. Out of my sight. Next!

HEAD PRIEST

Let the spokeswoman of the farmers step forward!

FARMER

My Lord, there is a shortage in our grain stores. We understand, of course, that the taxes have to be more in wartime. And we gave every ounce, never late. You can ask your collectors. Only...we lost a few fields to the rains last spring. And if this winter's as bad as the astronomers predict, our families mightn't have enough to eat themselves.

*
*

HEAD PRIEST

(aside, tries to encourage Ardel)
The proverbial game fowl with clipped wings, don't you think, milord? You may leave this day a hero to the peasantry yet.

ARDEL

(actually encouraged)
Yes. Yes, indeed, you're right.

NARRATOR

Ardel sat up straight and did his best to look regal.

ARDEL

Well. This castle keeps its stores well provisioned for just such cases. Sergeant-at-Arms, go with this woman and fetch however much grain she thinks she needs.

NARRATOR

And yet, nobody moved. The guards shot glances at one another.

ARDEL

What are you waiting for?

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

My Lord...

ARDEL

Yes, speak up.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

The surplus grain is in the Eastern storehouse, my Lord.

Spare murmurs.

NARRATOR

This prompted a few concerned murmurs from the handful of servants truly in the know.

ARDEL

I don't care where it is. Go and get it.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

No one really goes there anymore, my Lord.

ARDEL

Well if you don't start by the time I count five, you'll be hanged for insubordination. One--

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

--My Lord, it is haunted!

Murmurs of fear throughout the hall.

ARDEL

What did you say?

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

Everyone who's been there of late speaks of a phantom, a spectre, my Lord.

ARDEL

Is this some sort of joke? There are no such things as phantoms or spectres! There are only spies and saboteurs, and soldiers who are too afraid of their own shadows to keep this castle secure! Guards, take this man away and hang him for cowardice. *

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

But, my Lord!

ARDEL

Hear me well, all of you! House Redmoor is a proud and a mighty house! We will not suffer soldiers who refuse to protect our subjects because they are afraid of the dark. Nor will we be made to look ridiculous by enemy agents and spies. Men-at-arms, assemble a team to inspect the granary immediately, or suffer the same fate as your sergeant.

HEAD PRIEST

(whispered aside)

Milord, perhaps you should lead--

ARDEL

(evasive)

--I'll be in my chambers awaiting a report!

NARRATOR

And with that, Ardel Redmoor beat a hasty retreat.

Footsteps walk out quickly.

HEAD PRIEST

(trying to cover)

These hearings are now concluded for--

ARDEL

(from a distance)

--Oh, shut up!

23 EXT. RIVERBLOOD - DAY

23

We're at another river crossing. Water rushes past us. A dozen or so horses canter.

NARRATOR

It was a significant detour for Ry'y lo-Th'yyt and her retainers all the way back west to Riverblood lands. Yet the storm in the mountains had made the rivers impassable anywhere nearer.

The horses come to a stop.

NARRATOR

And though I am loathe to ascribe anything resembling heroism to the cruel Elf General, it was valiant how she rode through excruciating pain, legs splinted and tied to her horse, as she staved off shock through practiced meditation.

The dialogue here is shouted until noted otherwise, and Ry'y struggles through intense pain for all of her dialogue.

RY'Y

Hail up there!

No answer.

RY'Y

I say, hail up there!

YOUNG GUARD

Who...who goes there?

RY'Y

Do you not know our banners, you idiot? We are the Knights of the Wood.

YOUNG GUARD

My lord's not taking visitors at present.

RY'Y

We're not here to visit, you imbecile. We need to cross the river. Now lower the drawbridge, in the name of the Concordat.

YOUNG GUARD

My Lord keeps the gatehouse key with him at all times.

RY'Y

Well go and fetch him quickly!

Wings flutter and a pigeon coos, landing, panned left a little.

D'AYV

(also panned left)
Oh, hello!

D'ayv, still on our left, unties a string.

Quick beat.

D'ayv trots over to center.

Amongst themselves, the Elves now speak at a conversational volume.

