

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD  
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 7  
"What's Close To You"

**Part One** by Christian T. Kelley-Madera

**Part Two** by Christian T. Kelley-Madera  
and Gregory M. Schulz

**Part Three** by Christian T. Kelley-Madera

**Part Four** by Christian T. Kelley-Madera  
and Gregory M. Schulz

Created and Executive-Produced  
by  
Zach Glass &  
Christian T. Kelley-Madera

Copyright © 2021

Goldenrod Revisions - Ad libs chosen in edit  
7/4/2021

iordic.princes@gmail.com  
onceandfuturenerd.com

A1 OUTSIDE TIME AND SPACE

A1

NARRATOR

Previously on *The Once And Future Nerd...*

Well, you all know my thoughts regarding recaps, but needs must I suppose.

Once upon a time, three children from Pennsylvania got magically transported to the world of Iorden, where-- what's that, you don't need that much of a recap? Fine then.

You will recall, our group of heroes had found themselves on the run from the Elf general Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, in search of allies or, in the absence thereof, in search of cash with which to purchase allies. To the dismay of our party, Ry'y lo-Th'yyt had captured Nia's parents, and was using them to blackmail Nia into revealing Regan's location.

Nia saw this threat as an opportunity, and plotted an elaborate heist at the annual horse fair. If all went according to her plan, this heist would rescue Nia's parents, liberate a large pile of gold, and eliminate the threat of Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, all in one fell swoop.

And of course in all well-crafted stories, everything always goes according to the protagonists plans, yes? Let's rejoin the tale now to confirm.

FADE IN:

1 EXT. WINNER'S CIRCLE - DAY

1

Replay:

BRENNEN

*The net should be coming back up any minute.*

Beat, and then...

We hear the pulleys start to go again.

BRENNEN

*(just the slightest bit relieved)*  
As I said.

NARRATOR

When last we left Brennen, Regan, and Jen, they were waiting for the ingenious machine which Jen had devised  
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

to return, so that they could be safely lowered from the cliff to the beach below.

But you'll also recall the carnage left in the wake of a skirmish between Elves and Armstrungard gangsters. In case you don't, I can assure you that Regan was very keenly aware of it. She held one fist at her side and the other in its makeshift sling, but both clenched into knots as she looked upon the corpses - some of them children.

REGAN

Is Ry'y lo-Th'yyt dead?

JEN

What?

*(flustered)*

I don't know. She's down for now, that's what matters right?

REGAN

Well did you hit her with enough to kill her?

JEN

It's not exact like that.

REGAN

But you gave her everything you had.

JEN

I gave her a lot. But there were people over there!

A tense moment.

JEN  
Hey. We gotta go.

REGAN  
You go.

JEN  
What?!

BRENNEN  
Your Grace?

REGAN  
Send the net back up one more time, I'll meet you on the ship.

JEN  
What the hell are you talking about?

REGAN  
I'm finishing this fight. Gonna make gods-damned sure she's dead. Plus her armor'll make us too rich for all the piss-pants sell-swords to turn down.

JEN  
We won, just stick to the plan!

REGAN  
*(We can hear the shit-eating smirk)*  
I'm always sticking to my plan.

*She gallops away.*

JEN  
Wait, Regan!

BRENNEN  
Your Grace!

JEN  
God dammit. What now?

BRENNEN  
You should ride the net down. Send Yllowyyn back up.

JEN  
*(struggling with the decision)*  
Aggggggggh.  
*(then, decides)*  
Fuck it.

*She takes off running in the same direction as Regan's horse.*

BRENNEN  
Jen! Where are you going, gods dammit?

We hear him run to the cliffside.

BRENNEN

*(Shouting down)*  
Yllowyyn! We need help!

NARRATOR

Brennen looked around him for something heavy with which to send the net back down. He saw a marble pillar which adorned the winner's circle.

**BRENNEN GRUNTS AND GROANS.**

We hear marble scraping against stone as the pillar rocks back and forth, back and forth, until finally, it falls into the net.

We hear the pulleys start working again.

Brennen runs off.

2 EXT. BEACH - SIMULTANEOUS

2

We're right down on the beach, with the gulls and lapping waves.

A horse pulls something heavy across sand.

Yllowyyn's Elf-hearing FX kick in:

*BRENNEN (REPLAY)*

*(through Elf-hearing)*  
*Yllowyyn! We need help!*

Elf-hearing ends.

YLLOWYYN

Push it as far as you can into the cove. We'll catch up with you.

NIA

Is everything all right?

YLLOWYYN

Get as far as you can. Don't wait to board the ship if you make it there.

Yllowyyn runs along the beach.

NARRATOR

And thus Yllowyyn returned to the base of the cliff, and looked up at it. He saw the net, laden with a marble pillar, returning to the ground.

The heavy pillar touches down. In sand.

YELLOWYYN

Dammit.

NOW YELLOWYYN GRUNTS AND GROANS.

We hear some sand shifting about but that's it.

NARRATOR

But of course it is much easier to knock a standing pillar off its balance than it is to lift it out of sand.

YELLOWYYN

Sir Brennen!

No response.

YELLOWYYN

Blast it all.

NARRATOR

He grabbed one of the two ropes connecting the net to the sand bags.

A knife is unsheathed.

NARRATOR

He unsheathed his hunting knife, and cut the rope.

A rope is cut. We ZOOM upwards as a pulley whirls like mad.

3 EXT. RACETRACK - STARTING GATE - DAY

3

NARRATOR

The fog was beginning to clear and the dust was beginning to settle near the demolished seating area as Regan stalked through it, crossbow in hand. And as the sun began to pierce the thick, man-made clouds, an opalescent glint caught her eye.

We enter some sort of sound-space where time crawls to a halt.

Now this next series of events unfolded extraordinarily quickly, so pray permit me to explain it to you instant-by-instant.

Ry'y lo-Th'yyt lay prone, bloodied and burned, but with eyes open and crossbow at the ready. But I imagine it will please you to know that, through tremendous skill and a little bit of luck, Regan managed to spot the Elf a split second before she spotted her.

Regan whipped her healthy arm up to level her weapon at Ry'y, but as she did, something caught in her shoulder. Something she had noticed once or twice before but forced herself to ignore. It hurt her, stole her breath for barely a second, and knocked her arm off course, so that when she loosed her bolt...

Her repeating crossbow shoots and the bolt hits dirt.

...It flew a good foot wide of Ry'y lo-Th'yyt. And before Regan could line up and loose again, the Elf returned the attack.

Ry'y shoots her larger crossbow.

Acting on pure instinct, Regan raised her injured arm up in front of her face. Now, in a certain sense, it was fortunate for Regan that Ry'y lo-Th'yyt was such a skilled shot. Most fighters in her position would have aimed for the trunk of Regan's body, and struck her belly or lung or throat, and it would have been her doom. But Ry'y's shot was aimed straight at Regan's eye, and so her injured arm got in the way.

A bolt hits flesh and something crunches.

Now, of course, in another sense this was *not* fortunate for Regan. For the arm, not nearly healed from her last encounter with Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, broke again. And this time much less cleanly than the last.

REGAN

AGGGHHHHH!

We hear a few scuffed and uneven footfalls.

NARRATOR

Regan staggered backwards and lost her footing.

Ry'y shoots again twice...

NARRATOR

And so Ry'y's next two bolts missed high.

RY'Y

*(hurt and exhausted)*  
Mem-rhypaas!

Ry'y shambles to her feet.

NARRATOR

The badly burned Ry'y lo-Th'yyt struggled to her feet. The instant she was able to stand, she trained her crossbow down at Regan and loosed...

The crossbow shoots...

...but then there's a strange HUM of power.

NARRATOR

...and then watched in disbelief as the bolt changed course in mid-air for no discernible reason. It fell harmlessly to the ground a few feet away from Regan.

Again the crossbow shoots.

NARRATOR

She loosed again, and this time the bolt deflected far left - again for no reason that could be seen. But Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, as you know, did not want for cleverness and quickly made a reasonable guess as to the reason.

She aimed upwards, into the clearing fog, just in time to see the blonde-haired girl she'd met once before, emerging with arms outstretched. Ry'y shot a bolt straight at Jen's eye.

The crossbow shoots again, and the hum of power intensifies.

NARRATOR

And this one slowed mid-flight, and then stopped completely, as though held in place by an unseen hand. As Jen placed herself between Regan and Ry'y, her face was wracked with strain and concentration. And so her eyes were not open to see the head of the crossbow bolt glow red and then orange and then white. In one sense of course, it was unfortunate her eyes were closed, as she had no chance of avoiding what happened next.



Metal cracks violently and then ricochets.

NARRATOR

Which is to say the arrowhead shattered into molten fragments, some of which flew straight at Jen. Of course, in another sense it was fortunate her eyes were closed, for the fragment which struck her eyelid would have otherwise struck her eye.

Flesh sizzles.

JEN

Ahhhhhh!

NARRATOR

And so mercifully Jen's eye did not boil out of its socket. But from that day forward, there was forevermore a small grey mote on the left side of her vision.

Needless to say, Jen lost her concentration and her balance.

Jen stumbles.

And Ry'y lo-Th'yyt aimed to end her life. But as the Elf pulled her deadly lever...

Crossbow clicks empty.

...She was suddenly forced to remember her arithmetic.

We hear a crossbow thrown to the ground and a sword hastily unsheated.

Ry'y drew her saber on Jen...

An arrow whizzes past us and strikes a body.

RY'Y LETS OUT A **STUNTED AND WOUNDED CRY.**

NARRATOR

...but dropped it as an arrow pierced her flank.

A throwing axe whirls past us and clatters in the dirt.

NARRATOR

And she narrowly sidestepped the arc of a throwing axe.

Another arrow flies past.

NARRATOR

At last, keenly aware of her sudden but significant disadvantage, Lord Commander Ry'y lo-Th'yyt quickly hobbled away.

Shuffling footsteps quickly retreat...

...As two more confident sets of footsteps quickly approach.

Yllowwyn shoots one more time. We don't hear it hit anything.

BRENNEN

Who's hurt?

JEN

She is.

REGAN

She is.

BRENNEN

Can you walk?

JEN

Yeah.

REGAN

Yeah.

BUT REGAN **STRUGGLES PAINFULLY** TO STAND.

REGAN

*(woozy and hurt)*

Yllowwyn, you gotta go after--

--SHE **RETCHES** ONTO THE GROUND.

BRENNEN

You need a medic quickly, Your Grace.

YLLOWYYN

Make haste to the cliff. I'll cover your retreat.

4 EXT. CLIFFSIDE - A LITTLE LATER

4

We're on top of the cliff overlooking the ocean.

NARRATOR

The return trip to the cliffside took considerably longer than the trip Brennen and Yllowwyn had just made, as you can no doubt understand.

