

**THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD**  
**Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH**

Chapter 5  
"An Impregnable Missive"

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1 EXT. SEAHOLD - DAY

1

NARRATOR

As you may recall from the last time we spoke, Major Zyka'ad had ushered Nia's parents into her confidence under the not entirely false pretense that Nia was in "grave, grave peril."

MILDRED

Peril?! What kind of peril?

ZYKA'AD

It's, ah...best discussed in private. Will you come with me?

BEN

Of course. You're welcome in our priory of course.

ZYKA'AD

Thank you, but let us use the Garrison's Keep.

MILDRED

(*unsure*)  
If you think that's best.

ZYKA'AD

The Keep has provisions we'll need when my Lord Commander comes through. Will you come? I'm afraid the matter is urgent.

BEN

Lead the way, m'lord.

Three sets of footsteps - one with spurs - walk rapidly.

MILDRED

I understand if you can't talk about it aloud, but... could I at least see the letter?

BEN

My wife does worry so about her girl.

ZYKA'AD

Well it's in Hyylyg of course.

BEN

That's all right. We've a tiny bit of Hyylyg between us.

ZYKA'AD

You *do*?

MILDRED

Nia tried to teach us. We never got the hang of speaking it, but we could probably read well enough to understand.

ZYKA'AD

Well, ah...nevertheless. Perhaps you'd better be seated in any case.

MILDRED

Galadon above, is it that bad?

ZYKA'AD

Come, we musn't dawdle.

One set of footsteps speeds up ahead.

NARRATOR

Major Zyka'ad quickened her pace to a near jog. And the two reverends, after sharing a look between them, could not but follow.

The remaining two footsteps quicken to match.

## 2 INT. SEAHOLD KEEP - CONTINUOUS

2

Footsteps enter a large, echoey hall.

NARRATOR

And as they entered the imposing stone fortress which usually housed Seahold's garrison, it was impossible not to notice the heft of the doors, as two Elvish infantrymen quickly closed them.

A heavy fortress door closes behind us.

ZYKA'AD

*(palpable relief)*  
Now. You had questions?

MILDRED

Where is my daughter?! What trouble is she in?

ZYKA'AD

Unfortunately that information is classified.

BEN

But you just said--

ZYKA'AD

--However! It is my charge to assist in retrieving her. And though it pains me to bring such alarming news, I

(MORE)

ZYKA'AD (cont'd)

hope there's some consolation that you can play a critical role in her recovery.

MILDRED

Galadon help us. Keep my baby safe. We should never have let her leave Seahold--

BEN

--Sweetheart, stay calm.

MILDRED

*Calm, Ben?*

NARRATOR

Ben tried to console his wife with an embrace.

BEN

What do you need from us?

ZYKA'AD

Well, although my superiors know much of your daughter's predicament, her exact location has vexed us. If you had anything at your disposal that may help us locate her...

NARRATOR

The Reverends loosened their embrace and peered into one another's eyes as if searching for a mutually agreeable response.

Silence for a beat.

ZYKA'AD

*(impatient)*

Anything at all.

*(correcting herself)*

I'm sorry. You're understandably startled--

MILDRED

*(carefully, shrewdly)*

--Yes. No, you are right. There's no time to waste. We'll need to head back to our priory--

NARRATOR

--But as Mildred took a step toward the exit, Zyka'ad subtly - deftly - positioned her armored body in the way. The decisiveness of the gesture was not lost on Mildred or Ben.

ZYKA'AD

Oh, please, if you must leave, allow me to escort you. Or better yet send one of my pages back to town to gather what you need. We're a team now, you see.

NARRATOR

Though the Major was smiling, the Reverends could not detect the warmth of camaraderie in her eyes. Via another shared, piercing look, they communicated with each other their mutually agreed upon response.

BEN

We know just how to find her.

MILDRED

Clergy throughout Iorden have a network that we use to stay connected, with notices like--

BEN

--Like marriages and, who's expecting...

MILDRED

Yes, typically harmless messages ...