D'AYV

Message for you, Th'ayyd.

RY'Y

Message?

D'AYV

Has the seal of the High Council on it.

RY'Y

(scolding)
Well give it here, then.

A scroll of paper unfurls.

We'll now hear the voice of Ba'at Lo-Yl, reading his own letter as voiceover narration. Should have a bit of reverb on it.

BA'AT (V.O.)

To Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, Lord Commander of the Th'ar lo-Hyyl,

You are owed congratulations for your skillful destruction of the latest Orcish invasion.

(MORE)

BA'AT (V.O.) (cont'd)

However, we have also become aware of some very troubling oversights in the wake of said battle. Given your exemplary service record, we're confident there is some palatable explanation for these mishappenings. But I'm afraid the Council must hear this explanation from you, in person, as soon as you are able to return to the White Forest.

RY'Y

(under her breath)
Oh grant me strength.

BA'AT (V.O.)

I'm sure you'll agree that maintaining our control over critical assets must be of the utmost priority.

Yours very sincerely,
Ba'at lo-Yl, trustee of the High Council of the
White Forest

RY'Y

(sotto voce)
Gods damn it all. Bureaucratic buffoons will be the ruin of us all.
(quiet but simmering)
Major Zyka'ad.

One more horse trots up to us.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Yes, Th'ayyd?

RY'Y

It seems I must return to the White Forest at once. Use this boy's pigeons and summon the rest of the battalion.

D'AYV

Ooooooh, this is just like *Ash That Sings*, when--

RY'Y

--Shut up. Major, as soon as these slack jawed yokels lower this bridge you're to take a small detachment to Freehold. Question General Riverfell, find out what he's seen and heard. Have the Lieutenants lead patrols around Freehold, and search for this accursed traveling party. Set up checkpoints along the rivers downstream of Freehold - as many as you can without spreading the patrols too thin.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Yes, Th'ayyd. And if Riverfell has heard aught he shouldn't have?

RY'Y

(very furtive)

You must learn who knows what. Any Memyet who've seen or heard of that Orcling child must be quarantined as though they've a deadly fever. Do you understand?

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

It shall be done, Th'ayyd.

RY'Y

You, you, you, and you. On me. Keep up. Hyah!

Five horses gallop away furiously.

D'AYV

(so into this)

You know, Major, this is just like in *Gale of Wards* when Jan Winters is bitten by a warg on the full moon.

Beat.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

I was gonna read that, you little sh--

--Theme music.

END OF PART THREE.

PART FOUR:

24 EXT. SEAHOLD - DAY

24

A rural village on the coast. Busy but not super-crowded; definitely some gulls.

NARRATOR

We resume our tale in the southern port town of Seahold, nestled against the Sea of the Ancestors, in the shadow of the keep of Ivan, son of Morris. It was here that Billy's river barge was pulled to dock by a suntanned stevedore.

The barge splashes in the water and gently bumps against a dock.

BILLY

Thanks dude.

Billy steps on to the dock.

The Seahold denizens have Cockney accents.

BILLY

So listen my man, I'm trying to find--

STEVEDORE

--Do I know you?

BILLY

Probably not, I'm just trying to--

STEVEDORE

--Then I'm sure I'm not *your man*.

He walks way.

BILLY

Shit.

NARRATOR

And if you'd had an ear against one of the barrels just then, you might have heard a very frustrated Nia, talking to herself as if trying to will Billy's comprehension.

Quick cut inside a barrel:

NIA

(sighing; to herself)
Billy. We talked about this.

Quick cut back out.

BILLY

(to himself)

What did Nia say? Uhhh.....Oh, oh, oh!

NARRATOR

Billy searched for someone nearby who looked friendly. His eyes fell upon a woman with graying hair and a hempen robe, who seemed to be finishing a conversation with a small crowd of peasants. She had the air of a teacher, or--no, that's it. A minister. She and the peasants made the sign of the circle around their hearts and the peasants departed looking fairly pleased with the interaction.

BILLY

Hail and well met, good woman!

Back in the barrel:

NIA

(cautiously optimistic)

There we are.

