

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 8
"A Change of Scenery"

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PART THREE:

15 INT. UNDER THE MOUNTAINS

15

Eight sets of footsteps - a few carrying
torches - walk towards us, as our Party's
voices fade in:

BILLY

What about *The Matrix*? You ever see that flick?

NELSON

(no duh)

Yeah, I've seen The frickin' *Matrix*, Billy. My Dad
wrote a chapter in a textbook about it.

BILLY

Well Keanu's basically a god in that, and he turns out
okay.

NELSON

He gets shot to death!

BILLY

Yeah but then he comes back all powerful and shit?

NELSON

He gets blinded by robots!

JEN

Hun, it's very sweet that you're trying to help but
maybe we can just let Nelson sit with his feelings for
a bit, yeah?

NARRATOR

But Nelson's feelings were interrupted once more by a
fork in the subterranean path.

The footsteps gradually come to a halt.

VANDERBERG

Hey y'all. We're going left, on account of a dragon.

JEN

What?

VANDERBERG

Yeah, path to the right's a little shorter. But we've
heard tell there's a dragon that way. Might be
bullshit, but why chance it just to save an hour?

(Beat)

C'mon.

Footsteps resume, and recede off to our left.

16 INT. DRAGON'S HOARD

16

We're back in the Dragon's hoard. And for some reason...we're just sitting there for a while.

MAG UIDHIR

All right, that's it. I give up.

DRAGON

It is not permitted, this "giving up."

MAG UIDHIR

It must be almost a full day by now. I can't think of anything that has three wings, five legs, seven hearts, nine brains, no voice, and swims.

DRAGON

Well then keep trying.

MAG UIDHIR

I will not. You'll have to watch me die of thirst.

DRAGON

What if I gave you a hint?

MAG UIDHIR

I didn't know hints were an option. I would love a hint.

DRAGON

(unsteady)

Yes of course it's...ah...it has...eleven toes!

NARRATOR

Mag Uidhir looked deep into the Dragon's eyes, each one a globe of onyx, several yards around with a halo of fire for an iris.

He waits a beat.

MAG UIDHIR

This riddle has no answer, does it?

DRAGON

(almost sheepish?)

...No. I made up the clues on the spot and just hoped you'd think of something that fit.

MAG UIDHIR

(sighs)

You know, if I weren't speaking to so wise and venerable a being, I'd suspect you were stalling for time.

NARRATOR

Mag Uidhir's terrible and enormous interlocutor stared him down for a good...long...while.

DRAGON

...So I am.

MAG UIDHIR

Why?

DRAGON

Because I have enjoyed speaking with you. And I do not want you to leave.

MAG UIDHIR

You could overpower me as I could overpower an ant. Why the pretense of riddles?

DRAGON

Because riddles resemble conversation. And it would be immoral to overpower you.

MAG UIDHIR

You--we'll come back to that. Why not just venture out above. There are many who would relish--be honored by the chance to speak with you. Maybe even other living Dragons for all I know.

DRAGON

Because I do not want to.

MAG UIDHIR

You don't want to.

DRAGON

There's unlikely to be anyone interesting up there anyway.

MAG UIDHIR

You found me interesting. I assure you I am not *that* especially clever.

DRAGON

And look. Not even you wish to speak with me.

(a pause...then, forlornly)

You'll want to step to the side.

MAG UIDHIR
What?

DRAGON
Step a few yards away. Quickly!

Footsteps scuffle.

NARRATOR
Mag Uidhir did so, and not a moment before something shiny and heavy came streaking down from the cavernous dark above, and crashed into where he'd been standing.

There's a quick whoosh of air and then a huge metallic clank.

MAG UIDHIR
What the blazes?

NARRATOR
Upon some inspection, Mag Uidhir saw that he had dodged a suit of gilded plate steel, now badly dented but complete - apart from one missing gauntlet. When it hit, it had spewed a small cloud of fine dust, the origins of which Mag Uidhir could guess, but was not willing to get close enough to know for certain.

