

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD  
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 5  
"An Impregnable Missive"

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1 EXT. SEAHOLD - DAY

1

NARRATOR

As you may recall from the last time we spoke, Major Zyka'ad had ushered Nia's parents into her confidence under the not entirely false pretense that Nia was in "grave, grave peril."

MILDRED

Peril?! What kind of peril?

ZYKA'AD

It's, ah...best discussed in private. Will you come with me?

BEN

Of course. You're welcome in our priory of course.

ZYKA'AD

Thank you, but let us use the Garrison's Keep.

MILDRED

*(unsure)*  
If you think that's best.

ZYKA'AD

The Keep has provisions we'll need when my Lord Commander comes through. Will you come? I'm afraid the matter is urgent.

BEN

Lead the way, m'lord.

Three sets of footsteps - one with spurs - walk rapidly.

MILDRED

I understand if you can't talk about it aloud, but... could I at least see the letter?

BEN

My wife does worry so about her girl.

ZYKA'AD

Well it's in Hyylyg of course.

BEN

That's all right. We've a tiny bit of Hyylyg between us.

ZYKA'AD

You *do*?

MILDRED

Nia tried to teach us. We never got the hang of speaking it, but we could probably read well enough to understand.

ZYKA'AD

Well, ah...nevertheless. Perhaps you'd better be seated in any case.

MILDRED

Galadon above, is it that bad?

ZYKA'AD

Come, we musn't dawdle.

One set of footsteps speeds up ahead.

NARRATOR

Major Zyka'ad quickened her pace to a near jog. And the two reverends, after sharing a look between them, could not but follow.

The remaining two footsteps quicken to match.

2 INT. SEAHOLD KEEP - CONTINUOUS

2

Footsteps enter a large, echoey hall.

NARRATOR

And as they entered the imposing stone fortress which usually housed Seahold's garrison, it was impossible not to notice the heft of the doors, as two Elvish infantrymen quickly closed them.

A heavy fortress door closes behind us.

ZYKA'AD

*(palpable relief)*  
Now. You had questions?

MILDRED

Where is my daughter?! What trouble is she in?

ZYKA'AD

Unfortunately that information is classified.

BEN

But you just said--

ZYKA'AD

--However! It is my charge to assist in retrieving her. And though it pains me to bring such alarming news, I

(MORE)

ZYKA'AD (cont'd)

hope there's some consolation that you can play a critical role in her recovery.

MILDRED

Galadon help us. Keep my baby safe. We should never have let her leave Seahold--

BEN

--Sweetheart, stay calm.

MILDRED

*Calm*, Ben?

NARRATOR

Ben tried to console his wife with an embrace.

BEN

What do you need from us?

ZYKA'AD

Well, although my superiors know much of your daughter's predicament, her exact location has vexed us. If you had anything at your disposal that may help us locate her...

NARRATOR

The Reverends loosened their embrace and peered into one another's eyes as if searching for a mutually agreeable response.

Silence for a beat.

ZYKA'AD

*(impatient)*

Anything at all.

*(correcting herself)*

I'm sorry. You're understandably startled--

MILDRED

*(carefully, shrewdly)*

--No, you are right. There's no time to waste. We'll need to head back to our priory--

\*

NARRATOR

--But as Mildred took a step toward the exit, Zyka'ad subtly - deftly - positioned her armored body in the way. The decisiveness of the gesture was not lost on Mildred or Ben.

ZYKA'AD

Oh, please, if you must leave, allow me to escort you. Or better yet send one of my pages back to town to gather what you need. We're a team now, you see.

NARRATOR

Though the Major was smiling, the Reverends could not detect the warmth of camaraderie in her eyes. Via another shared, piercing look, they communicated with each other their mutually agreed upon response.

BEN

We know just how to find her.

MILDRED

Clergy throughout Iorden have a network that we use to stay connected, with notices like--

BEN

--Like marriages and, who's expecting...

MILDRED

Yes, typically harmless messages ...  
*(getting upset)*  
 Everyday things like births and deaths anyhow - NOT missing children.