Frantic, uneven footsteps shamble towards us.

*The dialogue approaches us gradually, along with the footsteps.*

YELLOWYYN  
There!

BRENNEN  
What happened to the machine?

YELLOWYYN  
I had to get back up very quickly. Not to worry. I'll get myself down and tie it back on where I cut.

BRENNEN  
Quickly. Go.

5 EXT. BEACH - A MINUTE OR SO LATER

5

We're back down on the beach. Above us, someone climbs down in a series of large, graceful hops.

YELLOWYYN  
*[Sounds of exertion, ad lib.]*  
And...there.

Two feet touch down in sand.

NARRATOR  
When Yllowyyn - calling on all of his grace and speed - returned to the beach, he immediately set to refastening the sandbags to the device above.

We hear him making a knot and yanking it tight.

YELLOWYYN  
Right.

He tugs on the rope.

NARRATOR  
But when he tested his handiwork...

We hear a considerable burst of sand spill out of the bags.

YELLOWYYN  
Galadon above.

NARRATOR

...Several of the sandbags gave way, spilling their now useless contents below them.

YELLOWYYN

Gods dammit, I warned them not to skimp on textiles. What now, what now?

BRENNEN

*(shouts down, very distant)*  
Yllowyyn! Is it nearly ready?!

YELLOWYYN

*(shouts back)*  
I need to get something from the others!

BRENNEN

*(Still shouts)*  
What?!

We hear Yllowyyn running away.

YELLOWYYN

*(shouts but trails off)*  
I won't be two minutes!

6 EXT. CLIFFSIDE - CONTINUOUS

6

JEN

What did he say?

BRENNEN

That he needed to get...something.

JEN

What's wrong with the sandbags?

BRENNEN

Would that I knew.

JEN

Maggie? How you holding up?

REGAN **GROANS IN PAIN** - VERY OUT OF IT.

JEN

Hey. Hey. Hey! You gotta stay with me.

REGAN

Unggggggh.

JEN

Uh, what did the bartender say when the thief, the Elf, and the cleric walk into the bar?

A long pause.

JEN

*(aside)*

I don't know why I thought I'd just come up with a punchline there.

*(shouts)*

Brennen! What's Plan B?

BRENNEN

*(doesn't know the phrase)*

Er, pardon?

JEN

If--

*(realizes she should be quieter)*

--I know Yllowyyn's coming back. But if he doesn't come back in time, what do we do?

NARRATOR

Brennen opened his mouth to speak, but no sound emerged.

*(beat)*

Jen gave him a look which could only be described as pleading, but he only shook his head, apologetically.

A pulley wiggles.

NARRATOR

And so the relief was palpable when a tug came on the rope.

BRENNEN

*(Shouts down the cliff)*

Yllowyyn?!

Brennen runs to the cliff's edge.

BRENNEN

He's back. He's waving to us.

JEN BREATHES AN AUDIBLE **SIGH OF RELIEF**.

BRENNEN

I'm going to climb down and grab the rope. Pass Her Majesty to me, and then grab on yourself.

7 EXT. BEACH

7

NARRATOR

And back down on the beach, Yllowynn watched with rapt attention as, high above, his friends took precarious hold of the rope.

We hear the rope tug and strain a little.

NARRATOR

The cord pulled taut against...a large and sturdy chest of oak and iron.

*(pause)*

Which did not budge.

Yllowynn gives an **exasperated sigh/grunt**.

Yllowynn

*(shouts up)*

I need to remove some weight! Hold fast!

A heavy padlock jingles.

Yllowynn gives a **more exasperated sigh/grunt**.

NARRATOR

Yllowynn found a heavy rock on the beach, and set to work on the lock.

Clunk. CLUNK. SMASH!

The lid of the chest is opened, and an absolute shit-load of treasure jingles around.

NARRATOR

And as he scooped armfuls of coins and precious stones and fine tableware out of the chest...

Several discrete scoops of treasure clatter out onto the sand, as the rope tugs.

NARRATOR

...It finally began to lift into the air.

8 EXT. CLIFFSIDE - A FEW SECONDS AGO

8

NARRATOR

But as Brennen and Jen waited above with a nigh insensate Regan, they began to hear an unmistakable sound.

It's hoofbeats. Approaching. ...Fast.

NARRATOR

And though Jen had learned to read various emotions into Brennen's usually stoic visage, she'd never before seen him panic up close.

BRENNEN

(desperate)  
YLLLOWYYN!

The pulley starts to move.

BRENNEN

Oh, Galadon's Mercy.

9 EXT. BEACH - CONTINUOUS

9

NARRATOR

And so when Jen's device set them down on the beach below, they were in quite a state of haste.

YLLLOWYYN

Help me load our spoils back into--

JEN

--No time.

YLLLOWYYN

But, Her Grace said that--

--Crossbow bolts begin to fall around us.

BRENNEN

No time!

YLLLOWYYN

Grab what you can and run.

We hear them scoop up an armful each of  
treasure and sprint away.

Behind them, the rain of missiles continues.

10 INT. RED REAVER - BELOW DECK - PICKING UP FROM CHAPTER 6

10

We're in the same spot we were in the last  
scene of Chapter 6.

*NELSON*

*(replay)*

*Uhhh dude, what are you?*



NARRATOR

Nelson, you'll recall, had just had a rather strange experience with the babe entrusted into his care.

The baby is still laughing.

NELSON

I...uhhhhhh--

--From above, sounds of hasty footfalls and hurried commotion.

An alarm bell rings.

SAILOR

*(up above us)*  
They're back!

NELSON

*(overwhelmed)*  
Daaaaaaaah!

The baby starts crying.

CUT TO:

11 EXT. RED REAVER - ABOVE DECK - CONTINUOUS

11

The crew of the ship is moving with great speed and determination

ALF

*(cheery as ever)*  
Right then, lads, set to! Make like you've done this before. Three minutes 'fore the Elves are on us like salt on the wind, doncha know.

Some heavy ropes are thrown overboard and splash into the water.

CREW MEMBER 1

*(shouting up from a lifeboat)*  
There's injured down here!

CREW MEMBER 2

*(on our level, relaying the message)*  
They say someone's hurt.

ALF

Right then Froggy, go and fetch your medicine bag. And tell the rowers: At the catch!

Footsteps hurry away from us.

Passing those footsteps and heading towards us is Nelson, who is preceded by the sound of the crying baby.

NELSON

Did they say someone's hurt?

Nelson is holding the baby. He carries it with him as it begins to cry.

Pulleys begin lifting a lifeboat out of the water.

NARRATOR

As the small rowboat was raised out of the sea, Nelson saw the panicked and haggard state of his friends.

NELSON

Oh, shit.  
*(Running towards them)*  
What happened?  
*(He gets there)*  
Who can I help?

CREW MEMBER 1

We're all aboard, sir!

ALF

Right, then. Tell the Rowers Power Thirty. Take us away from this lovely cove.

Somewhere on a deck below us, a coxswain's drum beats out a grueling pace. Oars beat the water, and the ship moves, steadily accelerating throughout the rest of the scene.

ALF

And full sail, fellas, full sail! And Jen? Are you here, kiddo?

NELSON

She's hurt!

JEN

I'm fine. What do you need?

ALF

A little extra wind would sure go down smooth, doncha know.

JEN  
Right.

We hear a magic pad begin to build.

NIA  
Jen, Her Grace still needs purified air. Are you sure you're up to handling both?

JEN  
I've got it.

The magic pad intensifies...but then drops out abruptly.

JEN **WINCES** IN EXERTION.

NARRATOR  
Jen faltered on her feet, but Billy was there.

BILLY  
Woah woah woah, I got you.

NIA  
Take her somewhere cool and dark, make sure she rests. Especially her eye. I'll be in to see her shortly. And I'll get Her Grace as much purified air as I can.

This scene **FADES OUT** under the remainder of the dialogue.

NIA  
Yllowyyn, Sir Brennen - rustle up some dry blankets for Her Majesty. Gwen, Lady Arlene - I'll need your help undressing her. And someone fetch me a board and some bandages for a splint. Alf? Is there any poppy milk on this boat? Some very strong rum will do in a pinch...

DIP TO:

12 SAME - DUSK

12

The boat is coasting at a comfortable pace. A few gulls circle nearby. It's serene...relative to the last scene at least.

NARRATOR  
By the time Nia had finished her work, the sun had nearly consummated its eventide courtship of the sea.

We hear Nia walk out onto the deck.

MILDRED

How are your...friends?

NIA

They'll live.

MILDRED

*(casual, not especially pious)*  
Thank Galadon.

NIA

I can't speak as to the one's fencing career. In addition to the broken forearm, I suspect she had a hairline fracture in her upper arm from a prior injury. She either refused to tell us or refused to acknowledge it herself. I suspect that's why she was bested in combat. The younger one still has her sight, though she'll see a little worse. Still, both are lucky.

A beat. Both cautious.

MILDRED

You did a good job, Nia. You really are a fine healer.

NIA

*(trying a little too hard to stay even-keeled)*  
Thank you.

Another beat. This one a stalemate.

MILDRED

*(truly overwhelmed)*  
I...don't really know where to start.

NIA

Me neith--

--HER VOICE CRACKS AND SHE BREAKS DOWN.

NIA

*(through tears)*  
Oh, Mum. Me neither. Me neither.

We hear them hug each other.

MILDRED

*(crying too)*  
It's all right, dear, it's all right. I'm so glad you're safe.

We let them be, for just a moment,  
until...

Another set of footsteps walks onto the deck. A  
VERY BIG set of footsteps.

ALF

Nia.

NIA

Alf. Good evening.  
*(She sniffles and attempts to collect herself)*  
Pardon me, it's been...quite a day.

ALF

No, no, I understand. Ah...the Captain was relieved to  
hear that none of your party's wounds were fatal, and  
she sends her best wishes for their speedy recovery.

NIA

*(waiting for the other shoe to drop...)*  
That is...kind of her to say.

ALF

She also demands parlay, in her quarters, at your  
earliest convenience.

NIA

*(...and there it is.)*  
Yes, I expected she might. Mother, if you'll excuse me.

MILDRED

*(flabbergasted)*  
...Of course.

NIA

Lead the way.

Nia and Alf's footsteps recede into the cabin.

We're left with just the water and the gulls.

END OF PART ONE.

## PART TWO:

13 INT. CASTLE GUERNATAL - AN AUDIENCE CHAMBER - MORNING

13

We're in a wide, echoey room of a castle.  
And we're just sitting there.  
After a beat, fingernails rap on a desk.  
And then a door opens.

ANTONIN

Your Excellency. Good morning.

A chair is pushed out from a table.

NARRATOR

The Bishop of Castle Guernatal had entered an audience chamber to find the man he had summoned - one Lord Antonin Mooncrest - waiting for him.