DRAGON
Such trinkets are always falling down here. Adventurous souls, who get lost or fall down a well or some such. In days gone by, I was grateful to be alerted of a meal. But now, you know...

MAG UIDHIR
Aye, the oath. Now, to that point...I actually rather have enjoyed speaking with you. It's just...to your point, the ones I'm traveling with do not have the boon nor curse of magical long life. And I would very much like to keep my word to them by getting them what they seek.

DRAGON
(big sigh)
Alas you are right. I have again betrayed my morals, and disappointed my ancestors and myself.
(beat)
I shall grant you and your comrades safe passage. That is only fair.

MAG UIDHIR
Thank you, oh venerable one.

DRAGON

The weapon you seek, this enchanted shield. Do you know what it looks like?

MAG UIDHIR

Thick oak, with a large ring of iron in its center.
Leaves painted on it in woad and gold.

DRAGON

I have seen it. I will tell you where it is.

MAG UIDHIR

You... I thank you. I will tell stories of your
graciousness to whoever will listen.

A beat...

NARRATOR

But Mag Uidhir, having been granted what he claimed to want by a terrible force of nature which owed him nothing, did not hasten to act on his unbelievable luck. Instead, he stood where he was, looking perhaps more nervous than he had since this entire ordeal began.

DRAGON

There is something else you seek.

MAG UIDHIR

...There is.

DRAGON

We agreed on terms and the terms have been met. One less patient than me might accuse you of having bargained in bad faith.

MAG UIDHIR

Never, oh Venerable One. Rather...I know that what I must ask next may indeed be too much. I would--I *must* dare for myself, but I would not take the risk on behalf of my companions.

DRAGON

You have my sacred word that I will not hold what you ask against your companions. But I must hear you ask it. Now.

MAG UIDHIR

(takes a breath)

A Dragon's plumage. Are the rumors true?

NARRATOR

At this, Mag Uidhir's gargantuan interlocutor flared their nostrils.

DRAGON

YOU INDEED ASK TOO MUCH! If I would not be your weapon in spirit then I would no more be your weapon in body. To ask it of me is insult against the sanctity of my spirit, my body, and my word!

MAG UIDHIR

You misunderstand me! I would not use it as a weapon. It is said that but one quill of your mane can unmake any injury. Is that true?

DRAGON

(this is bringing up some shit for them)
Do you think I've not known your kind before? Of course you would use it as a weapon! It is all you know.

MAG UIDHIR

All I want is my body back.

DRAGON

Will you not use your body to fight in your war?

MAG UIDHIR

Of course I will. It's all I have to fight with. But I am no more or less able to fight in my body than in this...desecrated thing I now inhabit.

DRAGON

Then explain your desire to have it back.

MAG UIDHIR

(much angrier than one should be when speaking to a Dragon)
BECAUSE IT IS MINE! I went through quite a lot to get it and I would go through quite a lot more to have it back.

A beat.

NARRATOR

Mag Uidhir's bargaining opponent narrowed their tremendous eyes.

DRAGON

You're not lying, but neither are you telling me the whole truth. I must insist that you do.

MAG UIDHIR

I will! In exchange for your plumage. One quill per question. I must answer each question as thoroughly as you like but they must indeed be *one question* each. Once I am satisfied that my body is returned to me, I shall leave. But I assure you, I have a great many injuries I wish to unmake.

NARRATOR

The slits of the Ancient One's irises opened, each to the size of a pitch black door through which a grown man could easily fit. They studied Mag Uidhir for a long, long time. Mag Uidhir, to his credit, trembled all the while but never once flinched from this awesome and horrible gaze.

DRAGON

I accept your proposal.

MAG UIDHIR

Very good.

(*shouts*)

Arden! General Traft! Get your arses in here! It's safe! For now!

They start from pretty far away, but five sets of footsteps rapidly approach and then come to a halt.

TRAFT

What's going on?

MAG UIDHIR

I've negotiated safe passage.

TRAFT

Well hot damn, you'll have to tell me how you managed that soon as we're out of here

MAG UIDHIR

That's not all. The mighty keeper of this cavern is going to show you where to find Mac Connor's Shield.

