

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD  
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 5  
"An Impregnable Missive"

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## PART FOUR:

25 MONTAGE

25

NARRATOR

Dear ones, I must now set down the tapestry I've heretofore been weaving, for just a moment, so that I may introduce one more thread. I know, I know, runs the risk of getting a bit busy. But the importance of this thread, for bringing the broader picture into relief cannot be overstated. So come with me, out west. Far west. Past rebuilt Freehold, past ruined Blackhold and ravaged Silberg...

Sounds of an army camp. Transitions to...

Past even Jethro's remote cabin and its terrible cellar.

Sounds of dripping ice and eerily clinking chains. Transitions to...

Over the god-made walls of that primordial fortress you call the Black mountains.

The whipping winds of a raging blizzard. Transitions to...

Down the foothills where the downtrodden many pull precious stones from the living rock, for the benefit of the privileged few.

Pickaxes strike rock. Somewhere, a bullwhip cracks. Transitions to...

26 EXT. WESTERN VILLAGE - DAY

26

Cock crows. Sounds of a rural morning.

NARRATOR

Until finally we arrive at a town on the plains. The inhabitants of this town would be called Urrkyet by the Elves, that is to say Orcs in the common tongue of the Eastern realms. But they called each other, well...by their names.

A creek babbles beside us. We hear the sounds of clothes being hand-washed in it.

NARRATOR

Allow me to introduce you to a woman of not quite sixteen years, whose parents called her First Snow.

Someone walks towards us. Something wooden clatters along with each step.

NARRATOR

We join her now at dawn, with an empty bucket over each shoulder as she sets to the day's chores.

First Snow is just a little winded.

FIRST SNOW

Good morning, Auntie.

NARRATOR

But she was not the first to have done so today.

STEADY RIVER

*(very good-natured teasing)*  
Morning, girl. Slept in today I see.

First Snow strains as she puts the buckets down.

FIRST SNOW

If Sleeps Through The Feast would mend the well like I asked him, then I wouldn't need to drag these buckets all over creation.

STEADY RIVER

You shouldn't speak so cruelly. Roan Dog is a sweet boy.

FIRST SNOW

Come to think of it, why *am* I up so early doing this? He should be carrying the buckets.

STEADY RIVER

He's hardly seen thirteen. He needs his rest.

FIRST SNOW

We all need rest, Auntie. I'm not much older than him. And I'm doing the work of three grown women. Instead of...

STEADY RIVER

Chasing boys? Matron knows I did at your age.

FIRST SNOW  
*(embarrassed)*  
 Auntie.

STEADY RIVER  
 Ha! You chase boys all right. They see you coming, they all run and hide so you won't ask them to do more chores.

*First Snow dips one of her buckets in the creek.*

FIRST SNOW  
 Someone has to. It's not my fault all the strongest folks went off to join that daft, pointless war. I spoke against it if you remember.

*She places one now full bucket of water down on the shore. Under her next line, she picks up and fills the other.*

FIRST SNOW  
*(on a roll, not listening)*  
 But no one listened to a fifteen year old girl then and no one listens to a fifteen year old girl now.

STEADY RIVER  
 Standing up for yourself is never pointless.

STEADY RIVER  
 I'm listening to you, girl. I always listen to you. But everyone's working as hard as they can.

*First Snow lifts the second full bucket of water from the creek and places it beside the first.*

FIRST SNOW  
 It's not enough. The days draw shorter and more chores go undone.

STEADY RIVER  
 Oh, I know it. I've seen many more winters than you. But does the lamed horse go any faster if you beat him?

FIRST SNOW  
 No. But neither does he heal once he's starving and cold. Which we will be if we don't prepare more.

STEADY RIVER  
*(sighs)*  
 Your parents named you well, First Snow. You are... inevitable. Try not to be chilly as well.

First Snow strains to lift the two buckets  
of water.

FIRST SNOW

*(exerting)*

Pleasant talking as always, Auntie. Send my love to--  
oh, twister take me!