And back out.

SEAHOLD WOMAN

(panned and a little distant)

Yes? Hullo?

Footsteps approach.

NARRATOR

The woman approached Billy. She looked nearly fifty.

BILLY

(trying to remember his "lines")

I, uh, seek to hire passage across the seas. Can you...
point me towards where I might do so?

*

SEAHOLD WOMAN

Aye, of course. You see that steeple over yonder?

One last time in the barrel:

NARRATOR

And inside her barrel, Nia cupped her mouth with her hand to conceal a gasp.

NIA GIVES A **MUFFLED GASP.**

And we're back outside.

SEAHOLD WOMAN

That's our chapel.

NARRATOR

For of course one does not easily forget the voice of one's own mother.

SEAHOLD WOMAN

Head down there, and right across the square you'll find a public house, big badger on the sign. Most seafaring folk are known to take their meals there. Should find someone to give you a fair price.

BILLY

Many thanks to you.

SEAHOLD WOMAN

Simple kindness is the least we owe to strangers. Go with Galadon, young man.

BILLY

Oh! Right. I, uh, have heard that some seafarers are less honorable than others. Are there any you would avoid?

SEAHOLD WOMAN

This is a decent burg, full of good, Galadon-fearing folk. Brigands and rogues find little welcome here. *(quieter; not gossip rather genuine concern)* But between you and me, I've heard some troubling whispers about Otto Olafsson. Nothing for sure, you know. But maybe best to steer clear.

BILLY

I thank you for your sage guidance.

SEAHOLD WOMAN

If I'm really being honest, you're best to avoid anyone who frequents Armstrongard like he does. City has a way of changing even good folks.

NARRATOR

In her barrel, Nia hung her head at what she was certain was an admonition in absentia.

BILLY

I...Okay, thanks again.

SEAHOLD WOMAN

Safe travels.

Some wagon wheels roll.

NARRATOR

And Nia could not fully stop at least a few tears from welling up, as Billy began carting his friends towards the aforementioned public house...

25 INT. THE BUSY BADGER - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

25

We're inside a lively tavern.

NARRATOR

...Where he of course immediately sought out Captain Otto Olafsson.

Olafsson talks like an old-timey New England fisherman.

OLAFSSON

Armstrungard you say?

BILLY

They told me this would be enough.

A coinpurse clanks onto the table.

Olafsson picks up the purse, opens the drawstring, and jingles a little to inspect.

OLAFSSON

Ayup. That'll getcha there. Fixing to leave at dawn.

BILLY

What about...right now?

NARRATOR

The Captain raised an eyebrow at this.

Another coinpurse hits the table.

OLAFSSON

I'll gather up the boys. Just you and your cargo?

BILLY

Yeah.

OLAFSSON

Your business is yours but I do like to have some idea what gets loaded onto my ship.

Another coinpurse.

OLAFSSON

But I don't require it exactly.

BILLY

So we all set?

OLAFSSON

Not until I've said this. This cargo - if it has to breathe, drink, and eat, that's not cargo. That's stowaways. And stowaways go straight overboard, no ifs ands or buts. Got that?

A long, tense beat.

BILLY

...There's eight aside from me.

OLAFSSON

Eight?

BILLY

No wait, nine.

OLAFSSON

Well that's lot more risk for me, then.

NARRATOR

With some reluctance, Billy reached into the traveling pack he had with him.

OLAFSSON

Use your head, lad. Under the table.

A big heavy sack of coins slides across the floor.

Drawstrings open.

OLAFSSON

All right. You can load 'em up. But they stay in the cargo hold the whole trip, and someone'll bring food and drink down. Got that?

BILLY

Fine. So can we go now?

26 EXT. SEAHOLD - A LITTLE LATER

26

We're right on the coast of the ocean, with gulls and breaker waves.

NARRATOR

And so by that afternoon, Captain Olafsson had raised his anchor and lowered his sails.

We hear a chain winch raised and some big sails unfurl.