TRAFT

He what?

MAG UIDHIR

Take the shield, and bring it west as we planned. Find someone worthy to wield it.

TRAFT

What about you?

He pauses.

MAG UIDHIR

I've negotiated my own deal. I'll be staying here a while.

17 INT. FEDERATION HOUSE - DAY

17

NARRATOR

Now I must take you a good ways west, where another deal was being discussed.

We're inside a large wooden building. It's heated by a very big fire at its center.

CHIEF SPEAKER

First Snow of Three Bridges. The Speakers of the Federation have conferred about Three Bridges' plight, and your request for aid.

NARRATOR

The fire inside the Federation House had been built very large this day. There was a damp chill in the air; if you'd asked Steady River, she'd have said that First Snow's namesake was on its way. And between the fire, and her nerves from waiting to hear what the other Federation members had decided, First Snow's winter furs were damp with already damp with sweat.

CHIEF SPEAKER

By unanimous consent...
(*knows they're delivering bad news*)
...every village in the Federation will take your people in as their own, should they choose to flee.

NARRATOR

First Snow hung her head. For while this decision was generous in and of itself, the notable omission of her most urgent request told her all she needed to know. Steady River squeezed her hand in consolation.

CHIEF SPEAKER

Furthermore, Three Bridges is exempt from this year's request for additional corn.

FIRST SNOW

So, the call for warriors has been denied, then?

CHIEF SPEAKER

The villages will all be know of your troubles, and that you are asking for warriors. Some will be permitted to volunteer. However, we must insist that no

(MORE)

CHIEF SPEAKER (cont'd)
village should deplete its workforce by any more than
one quarter.

FIRST SNOW
(*sad, not challenging*)
You know that won't be enough to repel the rangers.

CHIEF SPEAKER
(*genuine*)
I'm sorry, First Snow. We expect a very hard winter.
The able-bodied are needed.

FIRST SNOW
But if more warriors are sent, we can defend the town
with fewer losses. Everyone can return home to their
work as soon as the fighting is done.

CHIEF SPEAKER
Respectfully, First Snow, that is not our assessment.

FIRST SNOW
So you think us incapable fighters, then?

CHIEF SPEAKER
The village raised by Steady River and...her husband?
No one could doubt your courage. But many of the
Speakers here have run with war parties. Believe us
when we say that courage is rarely enough. It's a
matter of numbers, yes, but--

FIRST SNOW
--Well then give us--

CHIEF SPEAKER
--But! It is also a matter of experience. Of tactics.
Of a great many skills, that you could never hope to
acquire in a week's time.
(*aside*)
...And perhaps shouldn't want to.
(*Continues*)
Most in the Federation who had those skills joined
Traft's campaign, and have returned maimed or not at
all.

FIRST SNOW
(*under her breath*)
Not everyone.

NARRATOR
At this, Steady River squeezed First Snow's hand a
little more sharply. But if the Chief Speaker heard
this reply, she made the diplomatic decision not to
acknowledge it.

CHIEF SPEAKER

The Federation has nothing more to say on the matter, I'm afraid. But you are welcome to join us for our evening meal.

STEADY RIVER

Thank you, but no. I've found bad news is best delivered as soon as possible.

CHIEF SPEAKER

Will you take some bread and meat for the road?

STEADY RIVER

Yes, thank you.

CHIEF SPEAKER

Very well. If you're not staying, I believe some of the other Speakers had some things they wanted to say.

SPEAKER 1

Yes, that's right. Between Stones made more blankets than we think we'll need this year. We'll send them to Three Bridges. If you choose to leave, they'll warm you on your journey. If you choose to fight, perhaps you can trade them, and hire a ranger or two yourselves.

FIRST SNOW

(has objections)

I...

(but thinks better of speaking them)

...appreciate your generosity.

SPEAKER 2

North Bend has some lumber we can spare. We'll send a cart.

SPEAKER 3

South Hill has many bows that Traft's warriors left behind. Believe me when I tell you the cost of fighting the Easterners is terrible. But if you insist on it anyway, the bows are yours.