*She quickly puts down the buckets.*

FIRST SNOW

I told Uncle I'd help him mend the pasture fence first  
thing today.

FIRST SNOW

*(anxious)*

Oh, I'm such a fool. There's  
too much work to even keep  
track of.

STEADY RIVER

*(trying to calm her)*

Girl, girl, girl. Do it  
later.

FIRST SNOW

What?

STEADY RIVER

*(what's the big deal?)*

Do it later.

FIRST SNOW

He won't be insulted?

STEADY RIVER

He won't know. He's left again.

FIRST SNOW

Oh.

STEADY RIVER

Matron only knows where he runs off to. He was never  
like this when he was young. I'll never understand why  
he waited for sixty to start sowing oats.

FIRST SNOW

Well he always comes back with something more than he  
left with and gives it to the town. So at least we know  
he's not drinking, gambling, or wenching. You should  
have faith in him.

STEADY RIVER

When you've been married to someone for forty-some  
years, you shouldn't need faith. You should feel like  
you know them.

(MORE)

STEADY RIVER (cont'd)

(beat)

Ach. But you don't need to know about the worries of old folks. Go see to your chores, and I'll see you for su--

ROAN DOG

(distant)

--First Snow!

Footsteps come sprinting toward us.

ROAN DOG

First Snow! They need you at the listening post.

FIRST SNOW

All right, I'm coming. Bring the water back into town, will you?

She jogs away.

FIRST SNOW

(over her shoulder)

Or better yet mend the blasted well!

27 INT. LISTENING POST - A FEW MINUTES LATER

27

NARRATOR

Now the listening post was a small structure on the opposite end of town from the creek. Much to First Snow's dismay. Mounted on each corner of its roof was a pole, and running from each pole was a web of woven copper cords. Each of these cords was run between a series of stakes, spaced a hundred yards or so apart. These stakes traced the shortest land routes between this town and every town with which it had amicable relations, which was quite a few indeed. Building all of these was a staggering feat, undertaken in bygone days, when time and able-bodied workers were more plentiful. But its ongoing utility will be apparent imminently.

A small bell clinks out a pattern of long and short chimes.

NARRATOR

Inside the structure was a wall full of bells, each connected to a wire, and beside a placard that named a  
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

town. One of these bells - the biggest one in fact - was ringing. Its placard read "Federation House."

The door to the structure opens.

FIRST SNOW

*(winded)*

What is it?

TRANSCRIBER

The Federation.

FIRST SNOW

Did you take down the message?

TRANSCRIBER

Yes, of course.

NARRATOR

First Snow went to the wall of bells, and took a small copper strand from next to the ringing bell between her fingers.

A magical pad becomes just barely audible.

NARRATOR

She concentrated deeply, and, for just a moment, the world around her seemed to shift.

We hear a small electrical zap.

The bell keeps ringing for several seconds longer, and then...

...Stops. The magical pad fades away.

It's a moment of relief.

FIRST SNOW

Have that message?

TRANSCRIBER

Here.

A beat as she reads.

TRANSCRIBER

What do they say?

FIRST SNOW

Everyone's hurting from this blasted war. The Federation needs more corn to feed the old and sick.

TRANSCRIBER

More corn? I've been to the granary. We'll be lucky as is to feed ourselves for the winter.

FIRST SNOW

I must speak with grandmother.

28 EXT. MILL - A FEW MINUTES LATER

28

NARRATOR

And so First Snow traversed her town once again. But she found that Steady River the Elder - whom the whole town regarded as a grandmother but whom First Snow felt lucky to regard as an Aunt - was no longer beside the creek. So First Snow made for the mill.

A mule clops in circles as a stone wheel  
creaks.

FIRST SNOW

*(walking towards us)*  
Auntie! Auntie!

STEADY RIVER

Catch your breath, girl.

FIRST SNOW

Bad news.

STEADY RIVER

Now hang on. Before you tell me the bad news, tell me one thing to be glad about.

FIRST SNOW

*(no time for this)*  
Auntie...

STEADY RIVER

You know my rule. You've already griped to me once today. Now tell me something you're glad about before you gripe again.