NARRATOR

And with our party concealed in the cargo hold, he put out to sea. Not a moment too soon either, as the vessel had just cast off when the first banners of the Th'ar lo-Hyyl began appearing on the hill overlooking Seahold.

27 INT. MERCHANT VESSEL CARGO HOLD - DUSK

27

We're below board on a rickety, medieval seafaring vessel as the sun is going down.

NARRATOR

Once they had set off, Billy pried his friends loose of their very unbecoming containers, so they could at least stretch their legs while confined to the cargo hold.

GWEN COOS SOOTHINGLY TO THE CRYING BABY ON OUR FAR LEFT.

BRENNEN RETCHES VIOLENTLY ON OUR FAR RIGHT.

NARRATOR

Admittedly, some had taken to the ocean better than others.

BRENNEN GROANS FOR AIR, DESPERATE TO BE DONE PUKING.

REGAN

Well this is all very fucking regal.

NIA

Sir Brennen, you might have mentioned you were prone to seasickness while were planning this endeavor.

BRENNEN

Would it have diminished--
(stifles gag)
--Our need to travel by sea?

NIA

I could have at least tried to find some ginger or peppermint for you before we left.

BRENNEN

(clearly wishful thinking)

I ought to be myself again soon. There's nothing left to spew.

REGAN

(hint of respect)

I don't think I'll ever understand you, Brennen.

NARRATOR

Regan then took a moment to look out the one porthole available to her. The coastline was plainly visible, barely half a mile away.

REGAN

Why the fuck are we still so close to shore? Billy, go get the Captain. I gotta talk to him.

BILLY

("Go on...")

Okay.

REGAN

I think we're safe overnight, but come the sun we gotta be further out. Might as well fucking wave to them from here.

BILLY

I can just talk to the Captain myself if you want. We've got like a good rapport going.

REGAN

No, this is gonna be a pretty tricky needle to thread.

BILLY

I got us this far on my own.

JEN

Better leave it to Regan, okay babe?

BILLY

(pretty bummed out)

Okay.

Billy walks slowly, almost morosely over to a ladder.

BILLY

Hey Jenny did you see me steer the barge? It was pretty sweet.

JEN
No, I was stuffed in a barrel.

BILLY
Oh.

JEN
But...you did it! We got there. Good job.

JEN **BLOWS HIM A KISS.**

BILLY
Andrews with a Hail Mary into the endzone...

Billy takes a few steps back.

BILLY
...And Williams has it! Put six on the board.

JEN **GIGGLES, CHARMED.**

BILLY
One Captain, coming right up.

He practically skips up the ladder.

A beat.

Mixer will now break scene into three mini-locations. The first, panned center:

JEN
What? What's that look?

REGAN
You gotta stop stroking him off every time he manages basic shit.

JEN
Does everything out of your mouth have to be mean and gross?

The second, panned right:

NELSON
You okay, Nia?

NIA
(jolted out of her thoughts)
What? Yes. Sorry. I'm fine.

NELSON
You had like a thousand-yard stare going on.

NIA

There's been much to mull over as of late.

The third, panned left:

ARLENE

Well, one more hurdle cleared, I suppose. *

The baby fusses.

GWEN

For now. The milk we brought's like to turn 'fore we arrive. Best to keep him sleeping long as we can.

ARLENE

*Young Rosie left the path one day. \
Wandered past the fence and through the hay. \
She walked and walked until she fell \
In the clearing of the faerie's wishing Well.*

The baby's quiet.

*Then, back at center, heavy footsteps descend
the ladder.*

NARRATOR

But the calm of Arlene's song was disturbed by the return of Captain Olafsson.

OLAFSSON

All right, there better be a good damn reason you--
(*smells puke*)
--Agh! Who's been sick all over my damn cargo?

BRENNEN

(*holding back gags throughout*)
Apologies, Captain. I'll find my sea legs soon.

OLAFSSON

Someone start talking.

REGAN

What do you think about maybe heading out past these breakers?

OLAFSSON

Ha! None of your business and slim chance anyway. Anything else, or are you done wasting my time with foolhardy questions?

