

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD  
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 5  
"An Impregnable Missive"

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## PART TWO:

8 INT. ROOM IN THE CRAB'S CLAW INN - DAY

8

We hear bawdy, raucous tavern sounds, but they're downstairs from us.

NIA

All right, well...

A cork is removed from a bottle.

NIA

Here's...this.

YELLOWYYN

*(unhappy...but polite)*  
Thank you.

Beat.

NIA

Are you ready?

YELLOWYYN

*(something in mouth)*  
Mmm-hmm.

Some liquid is poured.

Biting down on the cork, **Yllowyyn yelps and groans.**

He also hits his fist on the table a few times.

NARRATOR

It had been three days since our party had come ashore in a desolate cove near Armstrungard, and they had spent that time hopping between the handful of inns, saloons, and public houses where Regan still commanded enough favour, or fear, to be quartered covertly. Unfortunately, although he was a hearty young Elf, cheese barrels, pirate vessels, and musty back rooms had hardly done wonders for the wound in Yllowyyn's arm.

Yllowyyn **spits** the cork onto the table.

YELLOWYYN

*(weary)*  
Is it helping at least?

NARRATOR

The spot where Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's arrow had pierced him was now ringed with a hot and angry red.

NIA

I've no doubt you'd be worse off without the brandy.  
But...

NARRATOR

Nia's eyes seemed to Yllowyyn to be an apology.

YELLOWYYN

The illness is spreading.

NIA

I'm afraid so. It's still within the realm of treatable  
I believe. For now. But I'd need to leave here and get  
proper medicine.

YELLOWYYN

So we're to, ah...petition the throne, then.

BRENNEN

I've found, Yllowyyn, that there is a certain joy, in  
abdication to a mighty leader who has one's best  
interests in mind.

YELLOWYYN

I...look forward to experiencing that.

NELSON

Hey no offense to Regan - she's dope - but isn't all  
that abdication stuff kinda how we got here?

NIA

Fret not for now, I shall speak with Her Majesty, when  
next she--

BILLY

--Fuuuuuuuuuuuck I'm bored! I'm so fucking bored! We've  
done absolute dick for three straight days. Does anyone  
in this world ever have fun?

NIA

Yes, though it does typically require leaving one's  
chambers.

GWEN

Well, not nec--  
(catches herself)  
--Nevermind.

NARRATOR

Gwen saw Arlene's face turn Redmoor crimson, and had to  
suppress a giggle.

NELSON

We could play the game again, I guess.

BILLY

Who's in? Weenie? Gwen? Who's dealing?  
(*waits barely half a second*)  
Me I guess.

A deck of cards is shuffled.

NARRATOR

I should note that at that moment, an idea began to form in Jen's head. She recalled another time they played this very game, what felt like ages ago, with some inebriated Armstrungard students.

BILLY

Okay. What to have for dinner. Go.

NARRATOR

Billy drew a card from the deck - a knave - and waited expectantly.

NIA

Hmm, let's see. There used to be a man with a cart around the corner from here who made some very tasty garbage.

NELSON

Sorry?

GWEN

It was always a treat when they served pheasant garbage at Castle Guernatal.

ARLENE

I remember that garbage. I'd always send Gwen down for seconds.

GWEN

Aye, Billy, that's your card.

NARRATOR

Billy's eyes narrowed, and darted back and forth between his various compatriots.

YELLOWYYN

A fitting answer. In the White Forest, we prepare our garbage using a rare flightless bird, found only within our wood. I've grown to miss that garbage.

BILLY

What the hell. Do I have a two? Or do you all...like eating garbage?

JEN

I'm guessing it means something different here.

NARRATOR

In case you're unfamiliar, as the Pennsylvanians were, garbage is a beef and poultry stew.

NELSON

Yeah shockingly this game kind of falls apart if you don't share enough cultural touchstones.

*Downstairs, a door slams open.*

REGAN

*(downstairs)*

Jackie! Gimme a whole lotta something strong. I'll take it in my room.

FALLON

*(downstairs)*

Your friends are already working on a bottle.

