

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 9
"A Handful of Bodyguards"

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PART ONE:

(Episodes now regularly begin with the Western arrangement of the theme music.)

1 EXT. WESTERN FOOTHILLS - DAY

1

The party of eight is walking through a prairie-like field.

BILLY

(a lightning bolt)
Oh shit!

JEN

What?

BILLY

Is *The Matrix* about Jesus? Ohhhhh, damn. That's what Ms. Meecham was talking about with that allegra stuff.

NELSON

(audibly nursing a stress headache)
Yes, Billy, it is a Christ allegory.

BILLY

'Allegory,' that's it.

NELSON

(this is him earnestly trying to open up)
It's also, to quote my dad, about reclaiming free will and self-identity under the ideological hegemony of late global capitalism. In hindsight he missed all the trans stuff, but I think it's all of a piece, you know?

BILLY

Hegemony's the chick from *Harry Potter*, right?

NELSON

I tried. Jen, I'm sorry, I tried. I just can't.

NELSON HUSTLES UP AHEAD.

BILLY

Oh, my bad, I mean - the young woman from *Harry Potter*.

Billy **clicks his tongue** as if to say "I gotchu."

VANDERBERG

All right, y'all, hold up.

THEY COME TO A STOP.

VANDERBERG

Town up yonder's called Pacific Ridge. And never was there a town less well-named. But that's where our business will come to an end. Services at Lulu's Alehouse should get you in touch with your man. Assuming he still has my prize.

REGAN

The bargain was "to the town."

VANDERBERG

Don't worry, I'm not sending you in alone. Come on out boys!

NARRATOR

At Vanderberg's call, six men with drawn crossbows emerged from tall grass surrounding the party.

REGAN

Hergh!

NARRATOR

Regan reached for her swords on instinct, but was stymied - primarily by the surge of pain from her recently broken arm, and secondarily by the fact that she no longer possessed said swords.

REGAN

(strained)
What is this?!

VANDERBERG

These men here are for your safety and mine. Can't have you getting in the wrong hands, not with what you know. Careful of that one, boys, she's a mage.

NARRATOR

Three of the six crossbows swung to aim at Jen.

BILLY

Whoa hey FUCK OFF POINT 'EM AT ME YOU CHICKENSHITS!

REGAN

If any of my crew gets hurt by one of these goons I swear...

VANDERBERG

You swear what exactly? You don't seem to have the lay of the land. You've got fast hands, I'll give you that, but they don't seem to know their new limits yet.

NARRATOR

Regan seethed and scowled at Vanderberg, but made no move.

VANDERBERG

But it ain't all bad. Once our deal is done, you'll have a very powerful ally. You're about to close a deal with the one and only boss of Pacific Ridge.

SIX RANGERS **CHEER.**

VANDERBERG

Enough chatter. I need to check in on my business. Make yourselves comfortable but keep your head down and don't mention the statue to anyone, or there'll be trouble for both of us. I'll swing by Lulu's tonight for an update on the delivery.

NARRATOR

And with that, Vanderberg's men prodded the group into motion towards the town.

2 EXT. THE TOWN OF PACIFIC RIDGE - MAIN STREET - EVENING

2

We're in a medium-sized town that feels distinctly "Old West." There's not a ton of wildlife but there are plenty of farm animals, and people milling about. Most of the activity is centered maybe 100 yards or so away.

NARRATOR

Upon arriving at the town of Pacific Ridge - which they did just before dusk - our Party of Heroes was met by a single thoroughfare, lined on either side by a row of simple buildings. These were raised a foot or so above the dusty clay ground by wooden stilts.

The party's footsteps - and those of the goons - come to a stop at the center of our sound field.

NARRATOR

At the far end of this thoroughfare was a town square. This was *not* where the party was, shall we say, impolitely directed by their new unsolicited chaperons. And so, their clenched fists and angry scowls notwithstanding, it was *not* where they headed.

Everybody begins walking off left.

NARRATOR

It is however where I will take you for a few moments.

3 EXT. THE TOWN OF PACIFIC RIDGE - TOWN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

3

There's only a subtle shift in ambiance here - the center of activity that was previously 100 yards away is now all around us.