REGAN

Hang on, hang on. Lemme talk to you in private a second?

Regan's footsteps.

NARRATOR

Regan gestured the Captain to follow her into a secluded corner of the cargo hold.

OLAFSSON

If you hadn't noticed, I've a whole ship to mind.

REGAN

C'mon, just a second.

OLAFSSON **SIGHS.**

NARRATOR

He reluctantly followed.

Footsteps.

NARRATOR

Unsure of what exactly their Queen was thinking, Regan's retainers surreptitiously moved their hands towards their weapons, as the Captain disappeared with Regan behind some barrels.

Regan and the captain talk quietly to each other.

REGAN

I wanna get further out to sea.

OLAFSSON

Good for you. I'm the Captain and you're technically cargo.

REGAN

What'll it take to convince you?

OLAFSSON

It's out of the question.

REGAN

(a little bit flirty)

Where I'm from, nothing's out of the question if you know how to ask.

OLAFSSON

Well where I'm from, the Captain decides where his ship goes. So unless you forgot to mention you're an Admiral, there's no negotiation to be had.

REGAN

(a lot a bit flirty)
I've always dreamed about venturing out onto the open seas. The loneliness. The tossing about. It just thrills me. How about it, Captain? Wanna give a girl her wildest dreams?

NARRATOR

The Captain looked down in confusion as Regan clumsily pawed at his arm with a bandaged mitt.

Awkward beat.

REGAN

(back to business)
I'm sorry, I've had a rough couple days. My heart's not in this. But I gotta get out to sea. How much coin'll it take?

OLAFSSON

Gal, if you could pay me enough, you'd own your own fleet.

A beat. Is she desperate enough to lay it all out?

REGAN

All right, look. I can't give you the details but--

OLAFSSON

--Now, now, now stop right there. I sure as Selbirin don't wanna know your business. But I know anyone who pays top dollar to board this rickety hunk of junk is running from something or someone. And I know we're too far out for you to be worried about human eyes spotting us.

REGAN

So if you know all that...ain't you worried about getting on a certain pointy-eared someone's shit list if they find us?

OLAFSSON

You see, gal, that'd be much more of a you problem. I've got what you call plausible deniability. You know what that means?

REGAN

You know I do.

OLAFSSON

But there's far worse than Elves out on the open seas.

REGAN

You don't know the Elves like I do, then.

OLAFSSON

Cutthroat raiders patrol those waters. And beasts that'll make your nightmares piss their britches. Ever seen a squid that could eat a fishing boat whole? I have. Not to mention that storm up in the mountains might head our way. Best case we get fully lost in a fog. Worst case, it turns into a tempest and rips this old rustbucket apart.

REGAN

Whole lotta maybes. My coin is a sure thing.

OLAFSSON

Maybe so. But for the last time, it's my ship. And I'll be taking my leave of you now, 'fore I have to get rude. Gruel and grog'll come down at sunup.

He walks away, and then climbs up the ladder.

REGAN

Balls.

28 SAME - A LITTLE LATER

28

NARRATOR

As soon as the Captain was back above board, Regan sought the counsel of her retainers.

Throughout this scene, everyone whispers.

REGAN

Anyone got any ideas for persuading the Captain? He's a stubborn motherfucker and buying him off won't work.

JEN

What, he was immune to your feminine wiles?

REGAN

Lemme tell you the state of my feminine wiles right now. I've had a cavalry charge, a three day hike, and almost died in a fire since my last bath. Plus I'm wiping my ass with a rag on a stick. It's a fucking shipwreck down there. So if you wanna offer to spit-shine his masthead, I won't stop you. But you're on your own.

JEN

Yeah, no thanks.

NIA

Ah, lady Arlene. Perhaps you might cover your ears.

REGAN

We could probably take his crew in a fight if we had to, but then no one knows how to drive this damn boat so that leaves us ass-fucked and shit outta luck.

YELLOWYYN

Your Grace, at the risk of becoming the proverbial hanged messenger...

NARRATOR

Ylloyyyn was at the moment looking out the porthole with grave concern.