*(getting upset)*

Everyday things like births and deaths anyhow - NOT missing children.

BEN

*(consoling)*

Sweetheart...

MILDRED

*(collecting herself)*

Ugh. I'm sorry. Well, I'm not but - the point is: that's how we find her: M.N.N.

ZYKA'AD

M.N.N?

MILDRED

Monastery News Network.

BEN

Monastery News Network.

MILDRED

MoNewstery for short.

ZYKA'AD

...Of course.

BEN

If we compose a message and get it to the rookery, it can be to every decent house of worship in the realm by sunup.

ZYKA'AD

A most useful resource indeed! Shame, almost, that its use has been limited to quotidian goings-on.

BEN

Aye, well...

MILDRED

Have you got parchment and quill? I'll get working on the message.

ZYKA'AD

That can be arranged. Private!

She **snaps her fingers**.

ZYKA'AD

Now I must warn you, we must be exceptionally careful in how we word our message, for...reasons I cannot yet divulge. I'll need to carefully read whatever you send.

MILDRED

If...you insist.

ZYKA'AD

I'm afraid I must. For your own safety and that of your daughter, of course. As I said, we're a team now.

3 EXT. FREEHOLD - DAY

3

Several horses gallop towards a fort.

NARRATOR

Major Zyka'ad was of course awaiting the return of her commanding officer, Lord Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, who was attending to some important business at the recently rebuilt fortress of Freehold.

4 INT. FREEHOLD GREAT HALL - CONTINUOUS

4

NARRATOR

Now I have been a storyteller since...well, perhaps I shouldn't date myself. It doesn't help for casting. Let's just say I have been at it for a long time. And I know what I mean when I say that Ry'y proved herself quite the thespian as she addressed the Freehold garrison.

RY'Y

Citizens! Soldiers! Dearly Beloved Friends!

It pains me to have to break this news, and to you whom the Knights of the Wood consider as close as brethren.

(MORE)

RY'Y (cont'd)

A light has gone out in this land, for all races allied with Galadon. Beloved commander, Bryce Riverfell, has been assassinated.

CROWD NOISES

(Gasps of horror ad lib.)  
NO! It can't be! [Etc.]

PROFESSOR

(not tipping his hand)  
How did this calamity happen, my lord?

RY'Y

Well...I confess, my closest advisors feared that promulgating the circumstances of this tragedy would be too harrowing for his devoted people to hear. But! I have seen you all test your mettle in battle. You are my cousins forged in the fight. And I say you have the right to know.

My Knights had been searching for a particular Templar encampment for some time, and not too long ago they finally found it. I hoped General Riverfell would join me on our raid, as he knew the terrain better than we ever could, and was of course near peerless among men in battle. Brave as the General was, he needed no convincing. But before we could mount our assault, the mighty Bryce took ill.

I came to realize - too late, curse my carelessness - that he had been poisoned.

CROWD NOISES

(ad lib. pained surprised)  
Poisoned? Gods no! How could this be? [Etc.]

RY'Y

Lady's Farewell, I'm afraid. A most unfortunate way to die.

The crowd has fallen to **wails of despair** at this detail.

NARRATOR

While most of the gathered crowd had fallen to lamentations over their beloved superior, the Professor watched Ry'y lo-Th'yyt like a hawk.

RY'Y

Now I shall not spare you these particulars, for they speak of his enduring love for his people. As he lay dying in my arms, he gathered himself to tell me,  
"General Ry'y lo Thy'yt, help my people. Protect them.

(MORE)

RY'Y (cont'd)

For enemies gather from the outside all around. We must band together stronger than ever with our allies."

What remains a mystery however, is how his assassins could have gotten so close without being discovered. I will now submit myself to your questions.

NARRATOR

A clamour erupted from the onlookers.

It's **utter madness** in the hall.

CROWD NOISES

*(ad lib. inchoate fury)*

Who did this? Where are they? We'll rip the bastards apart!

RY'Y

*(shouts above the din)*

Gentlemen! I cannot help you if I cannot understand you.