BEN

*(consoling)*  
 Sweetheart...

MILDRED

*(collecting herself)*  
 Ugh. I'm sorry. Well, I'm not but - the point is: that's how we find her: M.N.N.

ZYKA'AD

M.N.N.?

MILDRED

Monastery News Network.

BEN

Monastery News Network.

MILDRED

MoNewstery for short.

ZYKA'AD

...Of course.

BEN

If we compose a message and get it to the rookery, it can be to every decent house of worship in the realm by sunup.

ZYKA'AD

A most useful resource indeed! Shame, almost, that its use has been limited to quotidian goings-on.

BEN

Aye, well...

MILDRED

Have you got parchment and quill? I'll get working on the message.

ZYKA'AD

That can be arranged. Private!

She **snaps her fingers**.

ZYKA'AD

Now I must warn you, we must be exceptionally careful in how we word our message, for...reasons I cannot yet divulge. I'll need to carefully read whatever you send.

MILDRED

If...you insist.

ZYKA'AD

I'm afraid I must. For your own safety and that of your daughter, of course. As I said, we're a team now.

3 EXT. FREEHOLD - DAY

3

Several horses gallop towards a fort.

NARRATOR

Major Zyka'ad was of course awaiting the return of her commanding officer, Lord Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, who was attending to some important business at the recently rebuilt fortress of Freehold.

4 INT. FREEHOLD GREAT HALL - CONTINUOUS

4

NARRATOR

Now I have been a storyteller since...well, perhaps I shouldn't date myself. It doesn't help for casting. Let's just say I have been at it for a long time. And I know what I mean when I say that Ry'y proved herself quite the thespian as she addressed the Freehold garrison.

RY'Y

Citizens! Soldiers! Dearly Beloved Friends!

It pains me to have to break this news, and to you whom the Knights of the Wood consider as close as brethren.

(MORE)

RY'Y (cont'd)

A light has gone out in this land, for all races allied with Galadon. Beloved commander, Bryce Riverfell, has been assassinated.

CROWD NOISES

(*Gasps of horror ad lib.*)  
NO! It can't be! [*Etc.*]

PROFESSOR

(*not tipping his hand*)  
How did this calamity happen, my lord?

RY'Y

Well...I confess, my closest advisors feared that promulgating the circumstances of this tragedy would be too harrowing for his devoted people to hear. But! I have seen you all test your mettle in battle. You are my cousins forged in the fight. And I say you have the right to know.

My Knights had been searching for a particular Templar encampment for some time, and not too long ago they finally found it. I hoped General Riverfell would join me on our raid, as he knew the terrain better than we ever could, and was of course near peerless among men in battle. Brave as the General was, he needed no convincing. But before we could mount our assault, the mighty Bryce took ill.

I came to realize - too late, curse my carelessness - that he had been poisoned.

CROWD NOISES

(*ad lib. pained surprised*)  
Poisoned? Gods no! How could this be? [*Etc.*]

RY'Y

Lady's Farewell, I'm afraid. A most unfortunate way to die.

The crowd has fallen to **wails of despair** at this detail.

NARRATOR

While most of the gathered crowd had fallen to lamentations over their beloved superior, the Professor watched Ry'y lo-Th'yyt like a hawk.

RY'Y

Now I shall not spare you these particulars, for they speak of his enduring love for his people. As he lay dying in my arms, he gathered himself to tell me, "General Ry'y lo Thy'yt, help my people. Protect them.

(MORE)

RY'Y (cont'd)

For enemies gather from the outside all around. We must band together stronger than ever with our allies."

What remains a mystery however, is how his assassins could have gotten so close without being discovered. I will now submit myself to your questions.

It's **utter madness** in the hall. \*

CROWD NOISES

*(ad lib. inchoate fury)*

Who did this? Where are they? We'll rip the bastards apart!

RY'Y

*(shouts above the din)*

I cannot help you if I cannot understand you. \*

The crowd **quiets down**.