REGAN

What is it?

YELLOWYYN

There's an Elven frigate maybe five hundred yards to port.

REGAN

Gods fucking dammit.

YELLOWYYN

I think it's just a routine patrol, but small comfort that is.

REGAN

We gotta do something now.

NIA

When you spoke with the Captain, did he let slip any personal details that might be used to apply pressure to him.

JEN

(to herself, thinking)
Pressure...

REGAN

Not really. Strong silent type, that one.

JEN

I have an idea. It's gonna sound a little crazy but bear with me. I...I think I know how to...control wind.

BILLY

You what now?

JEN

I could do it in a small area I think. It's just air pressure - more molecules in one place than another. Should be even easier than lightning, theoretically. No ionic bonds to break.

REGAN

This honestly doesn't shock me.

NIA

(sighing, half to herself)
Why must it always be storm magic?

REGAN

Heh. Shock. Get it?

NIA

(remembering)
"I shall ride to safety on the wings of the Storm."

JEN

Huh?

NIA

Sorry, continue.

REGAN

Wind is good. But won't they just correct at the helm?

BRENNEN

Not if--
(retch)
--Not if we disconnect the tiller.

REGAN

Good thinking. I could probably get to the pulleys real quiet like.

JEN

No offense, but we'll need to untie them or something, not just cut them. so we can steer the ship again when we need to. Knots might be a little tough for you right now.

REGAN

You're right. This is getting really fucking old.

YELLOWYYN

I'll go. I think if I'm careful I can avoid detection.

NARRATOR

Regan stared at Yllowyyn for a long moment.

A beat.

YELLOWYYN

Shall I, Your Grace?

REGAN

My eyes'll be glued to that porthole. If the coast, or the Elf boat, start getting bigger, you're shark food. Now go.

NIA

Try and keep your bandage dry. I'm worried about your wound.

NARRATOR

Ylloyyyn bowed his head low before stalking off.

REGAN

All this still depends on the crew not getting wise. Can we keep them distracted somehow?

BILLY

On it.

Billy jogs away and begins climbing the ladder. But before he's even fully gone...

BILLY

(belting, wildly off-key)
I'm sai-ling! A-way!

Gwen and Arlene are still panned left:

They both whisper.

GWEN

M'lady, maybe you can help.

ARLENE

Help? How?

GWEN

I doubt the sailors would say no to your singing.

She hesitates, unsure.

GWEN

What's the harm in trying? Better than just sitting around praying.

ARLENE

Very well.
(Full volume)
Your Grace. I think I can help with the crew.

NIA

Thank you, my lady. That is much appreciated.

Light footsteps cross from left to center then up the ladder.

REGAN

Jen, you got what you need?

JEN

("We'll see...")
Think so.

NARRATOR

Then Jen closed her eyes, and concentrated deeply.

A magical pad fades in, extremely subtly, just audible.

29 EXT. MERCHANT VESSEL DECK - NIGHT

29

We're above deck on the ship now.

NARRATOR

And above deck, the sails began to fill, ever so slightly.

The sail starts the flutter in the wind, just a little.

30 INT. JETHRO'S CELLAR - NIGHT

30

There's a subtle but disturbing magical presence around us. We're in horror mode.

NARRATOR

You might recall that General Traft the Unfortunate had recently been drugged and kidnapped by a woodsman who lived in the mountains. We return to him now, just as he comes to. The first thing he perceived was the sight of his own breath, and the stinging nettles of frigid air in his lungs.

TRAFT STRAINS AND STRUGGLES.

NARRATOR

He tried to move, but found his wrists and ankles spread apart and bound with thick rope. And as he turned his head to the side--

--TRAFT **SCREAMS** IN ALARM.

NARRATOR

He came eye to eye with a corpse - motionless, eyes glazed over, and the first hints of frost just beginning to overtake its skin.

TRAFT

Gods dammit what the fuck.

TRAFT **STRUGGLES** AGAINST HIS RESTRAINTS AGAIN.

JETHRO

Now that won't help any of us, boy.

A stick taps cold dirt a few times.