NARRATOR

Now, this town of Pacific Ridge was home to a few hundred souls. How their time was occupied will be further expounded upon soon enough. But for now, suffice it to say that they were not completely without opportunity for leisure.

Note: For this guy, 'coyote' is pronounced with two syllables.

COYOTE CARL

Step right up, come one come all! Try your skills at Coyote Carl's latest challenge! With our biggest payouts yet!

NARRATOR

And of course, this niche in the local economy was filled by a particularly enterprising individual, who stood at this moment in the town square, hawking his services.

COYOTE CARL

One throw for just a copper, three throws for two! Won't find a better deal than that, folks!

NARRATOR

This enterprising individual, who'd dubbed himself "Coyote Carl," wore a wide-brimmed hat, a vest made from the pelt of the eponymous prairie canine, and honestly the most ostentatious mustache I have ever seen. And that's including the seaborne raiders of southeast Iorden such as Alf Firebeard.

COYOTE CARL

Test your skills against this most infamous Orc!

NARRATOR

Next to him, manacled by his ankle to a stake in the ground, and painted all over with an ashen grey, was a tall, broad-shouldered man - with bright red eyes.

COYOTE CARL

Born of the cave-people, he killed four Elves to escape the mines, and then fell in with the hill-people, whereupon he rose to become the most fearsome warrior the Rangers of Pacific Ridge have ever faced! The one the Orcs call the Man-Wolf!

There's a bit of sparse - awkwardly sparse -
applause.

NARRATOR

Carl and his colleague had caught the attention of a young couple strolling through the square, among others. So it is now with some unease that I introduce you to a freckled woman in a frilly dress and bonnet, and the stout but densely-built man onto whose arm she held. They were called Janey and Bill, respectively.

Two sets of footsteps sidle over.

JANEY

(fascinated by the novelty)
Oh my goodness gracious, would you look at him?

BILL

(so only Janey can hear)
Janey, will you watch how you talk in public?

JANEY

(private)
Oh come on, Bill, when was the last time we did something fun?
(to everyone)
Why do they call him the Man-Wolf?

COYOTE CARL

Ohhhh, let me assure you. In his heyday, you'd've rather faced a pack of wolves than one of him. Why I've known many a brave man who turned tail and fled when they heard his fearsome howl.

NARRATOR

Carl caught the eye of the large man beside him. The man returned his gaze, but took no other action.

A beat.

NARRATOR

He tried as surreptitiously as possible to jerk his head towards his two prospective clients. The large man cocked an eyebrow.

COYOTE CARL

(sotto voce)
Gods dammit, do the thing.

NARRATOR

The man rolled his eyes, and then...

THE HEEL LETS OUT A GROWL - IT'S LOUD BUT HE'S CLEARLY HALF-ASSING IT.

At this, a crowd begins to gather and buzz. A few people sound intimidated.

NARRATOR

This, at last, attracted a modest crowd over to Coyote Carl's little paddock.

COYOTE CARL

But not to worry! The Man-Wolf owes me a life-debt.

JANEY

A life debt?

COYOTE CARL

(bombastic, was waiting to spin this yarn)
 Why yes, ma'am. You see I was there the day the Man-Wolf's war party was finally out-maneuvered. I was with my company of Rangers, led by a detachment of Elves from the White Forest. It was only by great martial feats of Elvish horsemanship that we were able to get the drop on them. But they were resolved to fight to the last orc. And the Man-Wolf was the last orc standing. He had already killed quite a few amigos of mine, you see. When finally he was out of arrows, spears and throwing axes, the Elves - and not a few of my fellow rangers - were ready to shoot him where he stood. But I begged clemency. Isn't that right, friend?

THE HEEL

(a very flat performance)
 ...That's right.

COYOTE CARL

You see, I hated him for what he'd done. But I could not help but respect his warrior spirit. I orated on his behalf, friends, oh I orated! How long did I orate, friend?

THE HEEL

(can barely bring himself to play along)
 Ohh, it was so long I lost track of time.

COYOTE CARL

My comrades relented! And released him into my personal custody. Now it is the custom of his people when one man saves the life of another for that man to serve his savior the rest of his days. And that's why he's here. Now who wants to try their skill?

