

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 8
"A Change of Scenery"

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PART FOUR:

21 OUTSIDE TIME AND SPACE

21

There's perfect quiet except for the Narrator.

NARRATOR

Now, for the remainder of this Book of our tale, the experiences of the Party of Seven - plus young Connor - are bound to be quite "action packed," as they say. So before I set us upon that ramp of causal gravity, I must tie up a few other loose threads.

These events, all profoundly important to what will follow, will nevertheless interrupt my...how do you say, "flow," if left for later. Impeccable pacing, you see, is a skill one acquires when free to exist outside time and space.

FADE IN:

22 EXT. SUGARCANE ISLE PORT - DAY

22

We're in a tropical clime, and at a busy seaport.

NARRATOR

First we journey to the southwestern-most tip of the so-called Sugarcane Archipelago, where a small rowboat has just made port.

BEN

After you, darling.

Four steps of feet walk onto a dock.

MILDRED

Well. I suppose...this is where we live now.

GWEN

Suppose it is.

MILDRED

(exhales)

Quite hot for late autumn, wouldn't you say?

ARLENE

My, what unusual trees. Beautiful though.

BEN

Listen, don't take this the wrong way. I can't imagine you have supper plans. And since you're the only familiar faces on this entire landmass...what say we four find a public house and get better acquainted?

ARLENE

I think that would be love--

--She's interrupted by just the kindest-sounding middle-aged church lady you can possibly imagine--

ETHEL

--Excuse me, I'm so sorry to intrude. Are you four new here, by any chance?

A brief, uncertain beat...

MILDRED

We are.

GWEN

Why do you ask?

ETHEL

Well I work for the Church, and--oh, how rude of me! My name's Ethel. How do you do?

BEN

Well met, Ethel. I'm Ben.

ETHEL

Ben.

MILDRED

Mildred.

ARLENE

Anna.

GWEN

Gayle.

ETHEL

Well color me charmed. And might I ask - I don't know the customs where you all are from, but around here you two are dressed as preachers. Are you of Galadon's Cloth by any chance?

MILDRED

Me and Ben were preachers on the mainland.

ETHEL

Oh, wonderful! That will give us something to talk about for sure. Not that we wouldn't have found other topics on our own. Anyway, as I was saying, I work for the Church too. We make it a point to try and welcome all the newcomers here. So consider yourselves bade welcome!

ARLENE

(pleasant surprise)
Oh. How very kind of you.

ETHEL

And if you're interested, we serve a meal everyday at our rectory. It's later than breakfast and earlier than lunch, so we call it lunchfast - just a cute little thing we all do around here. It's pay what you can, wouldn't wanna presume anything either way about your circumstances. And there's lots of friendly, decent folk to meet. If you need help finding somewhere to stay, just talk to Gregory and he'll get you set right up.

NARRATOR

A cascade of grateful smiles passed between the four weary travelers.

MILDRED

(mostly to herself)
Galadon does provide.

ETHEL

Indeed he does! So you'll stop by, then?

ARLENE

I believe we shall.

ETHEL

Oh, I'm so glad! Now, I have to stay here a while longer in case anyone else arrives. But if you stay on this road a-ways, it'll take you straight to our rectory. It's just a few paces past the auction house. You can't miss it.

23 EXT. SEAHOLD DOCKS - NIGHT

23

It's night, but there's still some commercial activity around us. And definitely some waves and sea birds.

NARRATOR

Now, indeed the very night before these four travelers were bid this warm welcome, there was another journey to the Sugarcane Isles being planned. And this one was...well, I'll let you see for yourself.

We set our scene now in Seahold, where two men - both very recently down on their luck - were meeting. Little did they know, they were each soon to be the next in the other's latest streak of misfortunes.

ARDEL

I'm told you can offer discreet and safe passage to the Sugarcane Isles.

NARRATOR

The one - Ardel Redmoor - had recently been exposed and deposed by a much craftier opponent. And, you'll recall, he was rapidly running low on the means by which the highborn typically evaded justice.