NARRATOR

Then Jethro the woodsman walked into view. He wore a robe, that may have once been the deep black of the Templars of Discord, but was now a dusty and threadbare grey. But even more disturbing to Traft was the staff with which Jethro now walked, which somehow instilled a very visceral sense of terror in the seasoned warrior. It was sharpened at the bottom, and the markings on it were...wrong. The shapes on it...were not things that *should be*. At least in Traft's mind.

TRAFT

So, you're a Templar. That what this is about, then? Listen, just 'cause I lost the battle--

JETHRO

--Nay, nay, nay, I put them and their small little minds behind me long ago.

TRAFT

Listen, if you just let me go, I can bring you more jewels than you've ever seen.

JETHRO

(scoffs)

I'm sorry you think I'm such a petty man, who cares for baubles and trinkets.

TRAFT

Whatever you want, I can get you.

JETHRO

Now that, I think, is true.

NARRATOR

As his eyes adjusted to the dark, Traft began to discern the shapes behind Jethro. Hanging on hooks from the ceiling were frozen corpses, in various stages of mutilation and butchery.

Chains rattle.

TRAFT

What the fuck did you do to them?

NARRATOR

By their tattoos, the corpses were mostly but not exclusively Orcs.

JETHRO

Well, there were mistakes in our explorations. On my part, yea, but also on theirs. And once the spark's gone out the body it's just meat anyhow. Never could see the sense in wasting it.

TRAFT

(gagging)
You're out of your gods-damned mind.

JETHRO

I'm not, I promise you. But not for lack of trying. I got faith in you though. I got faith in you, because we got a mutu'l friend.

TRAFT

Mutual friend? I swear if this is gonna be some damn scripture-thumping, personal-lord-and-savior, self-righteous--

JETHRO

--Oh, who needs scripture when you got the genuine article? You knew Queen Dagmar, didn't you?

TRAFT

(beat)
What's it to you?

JETHRO

Well she's who got me started on this path. Showed me it was possible.

TRAFT

What was possible?

JETHRO

To walk between the worlds. To move like our shadows do. To become our own shadows.

TRAF T

Old man, if I gotta die in this shit-hole of yours, I wish you'd get it over with and spare me the gods-damned riddles.

JETHRO

No, you damn idiot! I need you to survive! But unless you wanna end up like old Caleb there - walking around begging for food, licking his own bumhole - then you gotta listen to what I'm telling you.

TRAF T

Why would I believe a word out of your mouth?

JETHRO

You wanna see her again? I know I do.

TRAF T

I guess you ain't got a town crier up here, you old coot. Dagmar's dead. Has been for more than a month.

JETHRO

Oh believe me I heard. You wanna see her again?

TRAF T

Great. Another loon thinks he can raise the dead.

JETHRO

I don't have to raise anything. The gate between the living and the dead is like my table upstairs. Our bodies can't pass through it, but our shadows? Mmmm, they got a chance. So I ask you again. You wanna see her?

TRAF T

All right, why don't you prove it then? Make one of those sorry bastards stand up and start doing a dance.

JETHRO

Nay, nay, nay, I can't with them.

TRAF T

Well that's a shock.

JETHRO

They ain't got no wills left. Soon as the will leaves your body, if you ain't careful it...falls through your grasp like sand. I tried to tell them like I'm telling you. But they didn't believe. And they didn't have no ties to the likes of Dagmar.

TRAF T

Yeah, I'm sure that was the problem.

JETHRO

She's out there somewhere, boy. I can feel her, and I think you can too. If you knew her, then you always felt like there was something to her that she wasn't letting you see. And when you heard she died, a part of you knew she wasn't really gone.

TRAF T

(a little bit shaken)

You're bluffing. You're just saying what everyone thinks after someone dies.

JETHRO GIVES A **LONG, FRUSTRATED SIGH.**

JETHRO

Everybody's so damn incredulous these days. Don't move.

NARRATOR

From a nearby workbench, Jethro retrieved a thick book bound in some crude kind of leather. Traft realized with mounting disgust that the patterns on the leather were also Orcish tattoos.