The crowd **quiets down**.

RY'Y

Now who is the ranking officer here?

GARETH

Clarence is second in command, but he left this morning on a patrol, so I'm the ranking officer present.

RY'Y

Very well. I'm sure you have questions on behalf of your men?

GARETH

Have you learned anything which may lead us to Bryce's assassins?

RY'Y

All we can say is what we know from past experiences: the Templars are adept at infiltrating the inner circles of their targets. They work in subterfuge to turn those on the inside, usually someone who manifests a connection with the chaotic arts. I urge you all to be wary and vigilant. Any information, however small, could be vital to our investigation.

HUMAN SOLDIER

What of the girl? The one from the battle?



PROFESSOR

Do you mean the one called Jen? Wasn't a fortnight ago that she fought with us against the Orcish onslaught, killing not a few Templars in the process. Do you mean to suggest she was working with them the whole time?

NARRATOR

Ry'y seemed to ponder.

RY'Y

Someone with those abilities would certainly be a target for the Templars.

GARETH

And the Templars care little for the lives of their comrades, especially if it serves their grander mission.

PROFESSOR

With all due respect, Lord Commander, General Riverfell tr--  
(catches himself but realizes it's too late)  
...He trusted them.

RY'Y

Precisely what I mean. I hope we are overthinking it, but those interlopers would have been in prime position to set a trap for dear Bryce. Captain, can you say what Commander Riverfell knew of why they were here?...Can anyone?

BODYGUARD FROM CHAPTER 2

Brennen Greyfield, and that peasant girl, came to see the General in his study. He sent us away.

OTHER BODYGUARD FROM CHAPTER 2

Bryce went to go see them in their tent before they left here. The mage girl would've been there too.

There are **murmurs and whispers** throughout the hall.

GARETH

Put the word out that Jen the mage is wanted for questioning in connection to the investigation.

RY'Y

It is prudence itself. Surely you can see that, Professor. I pray she has nothing to hide. But in the meantime, I shall leave a retinue of Elves to help in whatever way you deem. Now has anyone any idea where our interlopers might have gone?

Beat.

RY'Y

Anyone?

ANOTHER SOLDIER

A river barge left for Seahold off schedule. 'Twas loaded with food, only...no one told me to deduct anything from our count of stores.

RY'Y

I see.

*(Aside, to herself)*

The full picture falls into place...

*(Back to the soldiers)*

As a point of honour, for the debt I owe Riverfell, I volunteer to go to Seahold to find the sorceress. Now to your posts!

*The men spring to action with a new sense of purpose.*

5 EXT. SOUTH SEA - DAY

5

*The water is choppy and the wind is harsh, like a particularly nasty day on the North Atlantic.*

NARRATOR

We travel, for a moment, down to the frigid waters of Iorden's South Sea. Life here is hard, even in the summer. But now, as the nights draw longer and the sun grows more shy, it is only the bravest, or the most desperate, who still fish these waters.

*A spear bursts through the water.*

A beat.

FISHERWOMAN

Hmph. Dammit.

BOATSMAN

That was nothing.

FISHERWOMAN

We had a deal, Rollo. I fish, you shut up and steer the boat.

BOATSMAN

I haven't seen you fish in a week. I've seen you throw spears in the water. But I count no fish.

FISHERWOMAN

Rollo, I swear to--wait! I saw something!

BOATSMAN

No you didn't.

FISHERWOMAN

Come look.

BOATSMAN

I thought you fished and I steered the boat.

FISHERWOMAN

Shut up! Come quickly. I think it's a seal! Maybe even a sea lion!

BOATSMAN

It's not a--wait I see it!

FISHERWOMAN

Do you?

BOATSMAN

I think it is a seal!

FISHERWOMAN

Where is she?

BOATSMAN

There! See her?

FISHERWOMAN

Yes! I've got her.

NARRATOR

The woman raised her harpoon to strike.

BOATSMAN

Get it get it get it get it. What are you waiting for?

FISHERWOMAN

Shut up I'm concentrating.