FIRST SNOW

*(sighs)*  
I guess...the mill's not broken yet.

STEADY RIVER

See? Not so hard. And I'll even give you one for free. Daffodil's still a good sweet girl. Ain't ya?



She pats the mule and it brays.

STEADY RIVER

However your cousins feel about doing chores, Daffodil never minds to turn this mill. Near to fourteen years, no signs of slowing down.

FIRST SNOW

Yes. Fine. Thank you for all your hard work, Daffodil.

STEADY RIVER

Now what's your news?

FIRST SNOW

The Federation needs more corn this year. To feed the old and sick.

STEADY RIVER

Mmm. We've not much corn to spare.

FIRST SNOW

Yes, granny. That's what I've been saying.

STEADY RIVER

And what do you think we should do?

She thinks.

FIRST SNOW

When your choice is between the difficult and the unlivable, you must choose the difficult. Any food that we kept from the old and the sick would turn to ash in our mouths anyway. We must find a way to send more corn.

STEADY RIVER

Good. So now that you know what is not negotiable, how should we walk the difficult path?

FIRST SNOW

Well...we could use the last of the emergency stores. But that would leave us in grave danger should next year's harvest be meager. I would say we could ask the Federation to return the favor next year if it came to that. But if our crop fails, there's no guarantee the other towns will fare better.

STEADY RIVER

Anywhere else to get more corn for next year then?

FIRST SNOW

The eastern fields. They're supposed to lie fallow for another two years. But we could sow corn a year early without doing too much damage. In any case it's a more tolerable risk than having no extra stores at all.

STEADY RIVER

I agree.

FIRST SNOW

We'd have to aerate it now, before the frost comes. But maybe a new project, and the cause behind it, will breathe some new energy into the town's work.

NARRATOR

A grin had begun to tug at First Snow's face, for the first time this day, as her mentor looked on with pride.

STEADY RIVER

See? That's another thing to be glad about. You've earned yourself a gripe at supper.

NARRATOR

First Snow smiled, despite herself.

STEADY RIVER

Take one or two of the older boys out with you to inspect the field, make sure all is in order. Then I'll call a meeting tomorrow and you can propose your plan.

29 EXT. THE FALLOW FIELDS - LATER

29

Three sets of footsteps trudge through dry dirt and dead plants.

NARRATOR

And so did First Snow make her way east, to the fields in which nothing was planted last year.

ROAN DOG

Is it close?

FIRST SNOW

Yes.

ROAN DOG

My feet hurt.

FIRST SNOW

*(I don't care.)*  
I'm sorry.

CAPALL BUÍ

You can take a rest if you want, little man. We'll catch back up with you later.

NARRATOR

On this journey, she had conscripted her younger brother, and a slightly older but much larger friend. Thus, as was typical, she had taken...an appreciable portion of her elderly mentor's advice.

FIRST SNOW

Don't coddle him. His feet don't really hurt, he just wants attention.

CAPALL BUÍ

So he's just gonna...tag along the whole time then?

FIRST SNOW

Grandmother said take two boys along. You wouldn't have me disobey your town elder would you?

CAPALL BUÍ

So when you said "take a walk and inspect the fallow fields," ...you actually meant that.

ROAN DOG

Gross.

FIRST SNOW

Mind your own business, second-born. But also yes, don't flatter yourself, Capall Buí.

ROAN DOG

See? She *does* think you're gross.

CAPALL BUÍ

How about I fallow your fields, runt?

We hear one last big push through some dead stalks.

FIRST SNOW

Will both of you be--

--Some repeating crossbows click.

NARRATOR

As the trio pushed their way through to the open field, they were met with a half dozen crossbows trained on them at *pointe blanc*.

RANGER CAPTAIN

Now just where in Selbirin do y'all think y'all going?

NARRATOR

The men wielding them looked to be humans of eastern descent. They were dusty and sunburnt, and their armor was roughspun and piecemeal. But their meticulously crafted repeating crossbows were of obvious Elven design.

RANGER CAPTAIN

Answer me. Why are y'all here?