Jethro quickly thumbs through his gross book.

JETHRO

There you go.

NARRATOR

He held the book open in front of Traft's face. And there, bound into the horrid tome, was a yellowed old letter, written with a hand that Traft still recognized.

DAGMAR (V.O.)

You're coming to a crossroads, my love. The world is coming to a crossroads. And you shall choose its path.

TRAF T

Where'd you get this?

JETHRO

What you think, you the only one she took a roll around in bed with?

TRAF T

Let's say for some damn fool reason I was to believe you. What then?

JETHRO

Well, then I'd start trying to send your will. Short little hops at first, very easy, not much risk. Then once you start to see for yourself what I'm telling you, we can start to get more ambitious.

TRAF T

What do you get out of this?

JETHRO

Told you. To free myself from this bought-and-paid-for little world.

TRAF T

So why don't you just go yourself?

JETHRO

Because if I muck it up, there ain't nobody left to try!

(beat)

Your kind spend a lot of time in mines, don't they? And in mines, don't you sometimes bring a little birdie to make sure it's safe? Well you're gonna be my little birdie. Only if the miner's bird lives, all she gets to do is do it again the next day and hope for the best. But if you live through this, there ain't gonna be a cage built by man or gods that can hold you. And! You'll get to see her again.

Traft weighs this all out for a beat.

TRAF T

What am I supposed to do?

JETHRO

For now, just close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.

Pages in the book flip.

NARRATOR

The gnarled old man flipped through his grisly grimoire until he found the spell he sought.

JETHRO

There we are. Nice and easy to start.

NARRATOR

And as he silently mouthed the words of the spell, an unsettling presence crept into the cellar.

Mixer: We should hear some kind of creeping eldritch horror. Have fun.

31 EXT. MERCHANT VESSEL DECK - MORNING

31

We're back on the deck of the ship. Jen's magical pad is really in full effect now, and the sails are fluttering noticeably.

NARRATOR

As the sun rose on Otto Olafsson's ship, the crew found themselves wholly enraptured by Arlene's singing.

Arlene's singing has some localized magical reverb on it.

ARLENE

*She looked in the well as the mists did clear *
*In faith that her lover would appear. *
*But she saw not her man, nor moon, nor stars, *
Just her face all full of scars.

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.

As Arlene's singing finishes, so too does the magical pad and the wind in the sails.

OLAFSSON

Ah, now that was some lovely singing, gal. I ain't heard that one since...when was it?

NARRATOR

In his reverie, he turned his face to the rising sun.

OLAFSSON

(confused)
 Ye gods, where in Selbirin...

NARRATOR

As it dawned on him, he wheeled on Arlene, choking on his own fury.

OLAFSSON

What've you done, you gods-damned harpy?! What siren spell have you cast?

NARRATOR

The crew of the ship was now catching up to their Olafsson's realization.

As the crew starts to realize what's up, they groan in anger and fear.

ARLENE

I was only--

OLAFSSON

--You've killed us all, gods-damnit.

NARRATOR

He advanced, red-faced, towards a stunned and frightened Arlene, but Billy got in the way.

BILLY

Hey watch it, dude.

OLAFSSON

Had a feeling about you lot, shoulda thrown you overboard soon as I did.

BILLY

(Yelling to be heard below deck)

Well there are a lot us! So I'd like to see you try!

NARRATOR

And then the Olafsson's eyes fixed on some point over Billy's shoulder, and his face went white.

A fast bass drum begins to waft towards us.

OLAFSSON

Oh, you stupid, stupid child. Little good that'll do any of us now.

NARRATOR

All turned to look at where the Olafsson was staring, and saw a grotesque masthead pierce the fog, ahead of a sleek hull blackened with pitch.

Oars beat the water.

NARRATOR

As the thick morning fog parted, the sound of a coxswain's drum wafted towards our heroes, as oars furiously beat the water. And then the dread vessel raised high a black flag.

OLAFSSON

Pirates. Galadon help us all.

END OF CHAPTER.