BOATSMAN

Don't let her get away!

The Fisherwoman lets out an **exertive  
exhale**.

The harpoon breaks the water.

NARRATOR

And then she felt the tug in the rope that told her the missile had stuck in something.

FISHERWOMAN

*(stunned)*

I...I've got her.

The rope creaks and tugs.

FISHERWOMAN

*(frantic exuberance)*

I've got her! Help me pull her in.

Both **strain and pull**.

FISHERWOMAN

*(or ad lib similar)*

Come on come on come on.

BOATSMAN

*(or ad lib similar)*

Almost there...

One last **big strain**.

NARRATOR

With a desperate and mighty heave, they at last pulled their quarry aboard...

Something ker-plunks into their boat.

NARRATOR

...Falling backwards into each other from the effort.

Beat.

They begin **laughing** with joy and relief.

NARRATOR

All in all, it was a pleasant moment of hard-fought human triumph.

FISHERWOMAN

Should we get a look at her?

BOATSMAN

Yes, let's.

NARRATOR

But as they sat up to inspect their haul...

Both **gasp** in fright and disgust.

NARRATOR

...both recoiled in disgust. For they had caught not a seal or sea lion, but a decrepit human corpse.

BOATSMAN

Is that...?

FISHERWOMAN

Dear gods, I think it is.

NARRATOR

But seeing the corpse, one might forgive their initial mistake. What flesh had not sloughed off the bones was ashen and waterlogged. And the body wore a robe, blasted by time and salt to a dull grey, which was now slick and shiny with accumulated seaweed. The resulting appearance was not entirely unlike a seal.

BOATSMAN

*(stifling a gag)*

Should...should we throw it back in, or--

RENAULT

*(magical reverb)*

--No you should not!

Both **yelp!**

FISHERWOMAN

Who said that?!

Water squishes out of Renault's body as he sits up.

*Mixer: From now on, we should assume Renault is speaking via magic and will always have a supernatural effect on his voice.*

RENAULT

I did. Yes, hello.

Both mariners let out a **prolonged scream** that continues for a good while, probably under the next few lines.

NARRATOR

Now sitting upright, the corpse who you know as Renault D'Esprit proceeded to remove the harpoon that was lodged in his flank.

Rotted flesh rips apart.

RENAULT

There we are. You may have this back.

NARRATOR

He extended the safe end of the harpoon towards the boatsman.

BOATSMAN

*(cowering)*

It's hers! She does all the fishing.

RENAULT

She does? Hmm.

*(obviously bothered by it)*

That's...fine, I suppose. Nothing the matter with that.

FISHERWOMAN

How are you talking? I can hear you, but...

RENAULT

I'm missing my jaw? Yes, dreadful business that. A lesson against keeping false friends. But the past is past, and by your comprehension it seems I have mastered arcane speech. I knew I would of course, but fish make poor conversation, so it was hard to be sure.  
*(can't get off this)*

My good man, do you not enjoy fishing?

BOATSMAN

You're...speaking with magic?

RENAULT

Speech is but the movement of oslits in the air. I am merely using magic to do what muscles in my throat once easily--I'm sorry, it's just that historically *men* have tended to spearfish. Probably because of their superior upper body strength.

FISHERWOMAN

*(confused. not defensive...yet)*

My grandmother fished. So did her grandmother.

RENAULT

But that's not...I mean *real* history.

NARRATOR

The two mariners shared a very perplexed look.

BOATSMAN

Do you need anything? Food, or medicine...

RENAULT

It's really nothing personal. It's just that spear fishing was very important to my childhood.

FISHERWOMAN

Would you like a go, then? My luck's been rubbish lately.

RENAULT

Oh, no no no. I don't fish.

FISHERWOMAN

But you just said--

RENAULT

--When I said fishing was important to my childhood, I meant the general idea of fishing. Which is of course a man's work. And I am very clearly a man...

BOATSMAN

Are you?

RENAULT

...Ergo, fishing is very important to me. And I'd prefer she not do it, if we must get right down to it.