OLAFSSON

Ayup. For a reasonable fee, of course.

NARRATOR

The other - Captain Otto Olafsson - had been robbed of everything but the shirt off his back, and set adrift at sea, by Red Ren the Ruthless and her crew.

ARDEL

Would you accept that ass?

OLAFSSON

Excuse me?

ARDEL

That donkey, right over there. Hearty farm stock to be sure.

The donkey brays.

OLAFSSON

For the journey you're after? That's an insultingly low price.

ARDEL

And yet here you are, still on the docks after dark, after all the more reputable captains have already found employment.

A beat...

24 EXT. MERCHANT VESSEL DECK - DAWN

24

We're out at sea on a large, wooden vessel.

OLAFSSON

(mutters under his breath)

So this is what you've come to, Otto. Reputation in the shitter, plying your father's trade for flea-bitten livestock. What would he say if he saw you?

Two feet - and four hooves - approach.

OLAFSSON

Will you get that ass back below deck?

The donkey brays.

OLAFSSON

You're not paying enough to be up here. You're barely paying enough for steerage!

ARDEL

(anger and disdain)

My briny fellow, do you see those watch lights on the shore?

OLAFSSON

Ayup.

ARDEL

Might I ask what part of my desire for *discretion* was unclear?

OLAFSSON

Whoever they are, they can't reach us out here. You do understand that, don't you?

ARDEL

We need to be farther out. Now.

OLAFSSON

Any farther out, we're bound to be boarded by pirates. I'm certainly not doing that again.

NARRATOR

And then, with self-certainty that could only be mustered by a man accustomed to having all his worst impulses enabled by those around him, Ardel grabbed the helm.

He yanks the helm to one side.

OLAFSSON

Let go of that you goofy bastard!

Olafsson yanks it back.

ARDEL

Farther I said!

He yanks again.

NARRATOR

A few minutes later...

WHOOSH TO...

25 SAME - A FEW MINUTES LATER

25

SAILOR IN CROW'S NEST
Pirates!

There's panic down below.

NARRATOR

Another few minutes later...

WHOOSH TO...

26 SAME - ANOTHER FEW MINUTES LATER

26

A ship-to-ship swordfight is in full swing all around us.

NARRATOR

And a few minutes later still...

WHOOSH TO...

27 SAME - GET THE IDEA YET?

27

REN

This fucker again? You don't learn too quick, do you?

OLAFSSON TRIES TO STAND UP FOR HIMSELF, THROUGH A GAG.

ALF

Searched the ship, Mum. He's poorer than a dirt farmer's stable boy, doncha know.

OLAFSSON MANAGES TO SPIT OUT HIS GAG.

OLAFSSON

'Cause you robbed me blind, not two weeks ago!

REN

(we can hear her impish grin)
You though. You're a rich bastard.

ARDEL

What? No! I've nothing to my name. Just that ass.

The donkey brays.

ARDEL

And it's his now anyway.

REN

Ha! Never before have I seen someone on a boat like this, who looks less comfortable to be here. If you can't fetch a pretty little ransom, I'll eat my scabbard. Alf - grab him.

ARDEL **PROTESTS**, BUT HE'S GAGGED MID-THOUGHT.

ALL THE **PIRATES CHEER**.

GATHERED PIRATES

(celebratory)
We're the salty sons of no one.
Sailing the red, red reaver.
Though the seas get tough we're sticking tough.
Gotta see her to believe her.

We fade out midway through their song...

28 INT. JETHRO'S CABIN - NIGHT

28

We're inside the cabin, but the door is ajar and rattling. Outside, the winds are fierce and frigid.

NARRATOR

And as we continue our tying of loose threads, I must return you once more to a remote cabin on the eastern
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

slope of the Black Mountains. And to two of the most loathsome creatures we have met to date.

A literal pile of bones drags itself inside the cabin.

The door shuts.

As always, the barely-corporeal Renault speaks by means of magic, not mechanics.

RENAULT

Hello? Is anyone home?

(beat)

Anyone? Going once...