FIRST SNOW

Thank you, all of you.

STEADY RIVER

Yes, truly. We understand what you're doing for us.

CHIEF SPEAKER

And my village has extra salt, if you need to preserve any food. We hope it's clear what we advise your village to do. But may the many Matrons watch over you, whatever you decide.

18 EXT. OUT ON THE PLAINS - EVENING

18

A small cart, pulled by a mule, rattles along the prairie, as the creatures of the evening begin to emerge.

Daffodil brays.

STEADY RIVER

I know you're disappointed.

FIRST SNOW

Disappointed? I failed everyone.

STEADY RIVER

We didn't get what we wanted, that doesn't mean you failed.

FIRST SNOW

Why do you turn everything into some kind of riddle, where things don't mean what they mean? We came here for one thing! It was my responsibility to get it, and I didn't. Call that what you want, but I call it failure.

STEADY RIVER

...Are you finished?

FIRST SNOW

No, I'm not finished!

STEADY RIVER

Oh, well, by all means, carry on.

FIRST SNOW

Aggggggggghh!

First Snow stews for several beats, slowly but surely regaining her composure.

FIRST SNOW

(a little embarrassed)
Okay, I'm finished.

STEADY RIVER

Your speech was better than any I could have given. Truly. You balanced passion with reason in a way few could have managed under such pressure. But we cannot make others act as we wish. We do not govern like those brutes from over the Mountains, where someone makes a decree, and the rest are made to follow it with steel at their throats. We have the Federation. We build consensus. That is part of what we're fighting

(MORE)

STEADY RIVER (cont'd)

to defend. But it means we don't always get what we want. Now - when you've heard me gripe about the Federation, what is it I've said?

FIRST SNOW

They're too cautious.

STEADY RIVER

Yes. I fear without a big change, they'll save a plant but lose the crop. But knowing that about them, it is to your great credit that we're not leaving empty-handed.

FIRST SNOW

I suppose.

STEADY RIVER

Let me guess. You're afraid of looking foolish when we return home. Because you convinced them of your plan and it didn't work go as you hoped.

FIRST SNOW

Well...yes, of course I am.

STEADY RIVER

Mm. Some advice then, if you want to be Speaker. You'll have to get used to that. Do you think your plan was wrong?

FIRST SNOW

(pensive)

No. I still think it's the only smart thing to do.

STEADY RIVER

Good. It's right that you care what your neighbors think of you. But you also need to trust yourself enough that you're willing to earn their scorn sometimes.

FIRST SNOW

Yes, Auntie.

STEADY RIVER

There's more that troubles you, though.

FIRST SNOW

I can't help but think that if Wolf-Spear were here to fight--

STEADY RIVER

--He's not.

FIRST SNOW

The other towns would send more warriors if he were fighting, you know they would!

STEADY RIVER

(a flare of bitterness)

Listen to me, girl. That man is no more. I don't even know where Tree That Bends is half of the time. And he's supposedly still alive. And supposedly still my husband. I'm not saying this to take your hero away from you. I'm saying it so you can spend your energy on matters you might actually influence. Now I'll hear no more about Wolf-Spear. Is that understood?

FIRST SNOW

(a little hurt)

I understand, Auntie.

A beat.

FIRST SNOW

It's just that...

STEADY RIVER

(tired, wants to move on)

First Snow, please.

FIRST SNOW

I only wish I understood. I've asked Uncle to explain but he never does.

STEADY RIVER

It's a terrible thing your Uncle had to do. He'll talk about it in his own time.

FIRST SNOW

I think he's embarrassed.

STEADY RIVER

(getting testy again)

First Snow.

FIRST SNOW

I think he still questions his decision.

STEADY RIVER

ENOUGH!

This reverberates - literally and emotionally - for a moment.