HEAD PRIEST

*(from across the room)*  
Lord Mooncrest. Good morn to you.

Two frail feet and a cane hobble into the room.  
They hobble very, very, VERY slowly.

ANTONIN

Would you...like a hand, Your Excellency?

HEAD PRIEST

*(he's hardly any closer to us)*  
Patience, young man. Patience is next to godliness.

ANTONIN

Of course.

A few more beats of him hobbling towards us.

HEAD PRIEST

*(to himself)*  
Oh! Oh, it's just gas.  
*(to Antonin)*  
Please be seated, my Lord.

THE HEAD PRIEST EXERTS HIMSELF TERRIBLY TO SIT DOWN.

HEAD PRIEST

One moment, your cushion is dusty. Just a quick hasty thing, but you know...decorum matters. Thank you for making such haste, my Lord. You must have ridden very hard to arrive as soon as you did.

ANTONIN

When I read the enormity of Ardel's confession, I knew the people needed their new leader as soon as possible. Now. What would you say are the most urgent problems facing the Kingdom?

HEAD PRIEST

Hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm, well. I would say food first and foremost. The peasantry still believes the Eastern Storehouse to be haunted by a vengeful phantom.

ANTONIN

Is that so?

HEAD PRIEST

And then there's the matter of the garrison. With all the changes in leadership lately, I'm sorry to say there may be competing loyalties among them.

ANTONIN

I see. In that case, gather all the garrison and as many of the people as you can to the Eastern Storehouse.

14 EXT. CASTLE GUERNATAL - EASTERN STOREHOUSE - LATER

14

We're outside, on a crisp, chilly morning.

A crowd buzzes, but they begin to settle down after Antonin speaks.

ANTONIN

Good morning to you all. For those who don't remember me, I am Lord Antonin of House Mooncrest. I was wed to the Lady Arlene, before she fled the cruelty of her treacherous brother. Now it is true that Ardel's abdication leaves me *lawfully* the Lord Regent of this Kingdom. But you know all too well that the subtle maneuverings of the law have little to do with who is most fit to rule. So I intend to earn your trust in me. Captain?

NEW GUARD CAPTAIN

M'lord.

ANTONIN

I'd like to enter the storehouse.

NEW GUARD CAPTAIN

Won't do it m'lord. Hang me if you must. Saw what happened to the last chap.



ANTONIN

I understand your trepidation. If I go in there myself, and return with a barrel of salt pork, will you and your men pledge an oath to me?

NEW GUARD CAPTAIN

I'd have to advise against it m'lord.

ANTONIN

I appreciate your counsel. All the same, the key please.

NEW GUARD CAPTAIN

If you insist, m'lord.

*We hear Antonin walk away from us, open a big storehouse door, and walk in.*

*(The rest of this scene, we have the peasants' POV - outside the storehouse listening in.)*

ANTONIN

Nothing out of the ordinary here, just a plain old storehouse. Wait! What ghastly apparition do mine eyes perceive behind yonder crate?

WHISPERER

Who goes there?

ANTONIN

Why! It is a phantom, the rumors were true. Who art thou, spirit?

WHISPERER

I am the Spirit of Vengeance!

NARRATOR

Now I have to give Lord Mooncrest credit here. As a thespian, it is no small feat to disguise one's voice and have a conversation with one's self, such that one can convincingly seem like they are in fact two.

PEASANT PLAYED BY IAN

*(panned left)*

I told you the spirit was still here!

ANOTHER PEASANT PLAYED BY IAN

*(panned right)*

Run m'lord! Run while you can!

HEAD PRIEST

*(panned center)*

Oh, I do hope he's safe!

ANTONIN

What do you want of me, spirit?

WHISPERER

My quarrel was with Ardel the Usurper - AS I MADE A POINT OF SAYING LAST TIME. It's BEEN safe to come in here since he left. But since you are here, identify yourself!

ANTONIN

I am Lord Antonin of House Mooncrest. I am the lawful Lord Regent now. I've come here to prove my worthiness to the people. I only wish to bring them back the food which they have worked so hard to store.

WHISPERER

Very well. I shall examine your soul.

ANTONIN

Galadon's mercy! I can feel the spirit's gaze upon mine soul.

WHISPERER

I have examined your soul and found you...worthy. I shall depart this place now. But beware! I shall return if injustice does! Fare well!

NARRATOR

A long, cautious silence settled over the gathered crowd.

(beat)

And then they saw Antonin emerge, with a barrel of food held over his shoulder.

Thunderous applause!

DISSOLVE TO:

15 INT. BARN - SOMEWHERE EAST OF GUERNATAL - EARLY MORNING

15

We're inside a barn, with all the animal sounds you'd expect.

NARRATOR

South of Castle Guernatal, the once mighty Ardel Redmoor slept restlessly in a stall next to his horse. Ardel had ridden south - towards the ports in Seahold, and away from both his enemies at Castle Guernatal and the infamously ruthless mercenaries of Armstrungard - attempting to stay at least a day's ride ahead of the news that he no longer held any titles or land.

ARDEL

*(sleep talking)*  
Turpitude... character...

NARRATOR

Nightmares plagued him as he slept, haunted by the words Antonin said to him a few nights prior.

ARDEL

*(sleep talking)*  
Trust... never needed trust...

NARRATOR

Forced at knife-point to give up his claim to his lands and his lordship, he had fled that night in hopes of finding refuge with the field folk that lived further from the castle.

ARDEL

*(sleep talking)*  
Literal peasants...

NARRATOR

Unfortunately for Ardel, the further from the castle he rode, the more the definition of hospitality seemed to change.

ARDEL

*(sleep talking...)*  
Couldn't draw a decent bath...

A splash of water hits Ardel

ARDEL

AHHHHHHHHH!

PEASANT

Sorry to disturb your slumber, *m'lord*, but I just heard an interesting story from my neighbor to the north.

ARDEL

How dare you assault the Lord of Castle Guernatal! Justice shall rain down upon you the moment I get word to the nearest barracks! Do you not realize who you are attempting to trifle with?!

NARRATOR

The farmer stood over Ardel, arms crossed, immune to his threats.

PEASANT

My neighbor says there's been quite a lot of changes at the Castle of late.

ARDEL

As I told you last night, ma'am, there has been an attempted coup and as your liege I am more than entitled to lodging for the night. Now bring me your best garments so that I may look my best before presenting myself to the barracks, and you can have some hope of saving your neck from the gallows!

PEASANT

Word is, by your own decree, you're no longer any kind of lord. That you gave up your titles and your sister's husband is in charge now.

ARDEL

MOONCREST IS A LIAR AND A SNEAK!!! HIS TREACHERY AGAINST THE THRONE KNOWS NO BOUNDS!! I rue the day I gave away my sister to that loathsome, idiotic,..... charlatan!

PEASANT

As I was speaking with my neighbor, an infantry patrol came through and told us the same thing. What's more, they said you confessed to all manner of crimes.

ARDEL

Well obviously they would say--

NARRATOR

--Ardel looked into the eyes of the peasant and realized he was not convincing this woman.

ARDEL

*(barely hiding his disdain)*  
I appreciate the warning, my good woman. I'll gather my things and be on my way posthaste.

PEASANT

Right, then. I'll thank you for the gold we agreed upon last night - plus a little more of course, and I'll bid you fare--

ARDEL

--What do you mean a little more?

PEASANT

Mister Redmoor, I don't have much stomach for castle intrigue, it's why I live all the way out here. But the lord of these lands does, and I think he might be interested to know there's a fugitive staying in his barn.

ARDEL

*(caught, incredulous)*

I- You- Are you threatening me?!?!

PEASANT

I wouldn't say that, Mister Redmoor. More that the rates for the stall you stayed in just went up.

ARDEL

Overnight? That's preposterous!!

PEASANT

I wouldn't say that, either, Mister Redmoor. Any farmer'll tell you - when an enemy's threatening a siege, taxes go up. Just the way of things.

ARDEL

*(flabbergasted)*

Yes, but, this isn't--

PEASANT

--Shall I call for my lord, sir?

ARDEL

*(defeated and bitter)*

Let me see what I have.

NARRATOR

Ardel reached next to him for the sack of items he had hurriedly smuggled out of the castle. The bag had gradually been drained after similar stops Ardel had made on his journey. Usually the first item was enough to dazzle the folks beyond the castle keep. Ardel reached into the sack...

ARDEL STIFLES A **GASP**.

NARRATOR

...and came up with nothing. Frantically, he looked around for something, anything he could offer this woman.

ARDEL

*(nervously laughing a bit)*

My good woman, could you find it in your magnanimous heart to waive your fee just this one time? I appear to be short on supplies today.

PEASANT

Two ways you can pay for yer stay: first way is you can work it off.

ARDEL **SCOFFS**.

PEASANT

Second way is you can barter with me.

ARDEL

But my friend, I have nothing to barter with. Surely you will accept a writ of debit.

NARRATOR

The peasant turned to look at the fine, castle-bred horse Ardel had ridden in on.

PEASANT

Wouldn't say you had nothing.

ARDEL

*(sighing)*  
Ugh....

NARRATOR

And so, Ardel Redmoor rode away from the farm towards the still rising sun on his newly acquired ass.

The mule makes a hee-haw sound.

CROSS-DISSOLVE:

16 EXT. OUT ON THE PLAINS - DAY

16

A different mule brays as it clops along the prairie, pulling a small cart behind it.

STEADY RIVER

This is a good place to stop.

FIRST SNOW

Woah Daffodil.

The mule - and the cart she's pulling - clop to a halt.

STEADY RIVER

Now. Do you know why we stopped?

NARRATOR

First Snow surveyed the prairie that surrounded her. In every direction stretched miles of terrain that - to an untrained eye - would seem unremarkable and indistinguishable.

FIRST SNOW

Uhhh...

(MORE)

FIRST SNOW (cont'd)

*(beat)*

Oh! The horizon up ahead is moving. There's a herd in front of us. If we need water, we should get it now while we're still upstream of them.

STEADY RIVER

*(impressed)*

Hm. So it is. Very observant of you girl. But we've got plenty of water to get us to the Federation House. I was more thinking that...

*(switches to a cooing baby voice)*

...Someone deserves a carrot!

*We hear her reach into a cloth sack. The mule brays excitedly.*

STEADY RIVER

Are there any good girls around here who'd like a carrot?

*Daffodil crunches the carrot with glee.*

STEADY RIVER

*(genuinely giddy over this)*

That's a good girl!

FIRST SNOW

*(sighs)*

Auntie. We'll never get there if you keep stopping to give her carrots.

STEADY RIVER

Would you rather walk?

FIRST SNOW

No, of course not, but--

STEADY RIVER

--Then we should show her we're grateful for the service she provides. She's quite old, you know.

FIRST SNOW

Yes, you've mentioned that.