*Angry footsteps stomp up the stairs.*

NIA

*(wry)*

Sounds like good news.

*The door opens.*

NIA

Welcome back, Your Grace. Any luck with--

REGAN

--I've fucking had it with the yella sons of whores in this pisshole town. That's the tenth sellsword company in three days. Oooh, we're big, we're tough, our cocks blot out the sun. But ohhhh no we don't mess with Elves. Our mommies said they're scawwy. FUCK!

BRENNEN

Ah, Your Grace. Perhaps my presence may help create the image you need to persuade them.

REGAN

You? You look like your name should be Grandpa Not-A-Cop. Not exactly the image we're going for.

(MORE)

REGAN (cont'd)  
(louder)

All right, you all know the drill. Pack up your shit,  
we're outta here before sundown.

BILLY  
Uggggh.

YLLLOWYYN  
Accch.

NARRATOR

Billy and Yllowyyn shared a brief look of astonishment  
at things they suddenly had in common.

REGAN

I don't wanna hear it.

NIA

Your Grace. I regret to inform you that Yllowyyn's  
wound is not improving.

REGAN

Gods damnit. Always fucking something.

NIA

He needs proper medicine.

NARRATOR

Regan rubbed her temples as her nostrils flared.

BRENNEN

Your Grace, I recall when my arm was likewise wounded,  
you told me, "that's my arm and I'm going to need it."

REGAN

Where would you need to go?

NIA

Well, I've--

JEN

--Actually, I've been thinking. They must have what you  
need at the college, right?

NIA

Yes, but--

REGAN

--Out of the fucking question. The one place in this  
city where somebody's sure to know you by name?

NIA

Which is why I wasn't--

JEN

--But they won't know us. And we wanted to make a quick...detour around the school anyway.

BILLY

We did?

JEN

We didn't get to see much our first time there.

REGAN

This isn't a...fuckin'...*We're fugitives!*

JEN

But no one knows us!

REGAN

You mean apart from Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, who's got the whole city crawling with patrols?

JEN

There is no way her patrols each know us by sight.

NIA

This is a treacherous city for anyone. Even those on the right side of the law run no small risk of getting lost, or robbed, which is why I was--

NELSON

--You could draw us a map then. Tell us where the infirmary is, and maybe...the library?

NIA

Ah. I see.

REGAN

What am I in the dark about here?

NIA

Admittedly, I have committed to helping our young companions retrieve some materials from the college's library. Of course that was before we, well...I know they are clever enough to understand the frailty of our current situation.

BILLY

Yeah, we do. That's why we're so gung-ho on this.

JEN

When's the next time we're gonna be close to a library?

NELSON

Close to *the* library. To literally the one library that seems to exist on this entire continent.

JEN

All we need is a few books. Just so we'll know a little more. And we can get the medicine while we're there. Two birds, one stone.

REGAN

I wanna be clear that me even asking this is an attempt to be...what was it? Magnanimous? Okay. These books... they the kind someone can run in, grab, and run out?

NIA

Honestly, I'm afraid not. If the books they seek even exist, which I cannot guarantee, they will be extremely rare and therefore carefully guarded.

BILLY

Pssh. Narc.

NIA

But I must also say that, were we to find these books, it would go a long way towards putting their minds at ease. And mine.

REGAN

I'm gonna try this one more time. *None* of our minds should be at ease. We're in a fucked up spot here. Decisions we make in the next couple days are life-or-death for everyone in this room. Simple as that. We're getting Yllowwyn medicine so he doesn't fucking die. And all I wanna know is if someone's got an idea how to do it that isn't dumb as shit.

NIA

May I say one thing first?

REGAN

*(To herself with a very long sigh)*  
Magnamimous, Maggie.  
*(To Nia)*  
What.

NIA

If we should only take risks to avoid death, then why did we not keep our heads down and our mouths shut when you returned from that forest?

Beat.



REGAN

Nia...I appreciate your wise counsel. Now shut the fuck up. Okay, ideas for medicine. Not dumb as shit. Go.