STEADY RIVER

Forgive me. You don't deserve to be shouted down for speaking your mind. It seems that particular scar is even more raw than I realized. The truth is, of course he questions his decision. Just like me, just like

(MORE)

STEADY RIVER (cont'd)

everyone else. But he certainly didn't make it lightly. To harp on it would only serve to cause him shame. And believe me, girl. Shame will be the death of that man before anything else.

FIRST SNOW

I'm sorry, Auntie. I didn't mean to be rude.

Note: Steady River pronounces 'coyote' with three syllables, and closer to the Spanish pronunciation. That matters later, I promise.

STEADY RIVER

It's all right, dear. I'm sorry to have shouted. At least I'll have scared off the coyotes.

(beat)

Do you want me to give tell everyone the news when we get back?

FIRST SNOW

(unhappy, but courageous)

...No. I should do it. It was my plan. And I do want to be Speaker.

STEADY RIVER

I really am proud of you, girl. You'll have my vote for sure.

FIRST SNOW

Daffodil? Do you want a carrot?

We fade out on the mule braying excitedly.

19 INT. WHITE FOREST - GREAT COUNCIL CHAMBER - AFTERNOON

19

The space is wide, rich, and echo-ey, with a crackling fire in its center.

NARRATOR

Now, there is one more political arrangement that you must understand in order to make sense of what follows.

We travel now to the White Forest, where the sun was low, and the Great Council was nearing the end of its session. And being that today was the last of the season before the autumnal holy days, there was a certain urgency felt towards concluding the day's business.

WYYN

So then...final statements on the proposed motion?

BA'AT

I think there's general agreement.

COUNCIL MEMBER

Let the record show there is not general agreement.

BA'AT

I think there's a sizable majority agreement. As much as we are sympathetic to the aims of the farming colonies out west, the proprietors knew the risks when they requested their charter. We simply cannot spare the resources at present to quell Urrkyet unrest, especially with these troubling new reports of Memyet unrest closer to home.

ANOTHER ELF

The Honorable Ba'at lo-Yl is not wrong. But perhaps we might offer to send a few troops, provided Lord Tyymos and the rest would be willing to pay for them in additional duties and customs.

BA'AT

Mm. They'll never accept but I suppose it would be decent to offer.

WYYN

We'll take the proposals individually. All in favor of the motion to send a company of Knights over the mountain to aid the farming colonies?

There's a little bit of shuffling.

WYYN

All opposed?

There's a lot more shuffling.

WYYN

By a vote of twenty five to six, the motion fails. All in favor of sending the additional correspondence as recommended by the Honorable Ba'al lo-Vyr?

Lots of fast shuffling.

WYYN

That motion passes unanimously. Thus closes docket item one hundred thirty six of one hundred thirty seven for the season. Now, as docket item one hundred thirty requires the testimony of Lord Commander Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, who cannot be here at present, we will need a secondary motion to vote anyway in her absence. Would anyone care to--

--Huge and outrageously noisy doors are thrown open!

NARRATOR

The entire council gawked and gaped at the sudden arrival of Ry'y lo-Th'yyt - burned and bloodied and barely keeping upright.

THE ENTIRE COUNCIL

(ad lib.)

My word! Dear me! Is that the Lord Commander? What happened to her? *[etc.]*

BA'AT

(genuinely taken aback)
...Lord Commander?

RY'Y

(full of venom and barely holding it together)
I believe I was summoned.

WYYN

I...we were...your outriders informed us you were gravely wounded in the fracas on the coast.

RY'Y

They spoke true.

WYYN

Perhaps you should take some time to...rest and recover before you attend to highly consequential matters of state, no?

RY'Y

Whatever was urgent enough to summon me for is urgent enough to discuss here and now. To my face.

BA'AT

Lord Commander, please. Take some time to collect and comport yourself. If for no other reason than at least to preserve genteelness of this ancient and sacred room. You are literally bleeding on the floor.

RY'Y

(like a viper coiling and then striking)
Oh, you soft lilting flower. It is NOT MY DIGNITY THAT IS IN PERIL! Yes I am bleeding on the floor. Look upon it! It is the blood of my kind which waters this sacred tree. While the politicians and bureaucrats sit in their plush and gilded chairs and dare to judge. So go ahead, tell me what you have brought me here to tell me. Only mind your dignity as you do it, Sir.