STEADY RIVER

All right, all right, we can get going again.

FIRST SNOW

Here we go, Daffodil.

First Snow snaps the reins and they start moving again.

We let them just roll along in silence for a beat.

STEADY RIVER

So. Have you thought about what you'll say to the Federation?

FIRST SNOW

Sorry?

STEADY RIVER

When you present our proposal, I mean.

Stunned silence.

STEADY RIVER

Don't look at me like that. Why do you think I asked you to come?

FIRST SNOW

I don't know, you ask me to do lots of things!

STEADY RIVER

You're thinking about putting your name in for Speaker, aren't you?

FIRST SNOW

*(caught off guard)*

I...maybe! But not until your term is over!

STEADY RIVER

I've already announced I'm stepping down at the end of this season. And I doubt we'll be back to the Federation House before then. So this is your last chance to practice.

FIRST SNOW

Auntie, no, I...I can't. It's too important.

STEADY RIVER

You built consensus in our village, largely on your own. Who better to convince the Federation? And besides, if you're right, and appeasing the Elves is doomed to fail, then young folks have the most to lose by it. You are the better of us to speak for this.

FIRST SNOW

But they don't know me. They don't trust me like they trust you.



STEADY RIVER

No one at the Federation knew me, when my uncle first brought me along. They trust me now because I've spent my years saying sensible things. And you have sensible things to say. Not to mention, I'll be there to voice my support for you.

NARRATOR

But Steady River's young companion continued to look at her with an almost desperate uncertainty.

STEADY RIVER

*(firm)*

Do you trust my judgment as a matron of the town?

FIRST SNOW

Of course.

STEADY RIVER

Then trust me that you're the best one to speak. Now walk me through your reasoning, as practice. It will remind you how much sense you make.

First Snow collects herself.

FIRST SNOW

Giving the Elves what they want brings peace only for a time - a short time. And that time gets shorter the more their presence out here grows. It was barely three seasons ago that they provoked Traft Sixhills into building his army.

STEADY RIVER

Indeed. And if someone reminds you how badly Traft's campaign cost us?

FIRST SNOW

Traft's rage led him astray. In fact I wouldn't be surprised if that was the Elves' plan all along, but that's beside the point. In any case, we need not do what the Easterners have done to us, we just need to halt their advance. Make their campaign costly enough that they abandon it out of self-interest. And Three-Bridges is well-placed to do just that.

STEADY RIVER

And why is that?

FIRST SNOW

The River. We only need to hold our bridges to hold the town. If the other federation villages send even a few hundred people in fighting shape, we could fend off every Ranger in Rangerton until the snows come.

STEADY RIVER  
*(Devil's advocate)*  
 But they only want one field.

FIRST SNOW  
 Fighting takes food. Every field we cede to them makes it easier for them to launch an attack, and harder for us to mount a defense. No. The time is NOW!

Steady River lets this reverberate for a moment - lets First Snow sit with it.

STEADY RIVER  
 Good. Feel better?

FIRST SNOW  
 Do you think they'll be persuaded?

STEADY RIVER  
 I truly don't know. But if anyone can persuade them, I'm certain it's you. What do I always say about your name?

FIRST SNOW  
 That my parents named me well.

STEADY RIVER  
 You are inevitable.

FIRST SNOW  
 I am inevitable.

DIP TO:

17 INT. RED REAVER - CREW QUARTERS - EVENING

17

Nia walks briskly through the crew quarters of the Red Reaver. Around her are the sounds of gambling, drinking, and carousing. Maybe someone tries to get a shanty going but they're shut down.

NELSON  
*(on edge, a little frantic)*  
 Nia! Got a sec?

Nia keeps walking and Nelson chases after her.

NIA  
 Not right now I'm afraid. Are you unwell? Or unsafe?

NELSON  
 Uh, no, I just really need to talk to you.

NIA  
It will have to wait, then.

NELSON  
It always has to wait.

NIA  
I'm sorry. I'm late to meet with the Captain.

NELSON  
Is Jen in there?

NIA  
She is.

NELSON  
Why is she always in the important meetings?

*She stops for a second.*

NIA  
Because the Queen named Jen as her second when we first met Ren. It's not a matter of who we value more, it's a matter of...who Regan thought should play which roles.

NELSON  
That feels like a good answer to you?

NIA  
I *promise* I will talk to you later.

*She starts off again.*

18 NEARBY ON THE SHIP - MOMENTS LATER

18

*We hear Nelson walking.*

NARRATOR  
As Nelson took his leave of Nia - in a somewhat dour mood I might add - he chanced upon Arlene and Gwen.

GWEN  
Nelson. You all right?

NELSON  
Yeah, you know.

GWEN  
Have they gone to talk to the Captain?

NELSON  
Uh huh.

ARLENE

Might you know what they're discussing?

NELSON

Do I ever?

*Nelson sulks off.*

A beat passes.

GWEN

We still going to the Isles, d'you think?

ARLENE

I'm not sure. I imagine that must be what they're discussing.

GWEN

Aye. Must be.

An awkward pause. Then...

ARLENE

Gwen...

GWEN

I've been thinking.

It's one of those moments.

ARLENE

*(ad lib, e.g.)*

Beg pardon, say what you will.

GWEN

*(ad lib, e.g.)*

No it's all right, you can go.

GWEN

Right then. I've heard there's a lot of his kind on the Isles. I was wondering if we might find someone who'd take him. Not that I want to be rid of him, far from it. Just...would he be better off raised by his own?

ARLENE

I know what you mean, I've wondered it myself. He'd be better in some ways perhaps. But if what I've heard is true, his kind are enslaved there. All considered I'm afraid it's best for him if we continue to pretend he's like us.

GWEN

Right. Well, you know more about politics than I do. Just want what's best for him.

ARLENE

Of course. As do I.

A beat.

GWEN

Can't believe how fond of him I am already.

ARLENE

Yes. That's what I was going to say. Given everything, it's hard to imagine that we'll just...keep him forever. But it's becoming harder to imagine not having him as well.

The baby wakes from a nap and begins to coo.

ARLENE

*(to the baby)*  
Yes, isn't it, darling?

GWEN

D'you think it's time we give him a name?

ARLENE

He deserves one, yes. But if I name him, I don't know how I'd ever say goodbye.

19 CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

19

A heavy curtain parts. Nia enters and closes it behind her, muffling the sounds of the crew.

REN

She deigns to join us.

NIA

Apologies. I was, ah...

REN

--I'm sure I don't care. The matter at hand is the deal your "queen" brokered. And then failed to honor.

JEN

Look, obviously, things went very very wrong. You're a reasonable woman, and you've gotta know we weren't trying to--

REN

--Oh, believe me girl. If I thought you'd double-crossed me, this parlay would have a much less... cordial tone. But there's no amount of good intentions that make two and two into five.

ALF

And I've tried, doncha know.

NIA

We understand. In your estimation, what would it take to make you and your crew whole?

REN

I was promised half the purse from the race. And you brought back...what would you say, Alf?

ALF

Boys just finished counting. Two sevenths of the expected haul.

REN

So, needless to say, all that you did bring back is mine. And you owe me quite a bit more.

BRENNEN

Now wait a moment. Just because you've the upper hand right now doesn't mean we need yield to some.... gangster's code of--

REN

--Gangster's code?

ALF

Let's be very clear here fella. The Guild of Merchant Mariners Code of Laws and Best Practices, Section B, Article 2 says, in agreement with the practices of common law and all basic notions of good faith: if a party, formal or otherwise, enters into a contract with another party, formal or otherwise, in which either party incurs a debt to the other--

NIA

--Thank you, Alf. We take your point.

REN

'Course if you'd rather work under gangster's code, your protections under bankruptcy are considerably less, shall we say--

JEN

--Right, yeah. Gangplanks, sharks, we get it. Brennen's just trying to look out for the...crown's assets.

NIA

And naturally, if we were in a position to compensate you for your losses, we would. But as I'm assuming you would not accept a writ of debit--

REN

*(a unusually good-natured chuckle)*  
--You assume correct.

NIA

We'll therefore need to establish some reasonable promise of future repayment.

REN

Oh good. You've arrived at where I was. A half hour ago when I called for you.

JEN

How about we all simmer down a sec? Is this worth anything?

NARRATOR

From a satchel, Jen produced a cloth-wrapped bundle. She unwrapped it to reveal the bronze statue that she and Nelson had purloined from the Library of Armstrungard.

*(beat)*

...And then she noticed the wide eyes and slack jaws of those around her.

NIA

*(working hard to steady her voice)*  
Jen...Where did you get that?

JEN

*(N.B.D.)*  
The library. Why?

REN

Well I'll be fucked.

JEN

...Valuable?

REN

That's the White Lady. It's the masthead of the first ship that brought Elves to Iorden.

NIA

It is one of the most precious relics in the world.

ALF

Any chance it's a fake, mum?

REN

Anyone caught with a replica is tied to an anvil and thrown in the ocean. By law.

NIA

And Blu'u lo-Ba'al would not keep a counterfeit in his personal collection. Why did you take this, Jen?

JEN

Looked like it was worth something? So...we're good then?

REN

*Good?! We're damn far from good, girl. I can't possibly fence that. And if the Elves thought for a second I had this, I'd have the whole damn navy after me. I need you off my ship. Very soon.*

NIA

Right. Well. As you say, we are something of a liability to you. And even if you were willing to turn us in, which I'd not besmirch your...ethics by implying, you'd risk capture yourself.

NARRATOR

Nia began to perceive some, shall we say mildly concerned looks from her two comrades.

NIA

I'm realizing as I hear myself speak that I may not necessarily be strengthening my own bargaining position. But it seems that, were you resolved to throw us overboard, you'd have done so long ago. So - our admitted but unintentional breach of contract aside - it may still be in your best interest to deliver us to the Sugarcane Isles as agreed. And, as long as we're dealing in promises anyway, simply add the cost of that to our debt. In any case, due to our actions at the race and before, we've no choice but to...

She just trails off into nothing.

JEN

...Nia?

NIA

*(voice a little shaky)*  
Sorry. Saying it out loud is...due to our recent actions, we've no choice but to topple the White Forest and become wealthy and powerful beyond imagining, in which case we will have an easy time making you whole. If we fail at that...we will be dead and our memories all but erased from this world.

NARRATOR

Nia then took a moment to sit down, and regain her composure.

ALF

Oh yah no, that's a coin toss. Could go either way.



REN

Mm. Still. She's not all wrong.  
*(Aside to Nia's friends)*  
 Clever, this one. Talks too much by half. But, clever.  
*(Back to business)*  
 Here's what I'm willing to do. The Sugarcane Isles maintain their relative sovereignty through some very careful maneuvering. Their Magistrates, Governors, and custom collectors are of a certain...moral persuasion.