BOATSMAN

Look I hope you won't take this the wrong way, but you don't seem well.

RENAULT

Oh yes, there it is. I'm trying to engage you in a civil debate about fishing, and who is best suited to it, and you stoop to personal attacks.

We start to perceive a few gulls circling overhead.

FISHERWOMAN

It's not a personal attack. He means you got no legs or guts and your skin's all falling off.

RENAULT

So it's shaming my body now is it? Now we see who truly objectifies whom--

FISHERWOMAN

--I didn't--

RENAULT

--You're stuck up. And ugly. I never wanted to bed you anyway.

FISHERWOMAN  
WHAT!?

There are more gulls now. And they're louder.

BOATSMAN  
Hey, watch how you talk to her!

RENAULT  
I can see you're both getting emotional.

FISHERWOMAN  
'Course I am, you prat!

RENAULT  
I don't see why. I've only been polite and rational.

Overhead, the gulls are a near-deafening  
cacophony.

BOATSMAN  
I should throw you off my boat.

RENAULT  
No, I don't think so.

One seagull swoops down, squawks, and snaps its  
beak.

BOATSMAN  
(alarmed by the gull)  
Ah!

RENAULT  
In many ways, being underwater so long was excellent  
practice.

Another gull swoops and snaps.

FISHERWOMAN  
Ach! Cheeky bastard nicked me.

RENAULT  
I long ago mastered the art of controlling lesser  
beasts of course. But it's been a treat to practice it  
on beasts still living.

The gull attacks are getting more frequent now.

Our mariners yip and yelp accordingly.



FISHERWOMAN

*(panicked and fighting birds)*

All right, he can fish! Just leave us alone!

It's now a constant stream of **frantic screaming** as these two poor souls get absolutely Hitchcock-ed by the birds.

RENAULT

Too late for that I'm afraid.

*(beat)*

Off you pop.

They try to fight off the birds for a moment longer, but eventually...

*They throw themselves overboard.*

RENAULT

Mind the water, it's a bit chilly.

Renault **hums mindlessly** to himself...

...as he begins to row away.

Two heads pop out of the water.

The mariners **sputter and shiver**, hyperventilating in the frigid water.

FISHERWOMAN

You're a monster!

*Renault keeps rowing away.*

RENAULT

*(barely looking back.)*

I'm a free thinker is what I am. Won't let myself be censored. Not by you, not by the college. Brilliance is a great burden, but I've the intellectual courage to bear it.

*There is a very...very long beat of extremely lopsided, awkward rowing.*

BOATSMAN

You're just going in circles, you dolt!

RENAULT

Shut up and let me live in my truth!

Beat.

FISHERWOMAN

You're still going in circles but the other way now!

RENAULT

I'M GETTING THE HANG OF IT!

6 INT. HORSE'S HEAD INN - MORNING

6

Just outside our window, the first birds of the new morning chirp to life.

NARRATOR

Miss Bailey awoke in the common room of her own inn.

Bailey **jolts awake**, disoriented, and then **sighs** with resigned recollection.

NARRATOR

She was slumped over a cold and uneaten dinner for two. Next to her was a fine old bottle of wine, which had been uncorked, poured from into Bailey's glass thrice, and then abandoned.

Just outside, a horse trots up and comes to a stop.

BAILEY

Course. Now he comes.

NARRATOR

Miss Bailey's anger as she walked to her door was as a thunderbolt cutting through the cloudy haze of too little food and too much wine.

Bailey walks to her door in a huff.

BAILEY

*(under breath as she walks)*

Dunno what he takes me for, lousy flea bitten tramp like him. Like I'm some dizzy young thing who can drop her chores and throw him a screw out back at the drop of a hat. Who doesn't have work to do. Bad enough I can barely keep a barmaid around for more than a week.

She nearly rips her front door off its hinges.