RY'Y

Now who is the ranking officer here?

GARETH

Clarence is second in command, but he left this morning on a patrol, so I'm the ranking officer present.

RY'Y

Very well. I'm sure you have questions on behalf of your men?

GARETH

Have you learned anything which may lead us to Bryce's assassins?

RY'Y

All we can say is what we know from past experiences: the Templars are adept at infiltrating the inner circles of their targets. They work in subterfuge to turn those on the inside, usually someone who manifests a connection with the chaotic arts. I urge you all to be wary and vigilant. Any information, however small, could be vital to our investigation.

HUMAN SOLDIER

What of the girl? The one from the battle?



PROFESSOR

Do you mean the one called Jen? Wasn't a fortnight ago that she fought with us against the Orcish onslaught, killing not a few Templars in the process. Do you mean to suggest she was working with them the whole time?

NARRATOR

Ry'y seemed to ponder.

RY'Y

Someone with those abilities would certainly be a target for the Templars.

GARETH

And the Templars care little for the lives of their comrades, especially if it serves their grander mission.

PROFESSOR

With all due respect, Lord Commander, General Riverfell tr--  
(*catches himself but realizes it's too late*)  
...He trusted them.

RY'Y

Precisely what I mean. I hope we are overthinking it, but those interlopers would have been in prime position to set a trap for dear Bryce. Captain, can you say what Commander Riverfell knew of why they were here?...Can anyone?

BODYGUARD FROM CHAPTER 2

Brennen Greyfield, and that peasant girl, came to see the General in his study. He sent us away.

OTHER BODYGUARD FROM CHAPTER 2

Bryce went to go see them in their tent before they left here. The mage girl would've been there too.

There are **murmurs and whispers** throughout the hall.

GARETH

Put the word out that Jen the mage is wanted for questioning in connection to the investigation.

RY'Y

It is prudence itself. Surely you can see that, Professor. I pray she has nothing to hide. But in the meantime, I shall leave a retinue of Elves to help in whatever way you deem. Now has anyone any idea where our interlopers might have gone?

Beat.

RY'Y

Anyone?

ANOTHER SOLDIER

A river barge left for Seahold off schedule. 'Twas loaded with food, only...no one told me to deduct anything from our count of stores.

RY'Y

I see.

*(Aside, to herself)*

The full picture falls into place...

*(Back to the soldiers)*

As a point of honour, for the debt I owe Riverfell, I volunteer to go to Seahold to find the sorceress. Now to your posts!

The men spring to action with a new sense of purpose.

5 EXT. SOUTH SEA - DAY

5

The water is choppy and the wind is harsh, like a particularly nasty day on the North Atlantic.

NARRATOR

We travel, for a moment, down to the frigid waters of Iorden's South Sea. Life here is hard, even in the summer. But now, as the nights draw longer and the sun grows more shy, it is only the bravest, or the most desperate, who still fish these waters.

A spear bursts through the water.

A beat.

FISHERWOMAN

Hmph. Dammit.

BOATSMAN

That was nothing.

FISHERWOMAN

We had a deal, Rollo. I fish, you shut up and steer the boat.

BOATSMAN

I haven't seen you fish in a week. I've seen you throw spears in the water. But I count no fish.

FISHERWOMAN

Rollo, I swear to--wait! I saw something!

BOATSMAN

No you didn't.

FISHERWOMAN

Come look.

BOATSMAN

I thought you fished and I steered the boat.

FISHERWOMAN

Shut up! Come quickly. I think it's a seal! Maybe even a sea lion!

BOATSMAN

It's not a--wait I see it!

FISHERWOMAN

Do you?

BOATSMAN

I think it is a seal!

FISHERWOMAN

Where is she?

BOATSMAN

There! See her?

FISHERWOMAN

Yes! I've got her.

NARRATOR

The woman raised her harpoon to strike.

BOATSMAN

Get it get it get it get it. What are you waiting for?

FISHERWOMAN

Shut up I'm concentrating.