The crowd erupts with enthusiasm.

COYOTE CARL

All right, all right. One at a time! You sir, you were here first. It's one throw for a copper, three throws for two. What'll it be?

BILL

Sorry, maybe tomorrow.

COYOTE CARL

Don't you wanna impress your lady friend there?
(when that doesn't work, some good-natured ribbing)
You ain't scared, are you?

NARRATOR

In an instant, any sense of fun drained from Janey's face.

JANEY

(quiet, but desperate)
Bill.

BILL

(ignoring her - NOT good natured)
Scared? You know who the fuck you're talking to?

COYOTE CARL

Whoa-hoh - easy there, fella. I apologize sincerely for any offense, it was a...jest deriving from the absurd, as anyone can see you're brave as they come. But if you've other business to attend--

BILL

--No, I'll play your little game. Three throws.

A small amount of money changes hands.

BILL

What's the rules?

COYOTE CARL

Very simple, my good man, very simple. You throw this here axe at yonder stump. Get as close to the bulls-eye as you can. Then this here lumbering tower of Orc'll throw. If he gets closer to the bulls-eye, you lose. If he doesn't, you win! Are you ready?

BILL

You bet your ass.

COYOTE CARL

Righty then, give her a go.

An axe whooshes through the air and sticks into wood.

There's some...gentle and polite applause.

COYOTE CARL

All right, not bad at all. Wolf?

Another throw and thud.

The crowd goes "awww."

COYOTE CARL

Well I reckon he's got you beat by at least an inch there, buckaroo. Give her another shot.

Whoosh. Thud.

The applause is more enthusiastic this time.

COYOTE CARL

Damn, son! Not bad at all. I'm sure glad I apologized to you.

There are some chuckles.

COYOTE CARL

Well let's see how the Man-Wolf fares.

Whoosh. Thud.

Disappointed oohs and aahs.

BILL

Shit.

COYOTE CARL

Well shucks. Bested again. All right - last time. For all the bacon. Let's give our contestant a round of applause, shall we?

The crowd gleefully obliges.

COYOTE CARL

All right, settle down now. Let the man concentrate!

Again, they do. Coyote Carl's got them wrapped around his litte finger.

BILL TAKES A BIG DEEP BREATH.

Whoosh. Thud.

The crowd goes apeshit!

COYOTE CARL

Hot diggity damn! I'd call that a bulls-eye, my good man! That's gonna be tough to beat. Even for a vicious killer such as this one. And folks, we don't wanna see that happen do we?

The crowd boos and jeers.

NARRATOR

The red-eyed man reared back with his throwing axe...

Whoosh.

Wood splinters!

NARRATOR

...And shattered the prior axe with it.

That shuts the crowd up.

Everything is silent for a beat.

JANEY

This shit's rigged!

The crowd bursts into an angry din.

COYOTE CARL

(starting to get nervous)

Everyone, I assure you, this is a completely fair game.

BILL

You're fulla shit, Carl.

RANGER 1

Hey, shut the fuck up, Bill. You're just sore you lost, let one of us play!

JANEY

Why've you always gotta be such a rude horse's ass, Ned?

RANGER 1

Janey, you shut the fuck up too. You're just sore you picked a man with a little fish bait pecker.

BILL

What'd you say, you limp-dick Rosebud bastard?

RANGER 1

You heard me, you stinkin' Mulberry son of a bitch!

A punch is thrown.

The whole crowd explodes into a BRAWL.

We cut in very close to Carl and the Heel:

COYOTE CARL

(aside, to the Heel)

Think we oughta take our leave.

NARRATOR

At this, the large red-eyed man effortlessly pulled the stake to which he was manacled out of the ground, and began to spin it above his head as a makeshift flail.

A chain with a weight on the end of it whirs rapidly above us.

THE HEEL

(booming and impressive)

Everyone give us some room!

HARD CUT TO:

4 INT. LULU'S ALEHOUSE - ROUGHLY SIMULTANEOUS

4

Sudden, boring quiet.

The setting is an old west-style tavern, but it's not lively. The poker chips are un-dealt and the piano's un-played. All we hear is someone at the bar wiping down glasses, a few people wordlessly eating stew.