NARRATOR

To illustrate her meaning, Ren tossed a gold coin out of some unseen pocket, and caught it mid-air. She twirled it, back and forth across her knuckles, before making it seem to vanish once again.

REN

And to keep one's entry a secret requires even more "persuasion." When we made our deal, I planned to handle all of this. For eleven adults and one baby. Alf - how many is two sevenths of twelve?

ALF

More than three but a good bit less than four, mum.

REN

So, because I am a woman of my word and because you and your "queen" amuse me, I can get four of you to the Isles, and no more. Provided you--

BRENNEN

--But you cannot expect us--

REN

--This is a *final* offer so please permit me to finish it.  
*(takes a beat to reestablish dominance)*  
 Four or less to the Isles. I'll require collateral of some significant value--  
*(anticipating an objection)*  
 --Monetary or otherwise--for the remainder of your debt. The rest of you, I can deliver to some arms traders up north who have a hidden land route over the Black Mountains. You'll have to make your own deal with them. But. *They* might accept that statue of yours. I hear the...politics over the mountains are different. They might be able to fence it. Now this journey's neither pleasant nor safe. But it's not a shark's belly, and it's not the Elves.

A beat of silence.

NIA  
It's a lot to think on.

JEN  
We've...kinda been through a lot together.

NIA  
May we have some time to discuss it?

REN  
I can give you 'til sunup. Latest.

**END OF PART TWO.**

## PART THREE:

20 EXT. RED REAVER - ABOVE DECK - NIGHT

20

It's quiet now. Just the gentle lapping of waves and the creaking of the ship.

NARRATOR

It was long past dark by the time Jen, Brennen, and Nia had gathered the relevant parties and explained the choice before them. Four of them, but no more, could leave the others for the relative safety of the Sugarcane Isles, if they chose. As you can understand, there were many facets to consider.

BRENNEN

The Queen will not forsake this fight of hers. And I'll not forsake the Queen who knighted me.

YELLOWYNN

And I've long since cast my lot. So that's three you needn't account for.

NELSON

They got libraries on these islands?

NIA

I...small private collections, I believe, but nothing like--

NELSON

--So nothing like what we found in Armstrungard. About like, long forgotten truths or whatever.

NIA

I doubt it.

NELSON

Then I don't see the point. I mean, I don't wanna speak for you guys. But if we go out there, we're no closer to finding a way home and no closer to finishing what we started here. So...eh.

BILLY

Just throwing this out there. Doesn't sound like they have many libraries over the mountains either. We could take a little tropical vacation for a bit, save up a little money to sail back when the heat's died down. And then go back to the library all you want.

JEN

It's not *not* tempting, but...

NIA

Billy. Believe me when I say it breaks my heart to ask the three of you to volunteer for any more danger than you have already seen. But I must say for my parents, because they are too *stubbornly selfless* to say it for themselves...there is no part of this that is their fight. They would never have been caught up in any of this, were it not for my--our actions.

MILDRED

Not that you've even told us what those are...

NIA

Later, I said.

MILDRED

What, after we've left? Sure, just fill us in with your next twice-yearly letter.

BEN

Milly, let's...stay on topic for the moment. Now you're asking us to go off to the Isles in the place of these three, yeah? How old can they be?

JEN

Old enough to make our own decisions.

*(beat)*

Sorry, that sounded mean. Nia's right, though. You should go.

NIA

Well then. Are there any objections to sending my parents to the Isles?

MILDRED

We have several!

NIA

*(snaps)*

Well you are badly outvoted. Now I've promised I will explain more to you later, but let us please settle the urgent matter at hand first.

NARRATOR

Now, as this barely concealed tiff was playing out in public between Nia and her mother, a private look passed between Gwen and Arlene. But both declined to say anything. For now.

NIA

*(sighs)*

And furthermore, I'll be greatly relieved to have you safely away.

MILDRED

But what'll we even do there? We don't know anybody!

NIA

Not knowing anybody is precisely why you must go. As promised, I will explain everything to you as best I can once this matter is settled. But you must believe me that you cannot stay on the mainland.

MILDRED

Nia, come now...

BEN

*(defeated)*

Very well.

MILDRED

Ben!

BEN

She must be telling the truth, Milly. She knows how deep our roots are in Seahold.

NIA

*Thank you, Father.*

MILDRED

What about your sisters?

NIA

If Ry'y lo-Th'yyt did not track them down as she did you, then we must assume she doesn't know about them.

YELLOWYYN

I concur.

BEN

Is that really safe to assume?

NIA

The only way she could have known about you was through Ba'a lo-Ky'yr, my doctoral advisor. For once I am grateful the old blowhard never cared to learn much else about me. Let my sisters remain in safety and peace, preaching in their parishes.

MILDRED

Will we be able to write them at least? Or use MNN?

YELLOWYYN

I'm afraid you must treat MNN as though it were compromised. For your safety and theirs.

NIA

In a few years, it may be safe to write to them again.  
(*That sinks in*)

I would never dare trivialize what you're leaving behind. But you will get by on the Isles. You are farmers and preachers. Never in my travels have I seen a place where people don't grow food or fear Galadon. It's not what any of us would prefer, but it's the best we can do right now. The only way to keep you safe.

(*She lets it settle.*)

So that's decided then. And it leaves us two more to choose.

BEN

Two more? You wouldn't come with us?

NIA

(*a little numb*)

I'm...not sure. I have to consider all of my obligations. Arlene and Gwen have a very strong claim on it.

GWEN

Aye, that may be, but...

JEN

The kid.

ARLENE

Yes.

NIA

(*kicking herself a little for missing this*)

Of course. If my parents go the Isles, then one way or another you must split with the child.

BEN

No, we couldn't possibly tear a babe from its mum's arms.

ARLENE

The others were right. This is not your battle and you deserve safety. And, we must admit he's not...ours, in the traditional sense.

MILDRED

Sorry. I know this is rude, but I'm just so in the dark here. Whose is he?

GWEN

*(a little hesitant)*

I found him...orphaned after a battle.

MILDRED

And you didn't think to leave him somewhere safer before you got caught up in all this mess?

NIA

Mother, you must not speak to her that way! Gwen made the best decision she could under the circumstances.

MILDRED

*What circumstances?!*

NIA

Very well, since you insist on doing this now.  
*(Fast as she can without being unintelligible)*  
It is an Orc child. Gwen here could not bring herself to let him die, seeing as he is completely helpless and has hurt no one, so she and Arlene took him in. Ry'y lo-Th'yyt sought to murder them for this crime of being compassionate, so they fled and found their way to us.

*These two conversations should be panned apart, aside from the Narrator, who should always remain centered. Mix should strongly favor the Narrator/Arlene/Gwen lines but Nia should just about be audible.*

NIA

*(Takes a quick breath)*  
The fencer upstairs - who happens to be the granddaughter of the late King Gunther Guernatal and thus the rightful heir to the High Throne of Iorden - had just witnessed Ry'y lo-Th'yyt and her retinue indiscriminately slaughter dozens of Orcish women and children who were unarmed and posed no immediate threat to her.

NARRATOR

Now. As Nia condescendingly recounted information to her parents which was new to them but which you, my dear listeners, already know - thanks to me! - Gwen stole her paramour away for a brief aside.

NIA  
So, we were inclined to believe Arlene's story.

ARLENE  
I can't send these poor preachers into harm's way. But, it's just what I was afraid of.

NIA  
We took them in, and the Queen resolved to take up arms against Ry'y lo-Th'yyt.

GWEN  
I know, love. We said whatever's best for him, right?

NIA  
Ry'y lo-Th'yyt tracked down and kidnapped you to get to me, hoping to turn me against everyone else.

ARLENE  
I think Nia's proven more than trustworthy. Do you?

We can transition away from Arlene/Gwen now and return more fully to Nia.

NIA  
Instead, we rescued you, in the process killing several Elves, and...  
*(her voice falters just a little)*  
...leading to the deaths of many innocent bystanders. That is why none of us is safe anywhere the White Forest casts a shadow. Does that help?

There's a moment of stunned silence.

MILDRED  
...An Orc? You mean them what have red eyes and gnarled fangs and ashen skin?

NIA  
If you look, you'll see the child has eyes that are nearly a shade of orange. We've come to infer that many of the other tales about Orcs may be greatly exaggerated or else lacking crucial exculpatory context.

Another beat for this to start to sink in.

MILDRED  
...I need to sit down.

NIA  
Then please do. We will talk more later. As I promised.

NARRATOR  
This was when Gwen and Arlene rejoined the broader conversation.



GWEN

Nia.

*(summons her courage)*

If you take him with you, you can go with your parents.

NIA

If I take him?

ARLENE

Yes. The child will be in hands that we trust. And you can be with your family.

JEN

Hang on, you've been through hell for that kid. Are you really gonna be okay leaving him?

ARLENE

No, not really. But if we keep him any longer, I don't think I'd ever be able to let him go. Even if it was best for him.

NELSON

Can I make an argument that it's actually best for him to come with us?

GWEN

How's that?

NELSON

Where we're going is where he's from, right? He might have an auntie or a grandma or something who'd be glad to have him back. Wouldn't that be best for him? And for the people who lost him?

NARRATOR

Arlene and Gwen glanced quickly at one another.

NIA

That assumes, for one thing, that we can track down his relations. Which is vanishingly unlikely. And for another, it assumes much about the lives of his kind. If he were my kin, I'd rather he be safe in the East than in danger in the West.

NELSON

Well, no offense, but...that's easy to say when no one's trying to destroy your culture. Maybe they're willing to risk more than you are. You know, to raise him as theirs.

YELLOWYYN

He's won me over. It is right and proper that the child be raised by his own.

NELSON

*(winces audibly)*

Man, it's less good when you say it.

BRENNEN

I agree. We all know what became of Traft, when the Elves raised him.

JEN

I mean...not the way Yllowyyn said, but I get what Nelson's saying.

ARLENE

We've had similar thoughts, I assure you. But we can't know whether the poor creature who brought him east to begin with wasn't fleeing some manner of persecution herself.

GWEN

And we said the trip over the Mountains is dangerous, yeah?

NELSON

Sure. But think about what his life would be like on the Isles. I mean...the other kids are gonna bully him for his eyes, that's a given. But how long before the wrong, you know, colonial magistrate or whatever overhears? And starts looking into his background? And what if he does develop other quote-unquote orc features or something when he gets older. At least if we take him over the mountains, we don't have to wait for that shoe to drop. Yeah, it's riskier up front, but it might be safer long term. Plus Arlene and Gwen get to be safe in the Isles.

NARRATOR

This, at last, snapped Nia's parents out of their daze.

MILDRED

But not Nia. She gets separated from *her* parents.

NELSON

*(gets what he's asking)*

Yeah. Yeah. Nia, I can't make that call for you. But I wanna say one more thing in favor of keeping the baby near me.