BOATSMAN

Don't let her get away!

The Fisherwoman lets out an **exertive exhale**.

The harpoon breaks the water.

NARRATOR

And then she felt the tug in the rope that told her the missile had stuck in something.

FISHERWOMAN

*(stunned)*

I...I've got her.

The rope creaks and tugs.

FISHERWOMAN

*(frantic exuberance)*

I've got her! Help me pull her in.

Both **strain and pull**.

FISHERWOMAN

*(or ad lib similar)*

Come on come on come on.

BOATSMAN

*(or ad lib similar)*

Almost there...

One last **big strain**.

NARRATOR

With a desperate and mighty heave, they at last pulled their quarry aboard...

Something ker-plunks into their boat.

NARRATOR

...Falling backwards into each other from the effort.

Beat.

They begin **laughing** with joy and relief.

NARRATOR

All in all, it was a pleasant moment of hard-fought human triumph.

FISHERWOMAN

Should we get a look at her?

BOATSMAN

Yes, let's.

NARRATOR

But as they sat up to inspect their haul...

Both **gasp** in fright and disgust.

NARRATOR

...both recoiled in disgust. For they had caught not a seal or sea lion, but a decrepit human corpse.

BOATSMAN

Is that...?

FISHERWOMAN

Dear gods, I think it is.

NARRATOR

But seeing the corpse, one might forgive their initial mistake. What flesh had not sloughed off the bones was ashen and waterlogged. And the body wore a robe, blasted by time and salt to a dull grey, which was now slick and shiny with accumulated seaweed. The resulting appearance was not entirely unlike a seal.

BOATSMAN

*(stifling a gag)*

Should...should we throw it back in, or--

RENAULT

*(magical reverb)*

--No you should not!

Both **yelp!**

FISHERWOMAN

Who said that?!

*Water squishes out of Renault's body as he sits up.*

*Mixer: From now on, we should assume Renault is speaking via magic and will always have a supernatural effect on his voice.*

RENAULT

I did. Yes, hello.

Both mariners let out a **prolonged scream** that continues for a good while, probably under the next few lines.

NARRATOR

Now sitting upright, the corpse who you know as Renault D'Esprit proceeded to remove the harpoon that was lodged in his flank.

Rotted flesh rips apart.

RENAULT

There we are. You may have this back.

NARRATOR

He extended the safe end of the harpoon towards the boatsman.

BOATSMAN

*(cowering)*

It's hers! She does all the fishing.

RENAULT

She does? Hmm.

*(obviously bothered by it)*

That's...fine, I suppose. Nothing the matter with that.

FISHERWOMAN

How are you talking? I can hear you, but...

RENAULT

I'm missing my jaw? Yes, dreadful business that. A lesson against keeping false friends. But the past is past, and by your comprehension it seems I have mastered arcane speech. I knew I would of course, but fish make poor conversation, so it was hard to be sure.  
*(can't get off this)*

My good man, do you not enjoy fishing?

BOATSMAN

You're...speaking with magic?

RENAULT

Speech is but the movement of oslits in the air. I am merely using magic to do what muscles in my throat once easily--I'm sorry, it's just that historically *men* have tended to spearfish. Probably because of their superior upper body strength.

FISHERWOMAN

*(confused. not defensive...yet)*

My grandmother fished. So did her grandmother.

RENAULT

But that's not...I mean *real* history.

NARRATOR

The two mariners shared a very perplexed look.

BOATSMAN

Do you need anything? Food, or medicine...

RENAULT

It's really nothing personal. It's just that spear fishing was very important to my childhood.

FISHERWOMAN

Would you like a go, then? My luck's been rubbish lately.

RENAULT

Oh, no no no. I don't fish.

FISHERWOMAN

But you just said--

RENAULT

--When I said fishing was important to my childhood, I meant the general idea of fishing. Which is of course a man's work. And I am very clearly a man...

BOATSMAN

Are you?

RENAULT

...Ergo, fishing is very important to me. And I'd prefer she not do it, if we must get right down to it.