NIA

I was originally going to say that I've an... acquaintance from school. Last I heard he was running a charitable apothecary out of his parish.

REGAN

How far?

NIA

No more than an hour's walk.

*(beat)*

And...I'd like your permission to take some money as well.

REGAN

I thought you said it was charitable.

NIA

It is, for the needy.

REGAN

Well guess what, Nia. Right now we're the fucking needy.

NIA

Is it wise, in your experience, to seek a favor from a reliable contact and come empty-handed?

Regan **sighs**.

REGAN

Here's how this is gonna go. You wear a disguise. You stay off the big streets. You see an Elf patrol? You duck down an alley or bend down to pick a copper off the street or something. You know how to spot or lose a tail?

NIA

Well, ah, I imagine--

REGAN

--That's a no. I'll give you a place to go back to. It'll be different from where we're staying, but I'll come and check on you. If you're clean I'll bring you back to us. If not...cross that bridge when we come to it. Got all that?

NIA

Yes, I think so.

REGAN

Repeat it back to me.

NIA

Wear a disguise, no big roads, avoid Elves, I'll go where you say and you'll meet me when it's safe.

REGAN

Good. You go exactly where you have to, *no additional stops.*

JEN

I can help with the disguise.

REGAN

Fine.

JEN

Billy? Nelson?

BILLY

What?

JEN

*(pointed)*  
Need your help too.

BILLY

You do?

JEN

*(please pick up what I'm putting down)*  
Yes.

BILLY

...Kay.

*Four sets of footsteps walk away.*

NARRATOR

And as Regan's court disbanded, she marked this last interaction well.

9 INT. ANOTHER ROOM IN THE INN - CONTINUOUS

9

NARRATOR

But thus did Nia and the three Pennsylvanians regroup in another room to assemble Nia's disguise. Their first attempted solution was to simply swap Nia's clerical frock for Nelson's nondescript tunic. The result was... well, not entirely convincing.

JEN

Worked for Shakespeare's heroines.

NIA  
Who?

NELSON  
I'm not sure suspended  
disbelief works in real  
life.

JEN

Last I checked we've been living in an alternate  
universe for - what - like a month now.

NELSON

Point taken.

Beat.

BILLY

It has to work. What else are we--

NARRATOR

--Jen interrupted Billy with a disparaging look.  
Vernacularly, one might say she "ice-grilled" him.

NIA

Thanks Billy. That's...soothing...

NARRATOR

Nia "futzed," as I've heard mortals say, with her  
borrowed "digs" - as they also say.

NIA

It is a bit snug.

JEN

They call it "form-fitting" where we're from.

NIA

I'm a little frightened to breathe if truth be told.

NARRATOR

Jen sized Nia up in the mirror.

JEN

Hmm. Yeah. Okay, try Billy's clothes.

BILLY

Wait, what am I gonna wear?

NIA

We'll switch. Nelson, give him my frock and cloak.

BILLY

Uhh...ok...I guess.

Beat.

JEN

It's...pretty unisex.

BILLY

*(trying to get there)*

Yeah it's...I mean, who cares? ...Right?

Sounds of clothing changes - rustling, grunts  
maybe.

NIA

*(sighs)*

This one's a little too big.

JEN

Nothing a little belting and blousing can't fix.

Some light rustling...

JEN

*(almost absent-minded)*

Things you learn when it's homecoming week but Mom can only afford the clearance rack.

Rustling stops.

JEN

And - here - stuff your hair in this hat.

NARRATOR

Jen's powers apparently extended beyond atmospheric anomalies to...I believe it's called "styling" in the human realm.

JEN

There we go. Solid Cesario vibe.

*(Corrects herself)*

No, Ganymede!

NIA

Who?

BILLY

Who?

NELSON

I'd say Eowyn.

JEN

Is that the "I am no man" lady?

NELSON

Yeah! ...You...knew that?

JEN

Everyone saw those movies, Nelson. We just didn't make them into a lifestyle choice.

NELSON

Fair enough.

BILLY

Nia's is kinda tight on me.