NARRATOR

With this, we may now jump backwards in time by a paltry few minutes and rejoin our primary protagonists. They had been not-quite-willingly escorted to a saloon. And it is here we find them, sat at a table in the back, their "protection" positioned inconspicuously around the bar room, but always in sight. Not that there was any danger of the travelers from the east comingling with the locals. All but the proprietor gave the newcomers a wide berth.

(All conversation is hushed until talking to Lulu.)

BRENNEN

Your Grace, we need a plan.

REGAN

I'm workin' on it.

NIA

No doubt. But perhaps we might work on it together rather than you keeping it to yourself.

REGAN

(a bit passive aggressive)

Yeah, ok, you wanna hear what I got so far?

JEN

Totally.

Long uncomfortable silence...

REGAN

That's it.

YELLOWYYN

What?

REGAN

(tired)

I've got nothing. That Vanderburg prick got it right, we don't have the lay of the land. We don't know shit from soup out here. All I know right now is we're not giving him that damned statue.

JEN

Ok, that's....something. Can we work the problem? Start with not giving him the statue. How do we do that and not get killed?

REGAN

(deflated)

Fuck if I know. We've got nothing to work with here. I don't know these people and they don't know me. We've got no leverage, no feet in any doors. Fuck, I don't have a toe in a window. I don't have a cunt hair in a letter box.

JEN

Jesus, why would you want--

NIA

--With respect, that assessment is flawed. You are forgetting that we have some small amount of items that can be bartered if need be. Additionally, you have the

(MORE)

NIA (cont'd)
mind of a master thief and six people willing to fight
for you.

NELSON
Plus a maybe magic baby!

NIA
Yes, also we have a babe.

BRENNEN
Your Grace, you don't need to do this all on your own.
With all due respect, fighting on your own is how you
ended up with broken arms. We are your court, we all
have skills and knowledge you can lean on to help in
your time of need. We are...tools at your disposal.

BILLY
Who's a tool?

A set of footsteps approaching

REGAN
(sigh)
Fine.
(a beat)
Thanks. I'll be sure lean on and dispose of you as I
see-
(full volume)
Hi. We're *still* ok over here.

LULU
Right, look. Y'all seem...generally bewildered so I
reckoned I'd let you know. First plate of bread and
first bowl of stew is free for newcomers 'round here.
So long as they're gentle folk who behave themselves.

BILLY
Free?

BRENNEN
Free?

LULU
Y'all want any?

REGAN
(maximum cynicism as always)
...What kinda stew?

JEN
Regan!

NIA
Your Grace.

REGAN
Yeah, okay. Fuck it.

LULU

Right. Back in a sec.

A beat here. We can imagine some hangry stares.

REGAN

What?

JEN

I think everybody's just really hungry.

REGAN

Well congrats. We're not just broke and captive anymore, now we owe somebody something.

NIA

She said it was free.

REGAN

I heard what she said.

Plate clunks on the table.

LULU

Here's the bread, stew's coming next.

JEN

(extra nice to compensate for Regan)
Thank you so much!

BRENNEN

(whispers, to be polite)
Your Grace. I think there's something wrong with this bread.

BILLY

Ho-ly shit, they got tacos here? I'm getting a chalupa, who wants one?

NELSON

There's nothing wrong with the bread, it's just a tortilla.

YELLOWYYN

A what?

JEN

It's unleavened, and they make it with corn instead of wheat. Try one.

She slides the plate his way.

BRENNEN

What is...corn?

JEN

We're gonna eat if you aren't.

She slides the plate back.

BILLY, JEN, AND NELSON START **STUFFING THEIR FACES.**

JEN

(face stuffed)
Omigod, they're really fresh.

NELSON

(also face stuffed)
Yeah, these are bomb.

BILLY

(also face stuffed)
Mmhhh.

BRENNEN

Well don't eat them all.

He slides the plate back again.

THE REMAINDER OF THE PARTY **DIGS IN.**

Lulu returns.

NARRATOR

It was then the proprietor of the alehouse returned from the kitchen with seven steaming bowls of stew, and placed them before her seven hungry patrons.