(barely half a beat)

Well finders keepers I suppose. Now let's see here, must be a pantry or a larder or--

Jethro also speaks by means of magic.

JETHRO

--You're looking pretty rough, there, fella.

RENAULT

Who said that?

JETHRO

Just the owner of the homestead you've availed yourself of.

RENAULT

Well show yourself, then! But be warned! I have terrible and powerful magicks at my disposal.

JETHRO

Yeahhh, the fact you still walking and talking inclines me to believe you. But I'm not unskilled in the arcane arts myself.

A fireplace and couple of torches suddenly blaze alight.

RENAULT

So it's that way, is it? Very well!

We hear a sickly magical pad...

...and before too long, all kinds of bugs and worms and shit are skittering up from the floor and through the walls

JETHRO

Easy there, fella, easy. I see no need for us to quarrel. Least not yet. I was just giving us some light.

RENAULT

If you're not my foe then show yourself!

JETHRO

Look over in the corner there. You see that painting?

RENAULT

...Yes?

JETHRO

Well there I am.

RENAULT

Is that meant to be a joke?

JETHRO

Oh, no joke fella. You see I ran into some trouble with some folks, and they, ah...well suffice it to say the vessel my mother gave me wasn't much good no more. From the looks of it, you know what that's like. So I found the next best vessel at hand.

RENAULT

A vessel? Are we speaking, then, of transcending the natural limitations of mortal flesh?

JETHRO

Indeed we are.

RENAULT

And am I to understand that you have extended your life into something which was never living to begin with?

JETHRO

Well...not never. It's a matter of degrees, ain't it? This canvas was plants once. But fair enough, its lifetime is much more distant than the bodies you and I was born with.

RENAULT

A fascinating and useful talent.

(MORE)

RENAULT (cont'd)

(pause)

Suppose you were to teach it to me. Perhaps I have something you would consider fair in return.

JETHRO

Well I seen what you did with all them creepy crawlies in the wall. Were you merely calling them to your aid, or was they following your will in a more specific way?

RENAULT

(very proud of himself)

Each creature that emerged was at my beck and call.

JETHRO

You're sure now? Can be hard to tell with those little whosits. And we wouldn't wanna get any future... collaborations started with an empty boast.

RENAULT

Nothing at all empty about this.

NARRATOR

Renault uncurled what was left of an arm out towards the painting with which he conversed. And as he did, a particularly plump and furry spider ran up his shoulder and into his outstretched palm. At which point, it reared up on its four hind legs...and begin to wiggle its front four back and forth.

RENAULT

(singing...poorly)

Ya ta ta, hot cha cha, this is how the girls at the college dance, Ya ta ta ta ta taaa, ta ta hot cha cha.

JETHRO

Well...never quite got the hang of that one, myself. All right then. I'll teach you mine if you teach me yours. Deal?

RENAULT

Deal.

NARRATOR

And now, if you'll indulge me, there's one more thread to tie, so long as we are speaking of loathsome things.

We hear dinner being eaten on the left and right of us, but conspicuously not center.

NARRATOR

We return to the house of Yllowyyn's parents. Where I'm afraid a loathsome event is about to transpire.

Mixer: Wyyyn is to our right, and Ba'at is to our left.

BA'AT

My darling, I do not blame you for disliking this news, but would you please eat something?

WYYN

Ruby worked all last night and all today to make your favorite stew.

YLLODYK

So I'm to be a prisoner in my own house, then.

WYYN

If you only knew the absurdity, child, of calling this place a prison.

YLLODYK

Would you consent to such a condition?

BA'AT

I would if it were for my own safety, dear.

YLLODYK

Safety. Must you always be so dramatic, father?

BA'AT

One day you will know what it is to love a child.
(getting wound up)
To know with certainty that you would not only give your life for another, but that you rend the very foundations of Selbirin and Iorden just to make them comfortable, only to have them SPIT IN THE FACE of everything gave them--

YLLODYK

--I never wanted any of this, and if you'd only listen to me long enough to--

WYYN

--ENOUGH!!

That shuts them both up for a bit.