NIA

Near you?

NELSON

Yyyyyeah. Nia, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. I had one of those dreams. And I think the baby might be important to us.  
(*just a little defensive*)  
I wouldn't put him in any danger if it was just that! But also the other stuff. And protect Arlene and Gwen.

JEN

It's your decision though, Nia.

NELSON

Totally. I mean...yeah.

ARLENE

If we truly think it's best for the baby to travel over the Mountains, then we could come with you, and Nia could go with her parents. We needn't use all four spots.

NIA

And what would the two of you do, then? Over the mountains.

GWEN

What we've always done.

ARLENE

Make the best of things.

NIA

The Isles are *by far* the safer option for you two.

GWEN

We understand. We've lived with risk before.

NIA

(*flabbergasted*)  
I...

NARRATOR

Nia surveyed the cabin, looking back and forth between family given, and family found.

BRENNEN

When we met, Nia, you were a college student bored with her studies. You were interested in a new bit of lore that found its way to you. You were never out for war. Not that you haven't met its challenges admirably, but...you deserve safety too. My first choice would be her Ladyship and Gwen as well. But if they're volunteering...

NARRATOR

But Nia's mind was not on her friend's words.

NIA

I can't.

MILDRED

You can't?

NIA

I've made up my mind. My place is here.

MILDRED

Nia, what's this nonsense you're talking? If you think we'd ever be so cross with you that--

NIA

*(voice breaking a little)*  
--I've cast my lot, mother. I've made many, many choices that brought me here. Each more risky, and frankly more belligerent than the last. Her Ladyship and Gwen have only made one, and it was a choice to care for the innocent. If I let them be put in harm's way for that, it would betray the vows of both our clerical orders.

BEN

If everything you've told us is true, then haven't you made choices to protect the innocent as well?

NIA

Not always. And I'll hear no more of it here. The three of us can discuss more in private.

MILDRED

*(Not letting it go)*  
Aye, and we will!  
*(sighing)*  
And she calls us stubbornly selfless.

NIA

My Lady? Gwen? Is the proposed plan acceptable to you? You sail east with my parents, and the baby comes west with us?

NARRATOR

Arlene and Gwen looked to each other one more time. Each saw courage and resolve in the other's eyes.

GWEN

You take very good care of him, hear? Like he was your own.

NELSON

*(a little rushed)*  
We will!

GWEN

And whatever he turns out to mean to you or your cause or what have you...you look him in his eyes before you make any decisions about him. D'you understand? He laughs when he's happy, cries when he hurts, he shits, smiles, sneezes...don't you ever forget that.

NELSON

*(more earnest)*  
We'll remember.

ARLENE

In that case, I would only propose that perhaps...we be permitted to name him.

NIA

I don't think anyone would oppose--

BILLY

--Nah, FUCK that!

Everyone is stunned.

BILLY

Heh. Just kidding.

NIA

*(Not gonna dignify it)*  
Did you have a name in mind, My Lady?

ARLENE

We'll talk, and decide on one before we must part.

NIA

Then, I believe everyone present is agreed.

A beat of relief.

NIA

That leaves the matter of Ren's collateral. And, also...

JEN

...Right.  
*(beat)*  
God da--

--HARD CUT TO:

21 MEDICAL DECK - SIMULTANEOUS

21

We're in a musty, lower deck of the ship.

REGAN **GROANS**, GROGGY.

ALF  
Ope. Rejoining the party are we?

REGAN  
Where the fuck am I?

ALF  
Wish you'd stayed out a little longer.

REGAN  
Alf?

ALF  
Your arm's busted up something fierce. I'm gonna splint it, but I need to reset the bone first. It's gonna smart. More than a little.

REGAN  
Do what you gotta do.

BUT REGAN **WINCES** IN PAIN JUST FROM ALF GRABBING HER ARM.

ALF  
On the count of three, ya?

REGAN  
Just fucking do it.

ALF  
And a-one, and a-two, and a-  
THREE!

REGAN  
(psyching herself up)  
Do it. Just fucking do it,  
you gods damned coward.  
Fucking do it already you  
yellow motherf--

A bone snaps.

REGAN  
--FUUUUUUCK YOU IN THE MOUTH WITH YOUR BROTHER'S COCK!

A door opens.

NIA  
(dry)  
Oh, good. She's up.

REGAN CONTINUES TO **YELL AND SHUDDER WORDLESSLY** AS SHE RECOVERS FROM THE JOLT OF PAIN.

ALF

She's all yours. Need to go fetch a splint.  
(to Regan, patronizing)  
Now try not to move it too much, ya? We'd rather not have to do that again.

REGAN

(has just about caught her breath)  
Bite my cunt and spit in my asshole. You gods damned butcher.

Alf walks away.

ALF

(receding, perfectly pleasant)  
Ah huh, see ya soon.

REGAN

Bring rum! Giant fucking bastard.

NIA

(stiff, almost cold)  
Your Grace. Apologies for the ill-timed disturbance. But we had to make some decisions while you were... insensate. We wanted to inform you of them.

REGAN

You couldn't just fucking wait?

NIA

(bordering on snippy)  
With respect, we did not know how long you would be. And time was of the essence.

REGAN

Fine. What did you decide?

NIA

Well, only four of us can go to the Sugarcane Isles, so after much--

REGAN

--Whoa whoa whoa, that wasn't the deal. Did Ren try to fuck us? Where is she? Get her ass in here.

NIA

That was not the original deal, no. Turns out - there are consequences to bringing pirates a fraction of what you promised them.

REGAN

Okay, I'm getting a whiff of hostility here, which - seeing as my arm is blown to shit and not yours - I don't fucking appreciate.

NIA

*(loses it)*

We had a plan! It wasn't perfect but dammit it worked! Against all odds, we got my parents to safety. We got all of us to safety. And then you decided you knew better. You had a better plan, after the plan had already worked. And now look where we are. After everything I had to do - practically grovel to convince you my parents were worth saving. Because YOU SAID it would endanger the group. Then you go and throw it all away for...for what reason I couldn't begin to speculate. Do you even know?

REGAN

Yeah, I do! I was gonna kill Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, and get us some more money, so that maybe we'd--

NIA

--And that doesn't endanger the group?

REGAN

It shouldn't have, cause if--

NIA

--Well it did!--

REGAN

--Cause if any of you had any brains you wouldn't have--oh, shit. Jen. Where is she? Is she--

JEN

--Right here.

NARRATOR

Jen entered the cramped cabin, behind Nia, her eyepatch prominent.

REGAN

*(that actually hit home)*  
Fuck. Your eye.

They both let Regan stew in her discomfort for a moment.

REGAN

I...I don't...



NIA

*(furious but merciful)*

We think she'll keep the eye. By pure dumb luck.

They continue to let this hang.

REGAN

*(almost...meek?)*

...You should leave.

JEN

Seriously?

REGAN

I got nothing for you.

JEN

You could start with an apology maybe.

REGAN

You shouldn'ta come back for me!

JEN

Let's go, Nia. I don't know why we fucking bother.

NIA

I bother because my fate is tied to this woman, whether either of us likes it or not. I'm likely to be in her company until my premature death. And all I can hope for is that that time remains bearable.

REGAN

I never told any of you to follow me. That's on you. Fucking...look at me. I was never supposed to be a gods damned queen. No matter who fucked my grandma. I wasn't even supposed to live this long.

JEN

Oh, don't do that! Don't be all melodramatic so you can turn this on us.

*The door opens again.*

ALF

Okie doke. Here's a splint and some very strong rum.

REGAN

Thank the gods.

JEN

Yeah, good, get drunk. That'll fix everything.

REGAN

*Excuse me?*

NIA

Perhaps your instinct was right, Jen. We should cool our tempers and return in a little while.

JEN

Fine!

*Jen and Nia open the door and walk out.*

*They get a few steps away...*

*...And then one set of footsteps storms back.*

NIA

*(through the door)*

No, wait, Jen--

*--Jen slams the door open.*

JEN

Of course we're gonna come back for you, you selfish asshole! Normal people can't just leave their friends to die!

REGAN

Well sorry, fuck me then. Guess I thought you were smarter than normal people.

JEN

Being an asshole doesn't make you smart, it just makes you lonely. And an asshole!

REGAN

Maybe I'm supposed to be lonely.

JEN

Fine, fuck off, then.

*She huffs out of the door one last time.*

JEN

*(through door, walking away)*

Why is she like this?!

NIA

*(through door, walking away)*

I'm sure I don't know.

Regan pops the cork of the bottle.

ALF

You know, it's none of my business, but--

REGAN

--You're right, it's not.

She takes a swig.

22 EXT. ABOVE DECK - A LITTLE LATER

22

NARRATOR

And so after this unpleasant conversation, Jen sought out Billy's company. But Nia sought out the company of the wide open sky. Of course, she was not the only one to have had this impulse. I believe there's a saying in your tongue about apples falling from trees?

Nia walks up to the railing of the deck.

NIA

Hello, mother.

MILDRED

Hi.

NIA

I'm sorry I was short with you in there.

MILDRED

Oh, you gave me worse when you was younger.

NIA

I'm sure.

Beat.

MILDRED

I just wish you would talk to me more is all. I mean, all this with the Elves and the Orcs...It's not that I doubt you, see? It's just so much to believe all at once.

NIA

Trust me, I understand.

MILDRED

But it's not even so much *what* you told us. When you was young, it was like all you did was talk to us. I used to pray for a minute of silence. Since you left

(MORE)

MILDRED (cont'd)

for college, it's like we hardly speak the same tongue anymore.

NIA

I know. It's not because I don't want to. It just... became so difficult at some point.

MILDRED

I hear you talk the way you do now, and I can't help but think you're ashamed of us.

NIA

*(moved, sympathetic)*  
Oh, mother...Mum...

MILDRED

Is that why you won't come with us?

NIA

I am ashamed. But not of you. Never of you.

*(Works up her nerve)*

I made choices in order to rescue you. They got people killed, many of them with no part in our fight. Going in, I convinced myself that was unlikely. But I think, deep down, I knew it would happen.

*(beat)*

I couldn't bear the thought of losing you--of having gotten you killed. And so out of guilt, and self-centered fear, I let innocents die. Is there a greater failure you can imagine, for one who would be a priest?

MILDRED

*(sympathetic)*

Nia, Nia, Nia...Do you remember the parable of the headsman and the horse thief?

NIA

The law requires that he kill his father, and he refuses.

MILDRED

*(quoting)*

Truly I say to you, this man who has done an injustice to you taught me the meaning of justice. And so I cannot take his head, lest any claim I have to act justly be forfeit. Tell my successor to hone his blade well, for he must claim two heads this day.