She puts seven bowls down on the bar.

LULU

There we are. Rancher's stew. My secret recipe. Enjoy!

NELSON

Thank you!

JEN

Thank you!

THE THREE KIDS **DIG IN.**

BILLY

(face stuffed yet again)
Yeah, thanks!

NARRATOR

But the four members of our Party who had lived their whole lives in Eastern Iorden were more cautious with the food, as much of its aroma was entirely alien to them.

BRENNEN SNIFFS HIS BOWL.

BRENNEN

What's in it?

LULU

It's meat, beans, and a paste made from savory fruits.

NIA

I'm fascinated by the concept of savory fruits, I'd love to ask you more about it later.

BRENNEN TAKES A BITE.

BRENNEN

It's good!

LULU

Well don't act so surprised.

REGAN TAKES A BITE.

REGAN

Yeah, you know, that's pretty--

SHE SPITS IT OUT AND STARTS WHEEZING.

REGAN

Poison! It's poison!

**A BUNCH OF CHAIRS ARE THROWN BACK FROM THE
TABLE IN A PANIC**

LULU

It ain't poison! Why would I poison you?!

JEN

Maybe she's allergic to something? Oh, god, they don't have epi-pens here do they?

NIA

What do you feel?

REGAN

My mouth's burning!

THE KIDS ALL START LAUGHING WITH RELIEF.

JEN

Oh my god, Regan.

BILLY

You had us going for a bit.

Their laughter dies down, at which point we notice that a few of Lulu's other proprietors are chuckling.

NARRATOR

Regan faced her comrades, with a look of incredulous betrayal, that they would laugh in the face of her pain.

NELSON

It's not poison, it's just seasoning.

REGAN

You mean they cook it like that on purpose?

JEN

Drink some water, you'll be fine. Or milk, milk's better. You have any milk?

LULU

Hasn't been fresh for three days.

JEN

Water then.

LULU

Water's not that fresh either. Wanna beer?

REGAN

Yeah, fine, beer. Put it on that guy's tab. Why do they cook it like that?

BILLY

I dunno, it tastes good?

JEN

Also, it makes you sweat without raising your body temperature. So it helps when it's hot out.

REGAN

Did that not hurt you, Brennen?

BRENNEN

There's a wee stinging, I suppose. It's worth it for the flavor.

REGAN

You're all out of your fucking minds.
(then, almost mad about it...)
 ...Dammit it is really good.

SHE RESUMES **EATING**, THIS TIME **VORACIOUSLY**.

But, like, she's still in a lot of pain.

REGAN

(ad lib. under her breath, e.g...)
 Fuck me, gods dammit.

Note: For the entire rest of this scene,
 Regan should be struggling with a truly
 intense amount of phlegm.

YELLOWYYN

I don't feel any stinging.

LULU

Yeah, birds and Elves. The hotberries don't affect them
 the same. Who can say--

--The doors swing open

RANGER 2

(out of breath)
 --There's a brawl in the square! Y'all better come
 quick.

NARRATOR

The Party's chaperons stood so quickly that it seemed
 like a reflex.

RANGER 3

You three stay and watch them, like Les said. We'll go
 check it out.

Three people scurry off.

NARRATOR

And just like that, our heroes' protection was halved
 in number. The other six instinctively looked to Regan
 for cues on whether they should do anything to take
 advantage of this sudden change. But Regan, for her
 part, surreptitiously lowered her usable hand with the
 palm facing down, as if to tell her comrades to remain
 still. All the while her attention was rapt to the
 goings-on in the barroom.

LULU

(to herself but not trying to be quiet)
Lovely, 'nother brawl. Gally, Lulu, why's your beer always warm? Ohhhh, I don't know, maybe because I'm always using up my precious little ice to treat black eyes.

She clomps down a set of stairs behind the bar.

NARRATOR

And with this exasperated aside, the saloon's proprietor stomped off into the cellar.

Beat.

NARRATOR

And for a moment...there was peace again. But not for very long.

Two people walk in.