BAILEY

Well, what do you have to say for--

NARRATOR

--But the man standing at her door was not the one she expected. Instead of her Bryce Riverfell, it was the

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Captain known as The Professor who waited on her threshold. And she noticed that his sad eyes could not quite meet her gaze, despite his obvious effort.

PROFESSOR

Maeve. Can we sit down somewhere and talk?

NARRATOR

But Maeve Bailey's knees were already weak.

7 INT. HORSE'S HEAD BACKROOM - LATER

7

BAILEY

(numb)  
How?

PROFESSOR

The Knights of the Wood say it was a Templar assassination. That they poisoned him.

An awful silence hangs in the air, thick and oppressive.

BAILEY

Thank you for riding out to tell me.

Beat.

PROFESSOR

Are you certain I can't get you--

BAILEY

--I've had so many nightmares about this day. Now that it's here I keep expecting to wake up.

NARRATOR

Bailey reached up and pinched one of her cheeks until a single tear ran down it.

BAILEY

(wry)  
Worth a try.

PROFESSOR

I wish I had the right words.

BAILEY

Not as if he didn't try and prepare me. Soldier's life this, soldier's life that.

NARRATOR

The tears were falling, thicker and faster now.

After a long moment of desperately trying to hold it together, Bailey finally lets out a **sob and a wail**.

This continues for some time.

Eventually, Bailey settles down a bit. Then...

BAILEY

You needn't wait around on my behalf. I'm sure Bryce's men need you.

PROFESSOR

Maeve. Look at me. I'm sorry. I really am. I've been dreading this next part even more than the first. But I decided you ought to know.

NARRATOR

Bailey's eyes were wide with concern as the Professor leaned in very close.

He almost whispers.

PROFESSOR

I don't believe the Knights of the Wood.

BAILEY

What?

PROFESSOR

I'm almost certain the Templars didn't poison Bryce.

BAILEY

Then who did?

PROFESSOR

The night he rode off with the Knights, I was in his study with him. He had a drink before he left. Didn't offer me any, which, knowing him, I thought was odd. He kept the whisky under lock and key, and put it right back when he was done pouring.

*(beat)*

I think he knew it was poisoned and drank it anyway. Probably even poisoned it himself if I had to guess.

BAILEY

How...how can you say that about him? Why would you come here to tell me that? I...get out. I would like you to leave, please. Get out.

PROFESSOR

No, you misunderstand. I don't believe he wished to die.  
I believe he preferred death to some other outcome.

BAILEY

And what have you decided that might be?

PROFESSOR

I don't know. Yet. But I suspect he may have run afoul  
of the Elves somehow. And worse than he feared death,  
he feared their reprisal might circle back to those  
closest to him. Do you understand what I'm saying?

BAILEY

*(trying to process)*  
Yes.

PROFESSOR

You could be in danger.

BAILEY

I understand. So what now?

PROFESSOR

We've a very stark choice. I know that if Bryce broke  
some law or oath that meant his life, he had a very  
honorable reason to do it. And I also know the Elves  
are relentless in the enforcement of their laws. So our  
choice now is how to honor his memory. We can honor his  
final cause, and find out why and whether he came to  
defy the law, consequences be damned. Or, we can honor  
his final wish, and live out our lives in the peace and  
safety for which he gave his life.

BAILEY

I see.

NARRATOR

Bailey took a thorough look around her, and several  
long breaths.

BAILEY

I know what I choose.

PROFESSOR

I feared you might.  
*(he plans too now)*  
Is there any chance I may change your mind?

BAILEY

Unlikely.

PROFESSOR

Long life and peaceful death are no small things.

BAILEY

I'm not exactly young. And I doubt dying's much fun no matter how you do it.

PROFESSOR

Then let me just say this. I know Bryce loved you very much. Your safety and comfort were his dying wish. "Soldiers die violently so that others may live peacefully." I heard him say that a thousand thousand times. And though he meant it to be understood generally, I know he was thinking of you when in need of courage. So I need to try. Try to keep you safe. That's the debt I owe the departed.

BAILEY

Well, I've heard you.

*(a wry joke)*

I'll be sure to vouch for you when next we see Bryce.