JEN

I think it's fashion forward. And the arms and pecs...  
(*we can almost hear the wink*)  
...A-plus, babe.

BILLY

(*only kinda convinced*)  
Ohhkay.

JEN

Nia, I think you're in good shape. You know what would top it off?

NARRATOR

Jen reached for Nelson's glasses, and he leaned away from her grasp.

NELSON

Uh. Sorry. No. I need these.

Beat.

JEN

Mmkay. This'll have to do then.

NIA

Right.

JEN

Hey, um...before you go. What did you think about what Regan said?

Nia takes a breath.

NIA

Her assessment of the risks is not wrong. But only the three of you are in a place to evaluate the risks of not getting those books. And I believe you are mature enough to decide for yourselves.

BILLY  
Bitchin'.

NIA  
Sure.

BILLY  
I mean--

NIA  
I cannot say I endorse this endeavor, but I shall draw you a map of the college and library, and give you what information I can. I'll have to go quickly though lest Her Majesty grows suspicious. So pay attention.

10 EXT. CASTLE GUERNATAL - EASTERN STOREHOUSE - DAY

10

An anxious crowd waits in the courtyard of a castle.

NARRATOR  
Ardel Redmoor had mustered two score armed men outside the Eastern Storehouse of the castle named after Guernatal. Standing in a ring around them were no small number of the common folk about the keep.

ARDEL  
*(addresses crowd)*  
Now then. We shall soon reveal once and for all that this so-called "phantom" is a foreign saboteur who is very mortal indeed. And I trust, once I've flayed him and strung him up from the ramparts, you will all  
RETURN TO YOUR DUTIES.

A beat. This speech does nothing to alter the anxious mood of the crowd.

ARDEL  
Captain?

GUARD CAPTAIN  
My liege?

ARDEL  
Set to...your task.

NARRATOR  
The unfortunate officer looked at his two nearest men, and nervously jerked his head towards the storehouse.

Beat.

Two armed and armored men start walking.

NARRATOR

As they reached its doorway, the two guards shared an uneasy look.

The footsteps pause for a moment before receding into the warehouse.

A beat.

*The next bit of action is heard through an open door and panned to our right:*

A knife plunges into flesh.

One **Redmoor Guard** groans.

A body crumples to the ground.

Ardel **yelps in fear**.

ARDEL

What's going on? What happened? Is that normal? Did we win?

Outside the storehouse, the crowd shows some worry.

*Panned inside the storehouse:*

REDMOOR GUARD 2

Hagar? Oh, gods, Hagar. Medic!

As this guard panics more, so does the crowd outside.

REDMOOR GUARD 2

Someone! Come and help me--ach!

This guy gets stabbed as well.

*Back outside:*

As gasps peter out, there's a quiet moment of shock.

NARRATOR

The crowd looked on in stunned silence as a small stream of blood began to pool on the dusty ground just outside the storehouse doors.

ARDEL

*(tries to sound tough through cracking voice)*  
 Is that...Did you kill the saboteur?  
*(collects himself for a beat)*  
 Get in there, all of you. Charge!

GUARD CAPTAIN

Charge!

There's a clamor of men and arms as a dozen plus guards run into the storehouse.

Something heavy rolls and creaks...

GUARD CAPTAIN

Oh shit. RETRE--

NARRATOR

--The last thing the point men saw were a half dozen barrels of spirits, well, barreling towards them from an upper rafter.

He's drowned out by several splintering crashes.

There's a grim beat of calm after the crash.

It drags on until...

Groans of the wounded and dying waft out from the storehouse.

NARRATOR

What few survivors managed to crawl back out from that treacherous storehouse were bloodied and shot through with thick jagged splinters.

The crowd now openly panics.

ARDEL

*(panics as well)*  
 Nyahhhh. Captain? Captain! Call for more men!

GUARD CAPTAIN

*(very badly hurt)*  
 M'lord.

ARDEL

Lock the doors and burn this storehouse to the ground.



The crowd's reaction turns from panic to bewilderment at this new order.

GUARD CAPTAIN

But m'lord. The food...