NARRATOR

For soon thereafter did our Party first encounter Coyote Carl and his employee, who entered the saloon in something of a hurry. Needless to say, they were somewhat fascinated by Carl's appearance, and very fascinated by the appearance of the large man who was with him. These two ducked into a booth near the front window, but such was their state of excitement that their conversation was still largely audible to our protagonists.

COYOTE CARL

Gods, you see that one kid? What was he, seventeen? Took a rock to the head the size of a roast ham.

THE HEEL

I saw.

COYOTE CARL

Think he'll live?

THE HEEL

Doubt it.

COYOTE CARL

Gods damn. This town, I tell ya.

THE HEEL

I told you to hire a handful of bodyguards.

COYOTE CARL

And I told you it's fucking impossible around here. Hire from the Rosebuds, the Mulberrys show up and fight

(MORE)

COYOTE CARL (cont'd)

'em. Hire from the Mulberrys, the Rosebuds start shit. You hire some from both, they fight each other! Entire town's full of bodyguards and it's the most dangerous place I've ever lived. Besides, I thought you'd be my security, you know? At least a little.

THE HEEL

You don't pay me enough to do security. You barely pay me enough to do what we agreed on. Speaking of...with things as dicey as they are, I might have to split town sooner rather than later.

COYOTE CARL

What? Split town my ass. Our deal was until the first snow of the season.

THE HEEL

Our deal was until the first snow of the season *unless* things got unsafe. Then I said I'd leave if I had to and you'd pay me for the time I did work.

COYOTE CARL

(bitter)
Right. Gotta have your silver, don't you?

THE HEEL

("Why else would I be here, asshole?")
I'm told that's how your people conduct commerce.

A coin purse clinks on the table.

The coin purse is opened.

THE HEEL

This isn't the raise we talked about.

COYOTE CARL

The raise was to do the new axe-throwing game. But we didn't make any fucking money from the axe-throwing game, now did we?

THE HEEL

And how's that my fault?

COYOTE CARL

You didn't play the part right! What was that bullshit with the howl?

THE HEEL

("You tell me.")
What was that bullshit about a life debt?

COYOTE CARL

Our deal was you play the part I tell you to, no if's and's or but's.

THE HEEL

(being a ball-buster)

I *did* do the howl when you asked me to.

COYOTE CARL

I shouldn't have to say it out loud, you lunkhead. I was giving you a signal.

THE HEEL

I'm a big dumb Orc, remember? Can't expect me to pick up the finer cues of civilized society.

COYOTE CARL

You got a real shit attitude, you red eyed bastard. I pay you an honest wage for an honest day's work. There's not many here who'd do the same for your kind.

THE HEEL

You gonna pay me what you promised, or are we done here?

Carl angrily throws a few more coins on the table.

COYOTE CARL

Here! You fucking greedy bastard. That what you want?

THE HEEL

Again, I'm told that's why your people work...

COYOTE CARL

(ignoring him)

Yeah, yeah, we're fucking done here. I'll see you next year once you've pissed away what I gave you.

Footsteps from behind the bar.

NARRATOR

Coyote Carl rose from the booth in a huff, just as Lulu emerged from the cellar with a bucket of ice.

COYOTE CARL

Howdy, Lulu.

He leaves.

NARRATOR

And soon after his departure, the large man painted grey approached the bar and spoke with Lulu.

Very heavy footsteps cross the room.

(They speak quietly)

THE HEEL

I think I'm gotta split, Lulu. You mind if I take some supper in the cellar first.

LULU

Sure. Head on down, I'll bring it to you soon as I can.

THE HEEL

Appreciate it. Anybody asks, I slipped out the back.

Now he walks down into the cellar.

NELSON

We should DEFINITELY talk to that guy.

REGAN

(A bit distracted)
Yeah...for sure.

NARRATOR

Nelson was pleasantly surprised to see the flush of crimson rising to Regan's cheeks.

NELSON

That pissed you off too, right? That guy was clearly getting--

REGAN

--Outta my way, outta my way.

Her chair is thrown to the ground as she runs.

REGAN

(A few feet away now)
Holy fuck, where's the shitter?

She sprints out the back door.

LULU

(sighs)
Another banner day, Lulu. "Go west, young woman. Go west," they said. Lots of space out there, lots of peace.