BOATSMAN

Look I hope you won't take this the wrong way, but you don't seem well.

RENAULT

Oh yes, there it is. So much for the tolerant fisherman. I'm trying to engage you in a civil debate about fishing, and who is best suited to it, and you stoop to personal attacks.

\*  
\*

We start to perceive a few gulls circling overhead.

FISHERWOMAN

It's not a personal attack. He means you got no legs or guts and your skin's all falling off.

RENAULT

So it's shaming my body now is it? Now we see who truly objectifies whom--

FISHERWOMAN

--I didn't--

RENAULT

--You're stuck up. And ugly. I never wanted to bed you anyway.

FISHERWOMAN  
WHAT!?

There are more gulls now. And they're louder.

BOATSMAN  
Hey, watch how you talk to her!

RENAULT  
I can see you're both getting emotional.

FISHERWOMAN  
'Course I am, you prat!

RENAULT  
I don't see why. I've only been polite and rational.

Overhead, the gulls are a near-deafening cacophony.

BOATSMAN  
I should throw you off my boat.

RENAULT  
No, I don't think so.

One seagull swoops down, squawks, and snaps its beak.

BOATSMAN  
*(alarmed by the gull)*  
Ah!

RENAULT  
In many ways, being underwater so long was excellent practice.

Another gull swoops and snaps.

FISHERWOMAN  
Ach! Cheeky bastard nicked me.

RENAULT  
I long ago mastered the art of controlling lesser beasts of course. But it's been a treat to practice it on beasts still living.

The gull attacks are getting more frequent now.

Our mariners **yip and yelp** accordingly.



FISHERWOMAN

*(panicked and fighting birds)*  
All right, he can fish! Just leave us alone!

It's now a constant stream of **frantic screaming** as these two poor souls get absolutely Hitchcock-ed by the birds.

RENAULT

Too late for that I'm afraid.  
*(beat)*  
Off you pop.

NARRATOR

Though they'd at first tried to fight off this avian onslaught, they were soon left with no choice but to throw themselves overboard.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

*Two bodies splash on opposite sides of the boat.*

\*

RENAULT

Mind the water, it's a bit chilly.

Renault **hums mindlessly** to himself...

...as he begins to row away.

Two heads pop out of the water.

The mariners **sputter and shiver**,  
hyperventilating in the frigid water.

FISHERWOMAN

You're a monster!

*Renault keeps rowing away.*

RENAULT

*(barely looking back.)*

I'm a free thinker is what I am. Won't let myself be censored. Not by you, not by the college. Brilliance is a great burden, but I've the intellectual courage to bear it.

*There is a very...very long beat of extremely lopsided, awkward rowing.*

BOATSMAN

You're just going in circles, you dolt!

RENAULT

Shut up and let me live in my truth!

Beat.

FISHERWOMAN

You're still going in circles but the other way now!

RENAULT

I'M GETTING THE HANG OF IT!

6 INT. HORSE'S HEAD INN - MORNING

6

Just outside our window, the first birds of the new morning chirp to life.

NARRATOR

Miss Bailey awoke in the common room of her own inn.

Bailey **jolts awake**, disoriented, and then **sighs** with resigned recollection.

NARRATOR

She was slumped over a cold and uneaten dinner for two. Next to her was a fine old bottle of wine, which had been uncorked, poured from into Bailey's glass thrice, and then abandoned.

Just outside, a horse trots up and comes to a stop.

BAILEY

Course. Now he comes.

NARRATOR

Miss Bailey's anger as she walked to her door was as a thunderbolt cutting through the cloudy haze of too little food and too much wine.

Bailey walks to her door in a huff.

BAILEY

*(under breath as she walks)*  
Dunno what he takes me for, lousy flea bitten tramp like him. Like I'm some dizzy young thing who can drop her chores and throw him a screw out back at the drop of a hat. Who doesn't have work to do. Bad enough I can barely keep a barmaid around for more than a week.

She nearly rips her front door off its hinges.