ARDEL

SELBIRIN TAKE THE FOOD! I want the saboteur killed!

The crowd is turning on Ardel, quickly growing furious.

ARDEL

Burn it, I said! I'm ordering you to burn it!

NARRATOR

The Captain of Ardel's guard looked up, through a haze of pain and exsanguination, at the gathered faces in the crowd. He saw people whom, but a few moons ago, before he threw in his lot with Ardel's mutiny, he had called his neighbors and sworn to serve.

GUARD CAPTAIN

...No.

ARDEL

I'll hang you for this.

GUARD CAPTAIN

You're welcome to try.

The Captain **breathes his last.**

ARDEL

Gods blast it all. Someone fetch me a torch!

The crowd begins booing and hissing.

NARRATOR

Only now, as their jeers grew louder, did Ardel remember the crowd, and turn to see their number. He turned back to look at the guards he had brought with him today - all dead or rapidly dying. And in the cold pit of his guts, where a better man might have earlier felt concern or compassion for the men who served him, Ardel nevertheless felt their loss very keenly now.

ARDEL

*(voice wavering)*

I...return to your homes. Food is sparse and there's work to be done.

WHISPERER

*(inside the storehouse)*

Lo! And hark, you gathered here.

ARDEL

What.

*A few gasps from the crowd, and then silence.*

NARRATOR

In that moment, it did not take much for the voice from the storehouse to capture the crowd's complete attention.

Ardel attempts to **interrupt** the whisperer ad lib. He does not succeed.

WHISPERER

I am vengeance turned to flesh. Food's not sparse but justice is. Ardel's a blight upon this land. I've no quarrel with those who reject him. Forsake the usurper, and eat well!

A moment passes, in the quiet of wordless fury.

NARRATOR

And as Ardel looked into the eyes of his gathered subjects, he saw only rage looking back. He took a nervous step backwards.

*One footfall.*

NARRATOR

And in that moment, though naught but human forces were at work, you'd be forgiven for thinking some spell had been broken. And all at once, the crowd darted for the storehouse.

*We hear a mad, screaming stampede.*

NARRATOR

Not a one of them cast so much as a glance towards their presumptive sovereign. And for his part, Ardel - flush with humiliation and sweating with fear - scurried off the other way.

Ardel runs away, **whining** the whole time.

11 EXT. ARMSTRUNGARD STREET - DAY

11

Street sounds...

NARRATOR

Nia ventured forth, head down, through the streets of Armstrungard to her friend's Monastery. Along the way, she recalled the counsel given her by Jen and Nelson...

Street sounds countinue underneath this  
FLASHBACK:

JEN

*Walk and talk like Billy.*

NELSON

*Yeah, zero class, grace, or manners.*

BILLY

*Hey what the fuck!*

NELSON

*I'm j.k. bro. You've come a long way.*

JEN

*(consoling)*  
*Totes. We're all works in progress.*

NARRATOR

...which she adhered to with...well, judge her aptitude for yourself.

Someone bumps into her.

PASSERBY

*Watch where you're going, kid!*

NIA

*Oh, pardon me, I--*  
*(catches herself, switches to her parents' cockney)*  
*--Oi, quit hogging the road, yeah?!*

NARRATOR

She scurried away quickly after this outburst. Probably for the best considering that this particular passerby had Sir Brennen's physical bearing...but did not appear to have the warmth, loyalty, and compassion that she'd come to know of her friend. No sooner than she'd dodged that proverbial bolt, she noticed assorted Elves roaming the street asking questions.

NIA

*Bullocks!*

NARRATOR

Nia was apparently emboldened by her "costume." Besides this uncharacteristic verbiage, she was surprised by her own deftness as she weaved through the street. And when she spotted another Elf Patrol asking questions of the nearby townsfolk...

*Mixer: Wherever the Elves are in the sound field, Nia's conversations should be panned in the other direction.*

ELF INFANTRY

*(annoyed)*

The thief queen. Aerona Regan. Have you seen her?

NARRATOR

...She hastily turned to the nearest street vendor.