NIA

But Mother, that kind of..small-scale, just what's in front of us attitude...it's exactly why I abandoned the Order of the Plow. If the lives of our loved ones matter more than the lives of strangers, doesn't that

(MORE)

NIA (cont'd)  
diminish the value of all life? Doesn't it reduce justice to merely who has the most powerful friends?

MILDRED  
I admire your ambitions, Nia. I always have. You want to save the whole world, and I'm proud of you for it. But if all you can manage is saving what's close to you, you don't have to damn yourself.

Another set of footsteps approach.

NELSON  
Nia? Sorry. I really need to talk to you.

NIA  
I think this once, Mum, I may take your advice.

MILDRED  
Mm. I'll try not to keel over in shock.

23 INT. MEDICAL DECK - SIMULTANEOUS

23

REGAN  
Nia's staying with us?

BRENNEN  
Aye, Your Grace.

REGAN  
...Still?

BRENNEN  
As far as I know, Your Grace.

NARRATOR  
In the hopes of better understanding her circumstances, Regan had summoned her lone knight to her sickbed.

BRENNEN  
She elected to give her spot to Her Ladyship and Gwen.

REGAN  
...Should we have told her? Is that what this is about?

BRENNEN  
Told her?

REGAN  
As soon as she told us her plan, I knew innocent people were gonna die. You and Yllowyyn did too, but you followed my lead.

BRENNEN

We also knew she'd do anything to save her parents. I think we spared her some anguish.

REGAN

Yeah. Still. Maybe that wasn't my call to make.

BRENNEN

You're the Queen. Every decision is yours to make.

REGAN

Where's the baby going?

BRENNEN

He will stay with us as well. There was some argument on that point, but none seemed to disagree about Gwen or Arlene. And the two are inseparable. Gwen's loyalty to her liege is an example to all.

REGAN

*(chuckling)*

Yeah, well, I get it. I've known some pretty marvelous "lieges" in my day too. Especially the high-born ones.

BRENNEN

*(truly and genuinely confused)*  
...Your Grace?

REGAN

*(is he joking?)*

Well I mean, you know that them two...

*(Holy shit, he's not joking.)*

Wait you actually don't know what their deal is?

BRENNEN

Their...deal?

REGAN

Yikes. This is a much longer talk than we've got time for right now. And not really my business to tell you anyway. I just kind of assumed you would, uh...anyway. Anything else I need to know about?

BRENNEN

It seems Jen and Nelson stole from the college one of the most valuable relics in the world.

REGAN

No shit? I'm gonna make something out of those kids yet.

BRENNEN

Having it on the ship makes Ren very skittish, and it has no value to her because no one she knows can...what was the word?

REGAN

Fence it. Yeah, makes sense.

BRENNEN

And so Ren requires collateral for the remainder of your debt to her.

REGAN

Right. 'Course. Well, good thing we're shit broke except for an unsellable relic. I gotta think. Thanks, Brennen.

BRENNEN

Of course, Your Grace. Will that be all?

REGAN

*(pregnant pause)*  
...Can I ask you something personal?

BRENNEN

Anything, Your Grace.

REGAN

When your pops died...did you ever...have the feeling sometimes like maybe it was supposed to be you instead?

BRENNEN

*(genuinely surprised the answer isn't obvious)*  
Did I...why, of course it was supposed to be me instead.

This hits Regan like a ton of bricks, but doesn't faze Brennen at all.

BRENNEN

If there's nothing else, I ought to try for an hour of sleep.

NARRATOR

And then Sir Brennen took his leave, having given - to his mind - a factual report on the state of things. But Regan did not return to sleep that night.

END OF PART THREE.

## PART FOUR:

24 INT. A CABIN OF THE RED REAVER - LATE NIGHT

24

The sounds of the ship surround us.

NIA

So. What was this dream you had?

NELSON

Well, first of all I remembered it. So, that's weird. I don't know the last time I remembered a dream.

NIA

I see.

NELSON

And so there was the little girl and the monster, right? And the girl said her enemy was near, and we haven't been asking the right questions, and we're out of time, and not to let my power be corrupted. And then the monster grabbed my hand and I woke up.

NIA

*(she doesn't see)*  
I see.

NELSON

But then later the baby grabbed my hand in real life and it was...the same.

NIA

The same?

NELSON

I don't know how to describe it. I just knew it was the same, even though it wasn't.

NIA

I think I know what you mean. Sometimes in dreams, I'll find myself in a room that looks nothing like my parents' cottage. And yet it *feels* like my parents' cottage, so much that I'm certain that's where I am. Is it like that?

NELSON

Yeah, kinda! Except in reverse. In the dream I didn't know what I was feeling when the monster grabbed me. But as soon as the baby did it too, then I recognized the feeling.



NIA  
Was it frightening? Or painful?

NELSON  
No, that's what was weird. It was...kinda chill.

NIA  
Chill?

NELSON  
Like I finally understood something I was supposed to, but couldn't before. Except, I don't remember what it was I understood.

NIA  
Ah, yes. A true scholar's most frustrating recurring dream.

NELSON  
And then he wanted me to look at this book.

NIA  
In the dream?

NELSON  
No. I.R.L. Uh, in real life.

NARRATOR  
Nia took the book in her hands - the very one she had specifically directed Jen and Nelson towards. *On The Totemic Traditions of Primitive Iorden*, as you may recall.

NIA  
(a little unnerved)  
You're...sure it was this one he chose?

NELSON  
Totally. What do you think it means?

Silence.

NELSON  
Nia. You were telling us about Avatars once, and then shit popped off and we never finished the conversation. Does this have something to do with that? What did you mean when you said I might be more than human?

NIA  
Well as I said, the theory of Divine Avatars is considered heretical if espoused in earnest. As such, reliable sources on the matter are sparse. Even the very book you handed me - there were times I would have  
(MORE)

NIA (cont'd)  
traded an arm to spend one night reading it, had the offer been made.

NELSON  
(*dispirited*)  
You're gonna tell me you need to read the whole thing before you can say more.

NIA  
I very badly want to read it. But fortunately - or not, depending on how you look at it - we have a more expedient option.

25 SAME - A FEW MINUTES LATER

25

MILDRED  
I'd rather not spend our last minutes together getting into another of your debates. Can't we just pass the time in peace?

NIA  
I think you were right.

MILDRED  
...About what?

NIA  
Nelson? Show her.

NELSON  
Here you go, missus ah...

MILDRED  
Mildred's fine, dear. What's this? *On The Totemic Traditions of Primitive Iorden?*

NIA  
It's a very old book. I haven't read it, but it is known to be the best surviving source on the Theory of Divine Avatars.

MILDRED  
Demigods, you mean.

NIA  
Yes. I've come to believe they were real. The Order of the Plow had that right all along.

MILDRED  
I see. What changed your mind?

NIA

*(Eating crow)*  
My travels. Since leaving the college.

MILDRED

*(just a whiff of told-you-so)*  
Hm. Did they now?

NIA

We need to borrow from your knowledge of the subject.

MILDRED

Borrow away.

NIA

Every time Avatars are supposed to have walked among us, they battled each other. Yes?

MILDRED

Aye, of course. Galadon rallies the forces of Order, and his enemy rallies the forces of Chaos, and the two hosts do battle.

NIA

How recently is that believed to have happened?

MILDRED

Ohhh, not for a long time. Long before anyone living was born.

NIA

And how would we have known?

MILDRED

They'd tell us of course. Announce themselves, claim their dominion. How else to rally their forces?

NIA

Well, perhaps by convincing their forces that they were acting of their own accord.

MILDRED

What are you driving at?

NIA

This may sound mad. But suppose an Avatar of Garedian had walked Iorden during our lifetimes.

MILDRED

No, that's...surely we'd have known.

NELSON

*(cant help himself)*  
Don't call her Shirley.  
*(beat)*  
Sorry, wrong crowd for that one.

NIA

The murder of Prince Uther Guernatal has been unsolved for nearly seventeen years. Which suggests a tremendously - almost supernaturally - skilled assassin. And can you remember any single event in your lifetime which further advanced the cause of chaos? Have you not felt as if Iorden has been slowly unraveling ever since?

MILDRED

...Aye, perhaps, but...that doesn't mean it was a God what did it.

NIA

The seven of us have been having dreams, which I have come to believe are Selbircic in nature. You know I would not take that position lightly. In one of them, I was told "the blind man has seen the face of God." And the very next day, a blind beggar told me he'd watched Garedian kill the Prince.

NARRATOR

Nia saw a wave of unease pass over her mother's face.

NIA

What is it?

MILDRED

There's talk in the Scrolls of what happens when Avatars are killed. They always mention a blinding light.

NELSON

And there was a blinding light right before we came here.

NIA

I see.

They take a beat.

NARRATOR

All present let this new information sink in for a moment.

MILDRED

...But wait. That's just it. Avatars have been killed plenty of times before. And the stories don't say Iorden plunged into chaos. Or order for that matter. Their spirits return to Selbirin, where they regain their godly powers, which include inhabiting another Avatar if they wish. And the cycle just begins anew.

NIA

Hmm. Interesting.

Nelson is apprehensive, and it grows throughout the rest of the scene. He's following the logic where it goes...but he doesn't want it to go there.

NELSON

"My killer has died as well, but has not yet joined me." That's what Brennen heard in his first dream, right?

NIA

Correct.

NELSON

So what if Garedian killed Galadon's Avatar, but found some way to stop the spirit from going back to Selbirin?

MILDRED

Where would they go?

NELSON

What about to another dimension, or plane of existence or something.

NIA

Selbirin and Iorden are the only known planes of existence. There is no recorded evidence of any others.

NELSON

Nia, where I came from - do you think that's Selbirin or Iorden?

NIA

I...don't know.

NELSON

What if it's a whole other plane? And Garedian figured out how to send Galadon there?

NIA

I suppose it's not impossible. But we're so far out on this limb now, that--

NELSON

--You thought I might be more than human somehow, right? But we ruled out Avatars because Avatars know they're Avatars.

MILDRED

That much the scrolls make clear.

NELSON

What if they were so far from Selbirin that they lost track? Like they lost touch with the part of themselves that was a God. And it wasn't until they got back closer to Selbirin that they started to remember.

MILDRED

What do you mean "started to remember"?

NELSON

Brennen started having dreams when we showed up at the castle. You started having dreams that night at Bailey's. We all had the same dream when we were together at Freehold. And now...I started remembering my dreams when I was babysitting. Which means the baby must be...

MILDRED

Sorry. Are you trying to say that you and that babe are Avatars of the gods?

NELSON

Believe me, I don't want it to be true. I'm just... saying what makes sense.

NARRATOR

Nia could see the distant, glassy look in Nelson's eyes, and recognized it for the terror that it was.

NIA

*(comforting best she can)*  
Nelson. It's true that this hypothesis could explain some of the stranger phenomena of your time here. But that doesn't mean it is the only, or even the most likely explanation.