BAILEY

Well, what do you have to say for--

NARRATOR

--But the man standing at her door was not the one she expected. Instead of her Bryce Riverfell, it was the

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Captain known as The Professor who waited on her threshold. And she noticed that his sad eyes could not quite meet her gaze, despite his obvious effort.

PROFESSOR

Maeve. Can we sit down somewhere and talk?

NARRATOR

But Maeve Bailey's knees were already weak.

7 INT. HORSE'S HEAD BACKROOM - LATER

7

BAILEY

(numb)  
How?

PROFESSOR

The Knights of the Wood say it was a Templar assassination. That they poisoned him.

An awful silence hangs in the air, thick and oppressive.

BAILEY

Thank you for riding out to tell me.

Beat.

PROFESSOR

Are you certain I can't get you--

BAILEY

--I've had so many nightmares about this day. Now that it's here I keep expecting to wake up.

NARRATOR

Bailey reached up and pinched one of her cheeks until a single tear ran down it.

BAILEY

(wry)  
Worth a try.

PROFESSOR

I wish I had the right words.

BAILEY

Not as if he didn't try and prepare me. Soldier's life this, soldier's life that.

NARRATOR

The tears were falling, thicker and faster now.

After a long moment of desperately trying to hold it together, Bailey finally lets out a **sob and a wail**.

This continues for some time.

Eventually, Bailey settles down a bit. Then...

BAILEY

You needn't wait around on my behalf. I'm sure Bryce's men need you.

PROFESSOR

Maeve. Look at me. I'm sorry. I really am. I've been dreading this next part even more than the first. But I decided you ought to know.

NARRATOR

Bailey's eyes were wide with concern as the Professor leaned in very close.

He almost whispers.

PROFESSOR

I don't believe the Knights of the Wood.

BAILEY

What?

PROFESSOR

I'm almost certain the Templars didn't poison Bryce.

BAILEY

Then who did?

PROFESSOR

The night he rode off with the Knights, I was in his study with him. He had a drink before he left. Didn't offer me any, which, knowing him, I thought was odd. He kept the whisky under lock and key, and put it right back when he was done pouring.

*(beat)*

I think he knew it was poisoned and drank it anyway. Probably even poisoned it himself if I had to guess.

BAILEY

How...how can you say that about him? Why would you come here to tell me that? I...Get out.

PROFESSOR

No, you misunderstand. I don't believe he wished to die. I believe he preferred death to some other outcome.

BAILEY

And what have you decided that might be?

PROFESSOR

I don't know. Yet. But I suspect he may have run afoul of the Elves somehow. And worse than he feared death, he feared their reprisal might circle back to those closest to him. Do you understand what I'm saying?

BAILEY

*(trying to process)*  
Yes.

PROFESSOR

You could be in danger.

BAILEY

I understand. So what now?

PROFESSOR

We've a very stark choice. I know that if Bryce broke some law or oath that meant his life, he had a very honorable reason to do it. And I also know the Elves are relentless in the enforcement of their laws. So our choice now is how to honor his memory. We can honor his final cause, and find out why and whether he came to defy the law, consequences be damned. Or, we can honor his final wish, and live out our lives in the peace and safety for which he gave his life.

BAILEY

I see.

NARRATOR

Bailey took a thorough look around her, and several long breaths.

BAILEY

I know what I choose.

PROFESSOR

I feared you might.  
*(he plans too now)*  
Is there any chance I may change your mind?

BAILEY

Unlikely.

PROFESSOR

Long life and peaceful death are no small things.

BAILEY

I'm not exactly young. And I doubt dying's much fun no matter how you do it.

PROFESSOR

Then let me just say this. I know Bryce loved you very much. Your safety and comfort were his dying wish. "Soldiers die violently so that others may live peacefully." I heard him say that a thousand thousand times. And though he meant it to be understood generally, I know he was thinking of you when in need of courage. So I need to try. Try to keep you safe. That's the debt I owe the departed.

BAILEY

Well, I've heard you.