LESSER RANGER

Maybe they ain't speak Common.

NARRATOR

One of the men lowered his weapon and addressed Capall Buí, who tensed up.

LESSER RANGER

Howdy. Me...Jon. Who you? Why here?

*When First Snow speaks the Common (Eastern) Tongue, she has a noticeable accent that we did not hear before.*

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

I speak some Eastern-tongue.

NARRATOR

The armed men now turned their attention away from Capall Buí and towards First Snow.

RANGER CAPTAIN

Good. Then you know what I'm asking you.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

Yes. We came out to inspect the fields. We're unarmed and have no fight with you.

*(beat)*

Though I might just as well ask what you are doing here.

RANGER CAPTAIN

*(amused)*

Ha!

NARRATOR

First Snow's two companions could not understand what was being said, and thus did not know the reason for, or intention behind, this man's laughter. They looked at each other uneasily.

RANGER CAPTAIN

We're doing our job. Now tell me, little miss, do you know the word trespassing?

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

No.

RANGER CAPTAIN

Well, it means walking someplace you ain't supposed to. And y'all are doing it. This here field is the property of my employ--ah...boss. And I'm allowed by law to use deadly force to protect it from trespassers. Now y'all seem peaceable enough so I don't wanna do that. But I am gonna have to ask you to turn back around.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

Who is your boss? This cannot be their property.

RANGER CAPTAIN

He's got a charter from the White Forest and everything. Else I wouldn't have taken this job.

FIRST SNOW (ACCEPTED)

May I speak with him?

RANGER CAPTAIN

I don't think so. He's very busy.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

*(firm)*

I won't leave until I speak with him.

RANGER CAPTAIN

Now, can't we just have a nice quiet afternoon?

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

Yes. After I speak to your boss.

NARRATOR

The armed man sighed, and rubbed his temples.

LESSER RANGER

I can just go ask him, Jack. I reckon he's expecting this sooner or later. Maybe he wants to get out in front of it, before it turns into a whole thing.

RANGER CAPTAIN

Can you negotiate on behalf of your people?

NARRATOR

First Snow looked at him quizzically.

RANGER CAPTAIN

Make agreements I mean. Will your people stick to agreements you make?

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

They don't have to. But they trust me to pass messages.

RANGER CAPTAIN

*(to the Lesser Ranger, resigned)*  
All right, fine. Go ask him.

One man trots off.

RANGER CAPTAIN

*(to First Snow)*  
Now if - if! - he agrees to talk to you, I'm gonna have to search y'all for weapons, all right?

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

I said we were unarmed.

RANGER CAPTAIN

I heard ya. Make sure that big feller understands what's going on here, I don't want him getting the wrong idea, ya hear?

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

I give you my word.

RANGER CAPTAIN

Uh huh. Hands up over your head.

30 EXT. UNFINISHED PLANTATION HOUSE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

30

Same external ambience as last scene, but workers hammer wood in the background as a rocking chair creaks in the foreground.

NARRATOR

A few hundred yards from where First Snow and her retinue were detained, there stood the nascent wooden skeleton of what sought to be a large house. Around the perimeter of this structure was a raised wooden platform, on which perched an Elf. He was in his early middle age, and draped in fine beige silks that were the height of fashion at the time. At the moment, he was rocking gently back and forth in a wooden chair as he swilled an aromatic brown liquid.

Eight sets of footsteps approach.

NARRATOR

This is the state we find him in, as First Snow and her comrades are brought before him under armed guard.

TYYMOS

This is them, I presume?

RANGER CAPTAIN

Yes sir, Mister Jyf. Walked right up like they owned the place. That's close enough.

Footsteps stop.

TYYMOS

Your man here says one of them speaks passable Common?

RANGER CAPTAIN

Yes sir. That one there.

NARRATOR

Cautiously - but not timidly - First Snow took a step forward.

One step in dirt

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

Hello. Pleased to meet you.

TYYMOS

*(intrigued)*

Hm! Hello indeed. What do you call yourself, girl?