NELSON

Yeah, but...doesn't something about it feel right?

A beat.

NIA  
*(struggling to argue)*  
 Well, I--

--Jen walks in.

JEN  
 Hey. Sorry - am I interrupting something? I need to borrow Nia a minute, but it can wait.

NIA  
*(to Nelson)*  
 I'm happy to stay a while. There's more to talk about.

NELSON  
 No, I uh...think I gotta digest a little.

JEN  
 ...Everything okay?

NIA  
 Where are we off to?

JEN  
 Regan's exact words: "You know how people say they humbly request your presence when they really mean get your ass in here right the fuck now? Well I *actually* humbly request your presence."

NARRATOR  
 Nia looked to her mother, and an unspoken moment of kinship passed between the women.

NIA  
 Hm. I'll try not to keel over in shock.

26 INT. MEDICAL DECK - A FEW MINUTES LATER

26

The door opens. Jen and Nia enter.

REGAN  
 Hey.

NIA  
 Your Grace.

JEN  
 Yo.

REGAN  
*(Like she's trying new words out)*  
 I'm...sorry. You were right. About basically everything.

NARRATOR

Jen and Nia looked at each other, and then back at Regan, almost uncertain of how to proceed.

JEN

*(surprised but sincere)*  
Thanks.

NIA

That really does mean a lot coming from you. But is there any chance you could be more specific?

REGAN

I made a call that wasn't mine to make, because I thought I knew better. And it was the wrong call. It was stupid, and it makes me a hypocrite. Nia, I'm sorry I gave you shit about saving your parents. I'm glad they're safe. I thought I was protecting the group but really I was covering my ass.

NIA

I appreciate that very much.

REGAN

Jen. I'm really sorry you got hurt. I'm just...not used to anyone having my back I guess. I'm grateful for what you did. But I want you to promise never to risk yourself for me again. Okay?

JEN

What? No. I'm not gonna promise that.

REGAN

But...that's what I want.

JEN

What about what I want? I've got your back. So, get used to it.

REGAN

Jen, I can't...do it again.

JEN

Do what again?

REGAN

You're the good one. Just like Catie. I can't outlive the good one again. I think it'll kill me this time.

JEN

*(soothing)*  
Oh, no, no, no, no, no...



Jen sits on Regan's cot.

JEN

You were both the good one. Kids aren't supposed to die. Ever. Whatever you think you did that made you bad, I'm sure you were just...doing your best to keep your sister alive. And besides, I'm grown. I'm as fucked up as anyone.

REGAN

*(chuckles, still maybe a little patronizing)*  
You're not fucked up.

JEN

*(stage whisper - faux shame)*  
One time...me and Billy ordered Dominoes, right? And they brought us an extra cheesy bread by mistake. Oh, um, cheesy bread is exactly what it sounds like, but with just an obscene amount of garlic butter. And we didn't realize until like ten minutes after the delivery guy left. We coulda called him back, but I didn't, because if we waited for him to come back, then we wouldn't have time to hook up before my mom got home. So that's bad enough. But then I forgot about the cheesy bread. Just left it on the counter. Billy went home, I went to bed. I woke up, like midnight, really hungry. And I walked downstairs and just housed that cheesy bread. The whole thing. It had been sitting out for like five hours. *Who does that?*

REGAN

Nia? I want it on record that I think she'd be out of her fucking head to risk herself for me. But....I guess I can't really stop her, so...we okay?

JEN

Don't fucking do that again, okay?  
*(sighs)*  
Can I give you a hug?

REGAN

Uhh, I guess, yeah. Watch the arm.

We hear Jen wrap Regan up in a hug.

JEN

I'm really glad you're okay.

Beat.

REGAN

...Y'okay that's enough.

Jen lets her go.

REGAN

Nia? We good?

NIA

I accept your apology. I still feel angry, if I'm being honest. But soon enough, I think I won't.

REGAN

Fair enough. So. Collateral. Go and tell Ren she can have Maggie and Catie.

JEN

*(a big deal)*  
Your swords?

NIA

Are you sure about that?

REGAN

I sure as shit can't use 'em right now. Tell her they're master-crafted, and they never made a cut that didn't kill. Which reminds me - Jen, your little library trip?

JEN

Yeahhh I guess that was kinda selfish too. See? I *am* fucked up, I told you.

REGAN

It was selfish. And stupid. In your defense you've learned from the best. But you three mighta saved all our asses by nabbing that statue. Now listen very carefully. When we meet up with these smugglers, our story is we got a friend over there who's holding onto our money. You don't let *any* of them find out you're holding onto that thing until we're safely over. And even then be very, very careful. You get me? People get killed on highways and left in a ditch for far far *far* less.

JEN

Yeah, right, cool. No pressure.

NIA

It's nearly daylight. We should make our final arrangements.

NARRATOR

And with that, Nia and Jen nodded to their Queen and friend, and departed her company.

DIP TO SILENCE.

27 EXT. RED REAVER - ABOVE DECK - MORNING

27

Shockingly, we are above deck and it is morning.

SAILOR

*(from up in a crow's nest)*  
Land ho, Mum, land ho!

REN

You four that are getting off - We're not dropping anchor for long, so you'll want to be bidding your farewells now.

*(The Nia/Parents conversation and the Arlene/Gwen conversation are happening on opposite sides of the deck.)*

NIA

Mum. Dad.  
*(starts to cry)*  
I'm going to miss you so much.

MILDRED

*(crying too)*  
My sweet girl...when do you think you'll be back?

NIA

*(knows it's a fantasy)*  
Just as soon as I can.

BEN

You stay safe, now, you hear me?

NIA

*(quoting scripture)*  
Over mine own spirit, I shall keep ceaseless vigil...  
*(a dodge)*  
And you as well. If you should run into any trouble, seek out Lady--the maid Anna, as it were. She is quite skilled at winning over a crowd.

MILDRED

Right. I imagine we'll stay close, seeing as we know each other.

NIA

And if I may ask one more thing of you...I know that what I've said about the Orcish peoples is hard to believe. But...please do try. It's known that many of  
(MORE)

NIA (cont'd)

them work the farms out on the isles. Just look for their humanity wherever you can find it. I can't expect you to take the same risks as I, but I hope one day you can understand.

(Switch to the other side of the soundfield, per note above.)

ARLENE

We think he should be called Connor.

BRENNEN

A name from the old times, then.

GWEN

Had a brother called Connor. Everyone was so happy when I went off to work at His Majesty's keep. I was too, 'course. Meant my brothers and sisters could eat. But...I was still leaving. Connor was the only one who cried for me. Heard a fever took him a few years back. Poor thing.

NARRATOR

Arlene placed a comforting hand on Gwen's shoulder.

NELSON

Connor it is.

GWEN

Now you remember what you promised, yeah?

NELSON

We'll take good care of him. Pinky swear.

ARLENE

And take this. It seems to help when he starts crying.

NARRATOR

Arlene handed Brennen the music box, which she had acquired in Maeve Bailey's establishment - what felt like a lifetime ago.

ARLENE

And if that fails, I captured a lullaby on the device Jen showed us. At least, I tried to.

BRENNEN

Thank you, my Lady. I would like you both to have these.

NARRATOR

With as much grace and decorum as his surroundings would allow, Brennen knelt before the two women, and presented them with four of his throwing axes.

ARLENE

*(uhh what?)*

Thank you, Sir Brennen. How...sweet.

BRENNEN

It's not exactly what they're made for, but if you find any ropes need cutting or trees need felling, they'll see you through.

*(beat)*

Also, if anyone gives you trouble, whack them with the blunt end. If they keep giving you trouble, then whack them with the sharp end until they stop.

ARLENE

*(nervous)*

Of course.

GWEN

Well here's hoping it needn't come to that. If I may, Sir Brennen...growing up where I did, you tend to see the worst side of knights. You start to think that all those songs about virtue and heroes are just songs. But you're the real thing, Brennen. Everything a knight's supposed to be.

NARRATOR

Brennen looked down at the deck of the ship, but the red rising to his cheeks was unmistakable.

GWEN

And if any of these other sellswords and rapists who call themselves knights dare look down on you for your birth, you tell those pissants--

ARLENE

--They may be of noble blood but you're of noble soul.

GWEN

Damn right. Hey! Maybe the great bard Anna can put you in one of her songs some day. All the Sugarcane Isles'll know of your great deeds.

NARRATOR

Now it was Anna's - nee Arlene's - turn to blush.

ARLENE

Oh I don't think I could actually write a song of my own. Brennen, do please thank Her Majesty for her

(MORE)

ARLENE (cont'd)

tremendous hospitality these last few weeks. We truly owe her our lives. I only wish we had more to offer by way of gratitude. The Queen is strong, wise, and just. May her days be long.

BRENNEN

Thank you, my Lady. I'm sure your kind words are--

GWEN

--Oh fuck me!

ARLENE

Gwen! --I mean--Gayle!

GWEN

Sorry! Sorry, I just can't believe I forgot about this. All this time.

NARRATOR

Gayle - nee Gwen - pulled her hand out of a small purse on her belt to reveal a luminescent golden vial. If you've forgotten that Gwen found the vial on the floor of the Horse's Head Inn after Jen left it behind during a Templar ambush, well...you'd be forgiven. Seeing as how Gwen herself had only just remembered.

GWEN

Woulda been useful before now, Gwen, you dunce.

ARLENE

Pardon me, but that's my paramour you're talking about and I'll not hear you disparage her so. Yes?

*Arlene kisses Gwen.*

NARRATOR

At this, Brennen's jaw went slack.

BRENNEN

Your...she's...what?

ARLENE

Kal--I mean, Yllowyyn?

*Yllowyyn walks over.*

YLLOWYYN

My lady?

ARLENE

Do you know what this is?

YELLOWYYN

Elf medicine? Let me see.  
*(reads for half a beat)*  
It says this treats fever, and pain related to  
inflammation. If only I'd had this when my arm wound  
had gone bad.

GWEN

Aye, sorry.

YELLOWYYN

No matter, it's still well-timed. I'll bring this to  
Her Majesty at once, thank you. And fare well to both  
of you. I wish you the best.

28 EXT. ON THE WATER - A FEW MINUTES LATER

28

*A small rowboat touches down on the waves, and  
begins to paddle.*

NARRATOR

As Alf rowed Arlene, Gwen, Mildred, and Ben towards the  
tropical island before them, the newly formed foursome  
looked for a moment at their new home-to-be. Then they  
turned their attention back to the Red Reaver, and  
their kith and kin waving farewell. They returned the  
waves, and held this gaze for a long while. And then,  
when the brigantine was no longer visible on the  
horizon, did the four finally turn to look at each  
other.

FADE OUT.

END OF CHAPTER.