WYYN

Husband, when she speaks deliberately to rile you, I think you are clever enough to not let yourself be riled. Look, your face is already growing red. And child, I assure you your father is not being dramatic when he speaks of your safety. Now will you please eat?

YLLODYK

What danger could I possibly be in?

NARRATOR

A wordless exchange passed, then, between Ba'at lo-Yl and Wynn lo-Dyk. It was an exchange of parents, deciding what sorts of knowledge it was worth burdening their offspring with.

A beat.

BA'AT

That's...just it, my love. We're not sure.

YLLODYK

Pah! Well there you have it.

WYYN

What your father means to say is that... we now have an enemy in Ry'y lo-Th'yyt. Not to mention that dreadful Ba'al Syndyyk. And both of them are the kind whose ambitions far outpace their consciences. We must be exceedingly careful.

A tense silence.

BA'AT

Will you please eat something, darling?

YLLODYK

For the last time, I am not hungry.

(then...an idea.)

In fact! I don't think I shall be hungry for quite some time.

WYYN

What ever are you talking about?

YLLODYK

Ba'alophyyl told me about the workers under the mountains. When their conditions became truly intolerable, they would simply refuse to eat, until conditions improved...or they DIED! That's what I shall do.

WYYN

Yllodyk, I have known you longer than you have known you. If it's one thing you won't do it's starve yourself to death in protest.

BA'AT

Now *your* face is growing red, dear.

HE **COUGHS**.

YLLODYK

(smug)

Well I don't need to die. I only need to outlast this tyrannical dictate of yours. And look how out of sorts I've gotten you just by skipping one meal.

WYYN

Child, for the love of Galadon, will you--

(coughs)

--please. Stop. Being. So--

--HER **COUGHING FIT** STOPS HER FROM FINISHING HER SENTENCE.

BA'AT'S **COUGHING** HAS GOTTEN INTENSE AS WELL.

YLLODYK

(just generally being a little shit)

Well don't get all choked up about it.

NARRATOR

But even as this jape left her tongue, Yllodyk saw both her parents' expressions cross from annoyance to discomfort to genuine distress.

THE COUGHS GIVE WAY TO **PANICKED GASPS FOR AIR**.

YLLODYK

(panicking herself)

Mother? Father

A beat with no improvement.

YLLODYK

Ruby!

Yllodyk leaps up from her seat, knocking it to the floor in the process.

She sprints to the kitchen door and throws it open.

YLLODYK

Ruby! Quick, call the phys--

NARRATOR

--But when Yllodyk opened the kitchen door, the sight therein stopped the words in her throat.

YLLODYK

(breathless)
Ruby.

NARRATOR

The serving girl Ruby lay pallid and still on the floor, blood pooling around her open wrists, and a paring knife in one limp hand.

YLLODYK

Galadon have mercy.

NARRATOR

Yllodyk clutched at a counter-top and clenched her eyes to stop from fainting herself. When she opened her eyes, the world was spinning and a grey haze was tickling at the corners of her vision. And it was in this state - somehow both detached and deeply focused at the same time - that she noticed the piece of parchment on the counter.

We hear her pick up a piece of paper.

YLLODYK

(reading - hastily!)
Woe is me, terrible woe is me. I have foolishly mistaken deadly Widow's Cup for shameless Peasant's Saucer in my mistresses favorite mushroom stew.
(starting to make sense of it)
Widow's Cup!

She runs back into the dining room.

YLLODYK

Mother, Father, we need to get you--

NARRATOR

--But when she returned to the dining room, both of her parents were already face down on the table, unmoving, with the skin around their necks an angry shade of purple.

YLLODYK

FATHER! MMMM--

--BUT 'MOTHER' DISSOLVES INTO INCOHERENT **SOBBING**.

NARRATOR

Had nothing else happened, it is entirely possible that Yllodyk might have stayed in that spot, crying until she had run out of tears. And perhaps even she would die of deprivation after all, so great was the shock she'd just suffered. But, for better or for worse, she was not yet free from danger - not at all. And the next danger headed her way made itself known to her by...
(extremely resentful sigh)
 ...it must be admitted - the loud and ostentatious door into the main hall.