And then the front doors swing open again.

JANEY

LULU!

NARRATOR

Vanderberg's men reached for their hips on instinct. When they saw who was darkening the door, they relaxed, but their hands stayed near their hips.

LULU

Oh for Galadon's--

NARRATOR

--And when Lulu saw who it was, she too softened immediately.

LULU

(genuine care)
Janey! Are you--

JANEY

--Give me the crossbow.

LULU

(finally, relieved)
You bet.

NARRATOR

As Lulu rushed behind the bar, Janey paced near the entrance, casting furtive glances toward the door.

JANEY

The son of a bitch threw a bottle at Cottonball, Lulu. Cottonball! Gods know I sass off sometimes, or have a few too many and flirt with someone. But Cottonball never hurt a living thing in all his sweet little life. It's too much. If he ever hurt that innocent little thing...

NARRATOR

Lulu returned, putting a rather antiquated single shot crossbow in Janey's hands.

LULU

You remember what I showed you, right? How to use that?

NARRATOR

Janey continued to stare at the crossbow in her hands.

LULU

It's already loaded so all you need to do is aim and shoot.

JANEY

...I don't know if I can do this...

LULU
Sure you can, sweetie. Just aim and shoot.

JANEY
If I miss...

She can't fully spell out the end of that thought.

And then she has another.

JANEY
Gods, and what if I don't? I love him, Lulu.

LULU
I know you do, but this is no way to keep on--
--The doors swing open.

BILL
--Janey, will you quit being such a--

--A bolt looses and sticks in the wood wall.

NARRATOR
Bill stormed into the bar, catching Lulu and Janey by surprise. So much so that Janey accidentally let loose a bolt that narrowly missed the man's head.

A beat of stunned silence all around.

NARRATOR
Bill looked back at the bolt in the wall, took a moment to comprehend, and then flared his eyes and nostrils as he wheeled on Janey.

BILL
YOU STUPID--

--Three chairs scrape against the floor.

NARRATOR
--But he stopped short as he saw three gangsters stand, hands on holsters.

BILL
This ain't got nothing to do with y'all. You not see her try to kill me?

LULU
Bill, look at her! She's shaking like a tumbleweed - anyone can see it was an accident!

BILL

Accident my ass.

RANGER 4

You and your woman ain't our business, Bill. But keeping Lulu's as neutral ground sure is.

BILL

Oh. I see. She ruttin' on you Rosebud bastards too? D'you fellas know this bitch is tainted? She's sweet on that greyskin that Lulu keeps feeding.

NARRATOR

Our party was already rapt by this exchange before Bill let loose this particular slur but now they were on highest alert.

JANEY

(verge of tears)

I ain't ever stepped out on you. Ever!

LULU

Bill for once in your foul-spotted life, piss off!

BILL

Like Selbirin I will! You don't think I know whose crossbow that is, Lulu?

LULU

So what if it is? Ain't I got a right to shoot a mad dog who barges in here?

BILL

Yeah, right - neutral fucking ground. You're fulla shit Lulu.

(to the Rosebuds)

Y'all three are breaking the pact. I'm gonna get my crew and we'll see what they've got to say about that.

(to Janey)

And honey, we ain't finished by a damn sight.

NARRATOR

And with that final outburst, Bill left the bar room, leaving everyone else in stunned silence.

A beat of quiet.

This one actually sticks.

JANEY AT LAST STARTS **SOBBING**.

LULU

Come here sweetie, it's all right.

NARRATOR

Looks passed back and forth between our entire party of seven. Nia in particular sought to catch the gaze of Jen, but Jen had a hand on the shoulder of a tense and shaking Billy.

LULU

What do you need? A drink? A bath?

REGAN

Somebody to shoot that piece of shit for you?

NARRATOR

...Offered Regan, re-emerging from the back door.

BUT IT ONLY MAKES JANEY SOB HARDER.

LULU

Generous, no doubt, but maybe mind your business?

NARRATOR

Having thus offered what she could, Regan rejoined her comrades at their table.

JEN

Hey. You missed--

REGAN

--I heard most of it. We just learned a fuck of a lot about this town. Starting with who I wanna kill first.

END OF PART ONE.