She ponders.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

For now, call me Neighbor.

TYYMOS

Yes. Well. My name is Tyymos lo-Jyf. And this is my farm.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

With respect, I'm afraid you're mistaken. This is our farm. Our village has sown here as far back as there are stories.

TYYMOS

Perhaps. However. You have *not* sown these fields in the last two years.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

Yes, they're meant to lie fallow until--

TYYMOS

--And therefore they are fair to claim. And I've claimed them.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

By what law?

TYYMOS

A new one, admittedly. But fully ratified by the White Forest, and quite enforceable. I can read the whole thing to you if you'd like.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

But...of course we haven't sown here. The soil was worked and now it needs time to rest.

Tymmoss **chuckles**, kindly at least in his mind.

TYYMOS

A very charming bit of folklore, to be sure. But we Elves are an industrious race. Demand for corn is at an all-time high right now. To fall back on superstition when others are wanting is...well it borders on selfish, wouldn't you say? And so if you will not make use of your Galadon-given plenty, the law permits me to.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

*(holding back her temper)*

We know how to work our land. You do not. If you try it yourself, you will fail, and starve both our peoples in the process.

TYYMOS

I think not. I've all the latest technologies of the White Forest at my disposal.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

*(snaps)*

If you're such good farmers then why do you need other people's land?

Two quick footsteps. Crossbows immediately click.

NARRATOR

First Snow stepped forward but was restrained by her companions even quicker than the armed men raised their crossbows.



TYYMOS

Now listen. I've tried to explain this all very patiently. But I'm very busy so pray forgive my bluntness now. This here is my lawful property. If my person or my property is threatened, the full might of the White Forest is legally bound to come to my aid. If I fear they'll not arrive quickly enough, I can afford to hire as many rangers as I may need. My strong preference is that it need not come to that. There, I imagine, we agree. But do not mistake my politeness for temerity. Go back and tell your people that so long as I am unmolested here then there shall be peace. But aggressions or provocations visited upon me shall be visited back tenfold. Captain, please escort them off the property.

31 EXT. DIRT ROAD - DUSK

31

We hear the first insects of the early evening as three sets of forlorn footsteps trudge along.

NARRATOR

The sun had begun to set by the time First Snow and her companions were out of earshot of the crossbow-wielding men.

CAPALL BUÍ

What does he mean it's his farm?

FIRST SNOW

Says it's some new Eastern law.

Beat.

FIRST SNOW

This won't stand.

32 EXT. ARMSTRUNGARD STREETS - LATE MORNING

32

NARRATOR

Back East, Nia made her way back to Friar Iohanssen's chapel, with her feet pounding the cobblestones to match the pounding inside her chest. It required her trained clerical discipline not to break into an outright sprint. She made some effort to watch for Elf patrols as before, but her head was hazy with the blood rushing through it.

Chapel door flies open.

NIA

Frederick! What news?

FREDERICK

Nia? Oh thank Galadon you're all right!  
(*beside himself with genuine relief*)  
I'm so glad I trusted my gut.

NIA

What do you mean?

FREDERICK

I do wish you had told me the danger you were in.  
Though I of course understand why you felt you  
couldn't.

NIA

What is it you've heard?

FREDERICK

(*completely genuine*)  
And congratulations are overdue as well! A martial  
commendation, why I never.

NIA

Martial commen--oh. Oh, Frederick, no...

NARRATOR

Nia's knees had already begun to feel weak.

FREDERICK

(*excited and guileless*)  
But where are my manners? You'll not have heard yet.  
And I suppose it's only proper for the bestower to tell  
you herself.

NARRATOR

And then the door to Frederick's office opened.

A door opens. Footsteps walk towards us  
deliberately, and spurs jangle with them.

NARRATOR

Nia could not see the face of said bestower,  
silhouetted as it was by the morning sun. But the  
opalescent armor and flaxen, braided hair were  
unmistakable. It was then that Nia's knees gave out  
completely.

Nia collapses into a pew.

RY'Y

Nia. What a relief to see you.

**END OF CHAPTER.**