STREET VENDOR

Garbage here! Hot and fresh!

NIA

*(still cockney)*

How much?

STREET VENDOR

Two copper.

*The Elf walks away from us as they speak.*

ELF INFANTRY

We hear she's back in town. If you hear of anything, the White Forest is prepared to be very generous.

NIA

*(still cockney)*

Maybe tomorrow.

NARRATOR

And when the Elves had passed, she nodded farewell to the street vendor...

*We follow Nia's footsteps, away from the Elf, off the streets through a batwing door...*

NARRATOR

Then dipped into the front of a saloon, only to exit through the rear a moment later.

*...Through a bustling tavern, and then back into a smaller alley.*

NARRATOR

Until finally she arrived at the parish she sought.

Nia opens a door.

12 INT. FRIAR IOHANSEN'S MONASTERY - EVENING

12

Nia steps inside a small chapel and closes the door behind her.

NARRATOR

Nia sighed with relief upon entering Frederick's quarters...

She **sighs**.

NARRATOR

...And peered out the window before being startled by the man himself, who approached from behind her.

FREDERICK

May I help you young sir?

NIA

Ah!

NARRATOR

Jen's wardrobing prowess must indeed have been magic, as Nia's longtime friend did not readily recognize her. At least not until she lifted her head, and removed the hat to reveal her hair.

FREDERICK

Nia?

NIA

Frederick!

FREDERICK

It's great to see you. And - a surprise. You're dressed ...Have you gotten wise and chosen a more lucrative profession than mine?

NIA

(*chuckles*)

I'm no richer and only marginally wiser than I was when last we spoke.

FREDERICK

A margin plus a mile wiser than me, then. I must hear all about your life, it's been ages. How is my *alma mater* treating you?

NIA

I'm sorry, Frederick. There's so much I'd love to talk with you about, truly. But I'm afraid I'm in need of a somewhat urgent favor.

FREDERICK

Are you all right?

NIA

It's...my friend. He needs medicine for a putrid wound.

FREDERICK

*(a little surprised)*  
Oh. Is the college not--

NIA

--You know how it is at the college. Wrangle up three faculty seals on a requisition letter, wait a week, make corrections. This is easier, and as I said I need it urgently if my friend is to keep his arm.

FREDERICK

*(Taken aback)*  
Galadon's mercy. Keep his arm? Ah--yes, of course. Follow me.

Two sets of footsteps.

They walk together for a slightly awkward beat.

FREDERICK

Are...are you sure all is well with you?

NIA

Yes.

FREDERICK

Are you certain?

NIA

You seem quite concerned with how I've lead my life since graduating. You could have reached out at any time.

FREDERICK

No, that's...that's fair.

Footsteps stop.

FREDERICK

Forgive me, I didn't mean to pry. It's just the coincidence is almost alarming.

NIA

Coincidence?

FREDERICK

That you arrive here, after so long, on the same day that a message came from your parents via MoNewstery.

NIA

Pardon, what?

FREDERICK

Yes, they are looking for you, asking everyone where you were last seen.

NIA

Do you still have the message? Can I see it?

FREDERICK

Yes, I believe so. Just a moment.

*Desk drawers open and papers shuffle around.*

FREDERICK

Here you are.

*He hands over a paper which is quickly unfurled.*

NIA

*(a little nervous)*

Probably just my mother being dramatic. I've told you how she can be.

MILDRED (V.O.)

Dearest Nia,

Hadn't heard from you in some time. Tried reaching you at the college, but they said you'd not been seen in weeks.

Your poor pa and mum are worried about you. Sure you're busy, but pray let us know you're well, and pray let us know where to reach you.

You're still our dearest, be the weather foul or fair.

Love,  
Mum.

NARRATOR

And as she read these words, Nia felt a tumult in the pit of her stomach, and a cold sweat on the back of her neck.

*Replay line with a more ominous effect:*

MILDRED (V.O.)

*...be the weather foul or fair...*

NARRATOR

For now she was certain that her parents were in danger.

**END OF PART TWO.**