*(a wry joke)*

I'll be sure to vouch for you when next we see Bryce.

PROFESSOR

*(don't joke)*

Maeve...

BAILEY

Roy. Look around me. Do you see any children? Do you see the trappings of wealth?

PROFESSOR

I see a profitable inn, which is nothing to flippantly discard.

BAILEY

My sister gave me this place. Bryce gave me nothing I can hold. For thirty years I gave that man *all* of my love. And for better or worse I think he loved me as best he could.

PROFESSOR

I *know* he did.

BAILEY

But all I've got to show for it is the memory of him. And all his fullness and foibles and causes. Without that, I'm just a lonely old maid, who wasted her life on a bonny young soldier with a pretty voice, who told her pretty things and never planned to marry her. Can you understand that?

PROFESSOR

Yes.

BAILEY

And so I can't just traipse off into the sunset like nothing happened, and Bryce just passed away from old age. So once more...what now?

NARRATOR

The Professor looked into Maeve Bailey's eyes, and surmised that the resolve therein was true.

PROFESSOR

*(to himself)*

Well Bryce, I tried.

*(Back to Bailey)*

If I'm being honest...I was of two minds when I came here. And one of them is glad to hear you say that. If we're to uncover what we're up against, your sisters could be us a great boon.

BAILEY

What should I ask them to do?

PROFESSOR

For now, keep their ears open. I suspect the Elves may shift their attention to unusual places. I would know what they begin asking and of whom. Let me know all you hear, but do keep your head down.

BAILEY

My family's great skill.

PROFESSOR

Not all rebels need be martyrs.

BAILEY

*(sudden realization)*

I don't know why I didn't think of this sooner. My mind must have been on...well, anyhow. Ry'y lo-Th'yyt was here not a few nights ago.

PROFESSOR

She was?

BAILEY

Up and carted away one of my barmaids. And her sister - well, they *said* they were sisters - she never came back either after that. Wait, come to think of it...Bryce brought me those barmaids!

*(Can't help but chuckle)*

Told me they needed jobs, and asked me not to ask questions. Bryce, what were you playing at?

PROFESSOR

Strange. Did you catch anything that Ry'y lo-Th'yyt had to say to them?

BAILEY

Well she was hunting for Orcs and Templars, and she also asked after the missing Lady Arlene Redmoor, or, I think she said it was Mooncrest now? But with my barmaid she was most concerned with a missing child. I...suppose looking back, it's odd an Elf of her rank would concern herself with that.

PROFESSOR

Indeed.

BAILEY

Anyhow, this barmaid had taken in an stranded babe after the battle, and Ry'y lo-Th'yyt believed it was the same one as had gone missing.

PROFESSOR

Your ertswihle barmaids...was one of them tall and slender? With copper skin and black hair?

BAILEY

She was! It's why I thought it was odd her sister was pale and plump with red hair, but at the time I reckoned parents take in other children often enough.

PROFESSOR

She was at Freehold. She came to talk to Bryce while Brennen of Greyfield was in to see him.

BAILEY

Curiouser and curiouser.

PROFESSOR

This gives us somewhere to start.

BAILEY

And some good clear questions to ask my sisters. Starting with what lady Arlene Redmoor looked like. I'd not be shocked to learn she's pale and plump with red hair.

PROFESSOR

Good. I'll return to Freehold. The garrison's been tasked with aiding the Elves in their so-called investigation. I'll do my best to direct it in our favor. My men have much love and trust for Ry'y lo-Th'yyt. But I pray unearthing the right information may shake their loyalty. And let's meet again when we can.



BAILEY

A fortnight from today?

PROFESSOR

I'd prefer sooner. Ry'y is not like to leave loose threads hanging for very long.

BAILEY

If we meet any sooner, I'm not sure what I'll have learned from my sisters.

PROFESSOR

Well let's meet anyway, before week's end. Each just to see how the other is doing.

BAILEY

Very well.

PROFESSOR

And this should go without saying. If I miss our meeting...run.

**END OF PART ONE.**