There is a deeply uncomfortable silence

Someone half-stifles a cough.

WYYN

(can't help but tread lightly)
...Lord Commander. There is no one in this room, or indeed, in all the White Forest, who would question your bravery or the honor of your deeds. But one fears that you are, perhaps...too devoted to your duty.

RY'Y

Of course, now I see my error. I should have known you bureaucrats would not suffer devotion to duty.

BA'AT

(finds some nerve)
We mean to say that we have reason to question your use of martial power. And whether it is always used as best serves Elfkind.

WYYN

Indeed. We spoke not a fortnight ago regarding the culling that escaped your control. And now this business with the Memyet sporting affair - we've heard reports of a dozen Memyet dead, and two score wounded.

BA'AT

Not to mention nearly a dozen of your knights!

WYYN

It is simply beyond the pale.

BA'AT

We wished to offer you one final chance to explain yourself. Before this council is forced to relieve you of your command.

NARRATOR

Ry'y lo-Th'yyt dabbed the sweat of agony from off her brow, and slowly scanned the council with bloodshot, narrow eyes.

RY'Y

(quiet rage building)
One day a councilor found a termite, all the way up in her bedchambers, atop a great and venerable whitewood tree. So she trapped it under a jar, and called to the horticulturist, and said "kill this termite." And he did. But it happened again the next night. THE THIRD NIGHT THERE WERE TWO TERMITES, AND THEN--

WYYN

--Lord Commander, we were all taught this parable as children. The vermin kept returning until they were killed at the root. But since we trod familiar ground anyway, why don't you remind us how the horticulturist eradicates the vermin?

The parry lands.

BA'AT

Surely 'tis not by taking hatchet or torch to the root of the tree! Indeed is not the great skill of horticulture knowing which poisons to apply and when, so that the vermin are killed but the tree survives?
(beat)

Our great civilization rests upon a delicate balance, which must always be maintained if that civilization is to endure. Excessive warmaking, even with the aim of preserving order, is like to spawn chaos as much as anything else.

RY'Y

You do our ancestors a great dishonor to so disparage what they built! The order they envisaged is not as precarious as you would have it. The Urrkyet grow bold. The Memyet forget themselves. And not a few of our own sons and daughters contribute to this decay.

WYYN

Lord Commander, you will explain your insinuation at once!

(Gets legitimately choked up)

For well you know that our own dear son has been missing nearly--

RY'Y

--Your son is a traitor!

THIS USUALLY PRIM AND PROPER CROWD IS **SHOCKED INTO GASPS!**

BA'AT

(quiet to conceal his fury)

How dare you, sir? How dare you.

RY'Y

Not only did he aid and abet enemies of the Concordant in evading justice, he has shot at and killed Knights of the Wood to do so.

WYYN

Have you any proof of this outrageous accusation? Or will you speak any infamy or blasphemy you think you must to retain your title?

RY'Y

I have seen it with my own eyes! So have my troops!

BA'AT

You're a liar!

RY'Y

Is it really that hard to believe? We have all heard the disdain their daughter has for her elders, when she's deep in her cups. Why shouldn't her younger brother take her indecent rhetoric to its logical conclusion?

BA'AT

Her claims are nothing short of treasonous. I move we vote right now to strip her of her titles.

WYYN

That barely fits her misdeeds. She should be exiled!

There are some mumblings and murmurs at this escalation.

COUNCIL MEMBER

Come now, let us calm ourselves.

BA'AT

I will not calm myself as my family is besmirched. I've a right mind to demand satisfaction for that.

RY'Y **LAUGHS, LOUDLY AND DERISIVELY.**

RY'Y

Oh, how I wish you would! It would be the honor of my life to shoot you in the front, before you can stab anyone else in the back.

COUNCIL MEMBER

Now wait just a minute! No one is going to shoot anyone. There are devastating implications to the claims made here today. And yet both parties involved have been dependable servants of the realm for as long as I can remember. Would it not behoove us to investigate the matter, calmly and soberly?