We hear a loud an ostentatious door creak and groan open, at the other end of a VERY long hall.

IT TAKES GREAT EFFORT, BUT YLLODYK **STIFLES HER OWN CRIES.**

AN ELF TOUGH

(at - again - the other end of a VERY long hall)
 He said make sure it was done right.

Footsteps head towards us from down that VERY long hall.

NARRATOR

Her desire to live now pushing back against her desire to grieve, Yllodyk did something so well-practiced that it was possible even in an utter state of panic. Without making a sound, she slipped off her shoes and took them in hand. She dashed deftly up the servants' stairs, knowing exactly where to land on each step so that it would not creak. Upon reaching the second floor, she darted into her bedroom, opened a window, and slipped out onto a nearby branch...quiet as a summer breeze.

FADE SLOWLY TO QUIET.

30 INT. UNDER THE MOUNTAINS

30

NARRATOR

So. The remainder of Van Der Berg's journey with his eight charges under the mountains passed uneventfully.
(beat)
 Well...largely uneventfully.

WHOOSH IN mountain tunnel ambience. The party walks towards us.

BILLY

(a sudden insight)

Bro. I don't know how I didn't think of this before.
But...Jesus.

NELSON

What about him?

BILLY

He finds out he's god.

NELSON

He gets tortured to death!

BILLY

Oh, word, I forgot about that.

NELSON

You for--that's a hugely important part of that story!

JEN

Billy, remember we talked about this?

BILLY

Oh snap, what's over there?

He runs off to the side.

VANDERBERG

Hey, easy now.

NARRATOR

The glint that caught Billy's eyes revealed itself, under torchlight, to be a full suit of gilded plate steel, sat on the lip of what looked like a well.

BILLY

Ah sick, bro, free armor! I got dibs.

VANDERBERG

Now just hang on.

NELSON

(panicked)

Billy, wait wait wait wait wait wait.

NARRATOR

But on holding the torch closer, Billy saw through the helmet, to the desiccated skull of the armor's prior owner.

BILLY

Ugh, what the fuck?!

NARRATOR

And as he recoiled in horror, he managed to dislodge a single gauntlet, and send the rest of the suit careening down the well.

We hear the armor clatter loudly all the way down and extremely deep hole. It stays clattering until it falls completely out of earshot; the hole is so deep we don't even hear it hit the bottom.

NELSON

(a furious stage whisper)
BILLY!? WHAT. DID. I. SAY.

There is a very long and tense silence.

When nothing else happens...

BILLY

(whispers)
Sorry.

VANDERBERG

Sounds like we're clear. Let's keep moving. And don't do that shit again.

31 EXT. WESTERN MOUNTAIN TUNNEL - LATER

31

NARRATOR

So yes, that aside it was uneventful.

WHOOSH BACK.

The party walks towards us.

NARRATOR

And it was a little before noon on the third day of their travels when Van Der Berg - well-trained in what to look for - began to perceive a faint bluish glow up ahead. And soon thereafter, he felt the slightest stirrings of a breeze.

VANDERBERG

Hey y'all. You feel that? Look up ahead. We made it.

THE WHOLE PARTY CHEERS.

The pace of their steps picks up drastically.

Then, the space opens up. The echoes and cave sounds recede, and we're met with a cool mountain breeze. Maybe even the cry of a hawk if it's not too trite a clip.

NARRATOR

And as they walked, blinking, out of the tunnel and onto a plateau, the sensory experience was overwhelming. It might have been just the contrast with the damp and dark under the mountains. But the air smelled...crisp. Like a handful of untrod snow. The sun burned brighter amidst the deepest blue expanse. And the landscape was a vivid tableau of land and life. Oceans of green grass, specked with towers of vibrant red clay stretching to the skies.

VANDERBERG

Ladies. Gentlemen. Welcome to the West.

(Under the end credits of this episode, a new, decidedly more "Western" arrangement of the theme music plays.)

END OF CHAPTER.