WYYN

You mean for us to *calmly and soberly* consider our children being accused of treason?

COUNCIL MEMBER

Of course not, Wynn lo-Dyyk. None could be asked to do so. That is why you are far from the only votes on this council. I'd like to propose that Ba'at lo-Yl and Wynn

(MORE)

COUNCIL MEMBER (cont'd)

lo-Dyk abstain from any votes on this matter, as is only right and proper. However! I'd also like to propose that until the matter is resolved, Ry'y lo-Th'yyt should be sent away from the White Forest, and an acting commander should assume control of the Th'ar lo-Hyyl.

RY'Y

WHAT?

COUNCIL MEMBER

Hear me out, Commander. This is not a punishment, merely a precaution to maintain decorum during our investigation. There's no doubt in my mind you've brought forth your allegations out of concern for the realm. So I pray you permit us the time to conduct an investigation that meets the gravity of the charges.

RY'Y

Hah! "Gravity of the charges." Spare me. This den of cowardice is a shame to your ancestors and your descendants.

She storms out.

The ostentatiously creaky doors open and shut behind her.

20 INT. WHITE FOREST - STABLE - A LITTLE WHILE LATER

20

We're in a stable. We hear a bunch of straps being hastily fastened and saddle bags being loaded up.

NARRATOR

And so Ry'y lo-Th'yyt made preparations to depart the White Forest in a hurry. But she was met in the stables by an unexpected visitor.

COUNCIL MEMBER

Lord Commander.

She continues her work, ignoring him completely.

COUNCIL MEMBER

Your wounds do seem quite serious. I've brought you some medicine.

RY'Y

(flat)
Thank you.

She snatches a few vials out of his hand, but continues the work.

COUNCIL MEMBER

I was hoping we might have a word before you left.

RY'Y

I'm afraid I've already wasted enough precious breath on politicians for one lifetime.

COUNCIL MEMBER

Have I misjudged you then? Do you not imagine yourself Chancellor one day?

She pauses her work for a pregnant second...But then sets back to it.

COUNCIL MEMBER

I tend to recognize in others those traits of character which have been the most motivating to myself.

RY'Y

Perhaps I did, once. When I was more naive.

COUNCIL MEMBER

I think you are principled, not naive. You were right, of course, that we have gone too soft. But a righteous cause is unfortunately not enough to win in politics. We must play by the established rules, until we are powerful enough to rewrite them.

(Okay, fine. Cards on the table.)

That is why I intend to unseat that pompous blowhard Ba'at lo-Yl, and take his place. And then I shall return us to the resolve which has earned us all we have.

Ry'y finally ceases her work and starts paying attention.

RY'Y

And how did you intend to do that?

COUNCIL MEMBER

For now, let us say that I have several irons in that fire. But you may have brought me an opportunity to drastically accelerate my plans. I take it you were not bluffing about young Yllowwyn.

RY'Y

I was not.

COUNCIL MEMBER

Then instruct the subordinates who can support your claim to remain behind during your period of exile. The council will summon them to testify. I will continue to play the part of impartial but principled observer, and all the while we shall build the case against young Yllowyyn.

RY'Y

You could compel their testimony without my help. Why involve me?

COUNCIL MEMBER

Because you are uniquely able to help me with another matter. You see there's been some trouble out west, with some of the charter farms. Some Urrkyet trouble. I wanted to send Knights, but I was outvoted. Now as it happens, I have some fairly substantial investments in those farms - but more importantly - it's obvious to me we'll need to civilize that region sooner or later. No sense tiptoeing around it now. And so long as you're temporarily relieved of your duties...

RY'Y

...Perhaps I might take a trip out west.

COUNCIL MEMBER

Precisely my thinking. I know you're capable of the decisive action that the situation requires. Do that for me...and you shall be my Vice Chancellor. Do we have an understanding?

NARRATOR

And for the first time since the day of the horse race, a glint shone in Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's eye.

RY'Y

On my honor.

END OF PART THREE.