PROFESSOR

*(don't joke)*

Maeve...

BAILEY

Roy. Look around me. Do you see any children? Do you see the trappings of wealth?

PROFESSOR

I see a profitable inn, which is nothing to flippantly discard.

BAILEY

My sister gave me this place. Bryce gave me nothing I can hold. For thirty years I gave that man *all* of my love. And for better or worse I think he loved me as best he could.

PROFESSOR

I *know* he did.

BAILEY

But all I've got to show for it is the memory of him. And all his fullness and foibles and causes. Without that, I'm just a lonely old maid, who wasted her life on a bonny young soldier with a pretty voice, who told her pretty things and never planned to marry her. Can you understand that?

PROFESSOR

Yes.

BAILEY

And so I can't just traipse off into the sunset like nothing happened, and Bryce just passed away from old age. So once more...what now?

NARRATOR

The Professor looked into Maeve Bailey's eyes, and surmised that the resolve therein was true.

PROFESSOR

*(to himself)*

Well Bryce, I tried.

*(Back to Bailey)*

If I'm being honest...I was of two minds when I came here. And one of them is glad to hear you say that. If we're to uncover what we're up against, your sisters could be us a great boon.

BAILEY

What should I ask them to do?

PROFESSOR

For now, keep their ears open. I suspect the Elves may shift their attention to unusual places. I would know what they begin asking and of whom. Let me know all you hear, but do keep your head down.

BAILEY

My family's great skill.

PROFESSOR

Not all rebels need be martyrs.

BAILEY

*(sudden realization)*

I don't know why I didn't think of this sooner. My mind must have been on...well, anyhow. Ry'y lo-Th'yyt was here not a few nights ago.

PROFESSOR

She was?

BAILEY

Up and carted away one of my barmaids. And her sister - well, they said they were sisters - she never came back either after that. Wait, come to think of it...Bryce brought me those barmaids!

*(Can't help but chuckle)*

Told me they needed jobs, and asked me not to ask questions. Bryce, what were you playing at?

PROFESSOR

Strange. Did you catch anything that Ry'y lo-Th'yyt had to say to them?

BAILEY

Well she was hunting for Orcs and Templars, and she also asked after the missing Lady Arlene Redmoor, or, I think she said it was Mooncrest now? But with my barmaid she was most concerned with a missing child. I...suppose looking back, it's odd an Elf of her rank would concern herself with that.

PROFESSOR

Indeed.

BAILEY

Anyhow, this barmaid had taken in an stranded babe after the battle, and Ry'y lo-Th'yyt believed it was the same one as had gone missing.

PROFESSOR

Your ertswile barmaids...was one of them tall and slender? With copper skin and black hair?

BAILEY

She was! It's why I thought it was odd her sister was pale and plump with red hair, but at the time I reckoned parents take in other children often enough.

PROFESSOR

She was at Freehold. She came to talk to Bryce while Brennen of Greyfield was in to see him.

BAILEY

Curiouser and curiouser.

PROFESSOR

This gives us somewhere to start.

BAILEY

And some good clear questions to ask my sisters. Starting with what lady Arlene Redmoor looked like. I'd not be shocked to learn she's pale and plump with red hair.

PROFESSOR

Good. I'll return to Freehold. The garrison's been tasked with aiding the Elves in their so-called investigation. I'll do my best to direct it in our favor. My men have much love and trust for Ry'y lo-Th'yyt. But I pray unearthing the right information may shake their loyalty. And let's meet again when we can.



BAILEY

A fortnight from today?

PROFESSOR

I'd prefer sooner. Ry'y is not like to leave loose threads hanging for very long.

BAILEY

If we meet any sooner, I'm not sure what I'll have learned from my sisters.

PROFESSOR

Well let's meet anyway, before week's end. Each just to see how the other is doing.

BAILEY

Very well.

PROFESSOR

And this should go without saying. If I miss our meeting...run.

END OF PART ONE.

## PART TWO:

8 INT. ROOM IN THE CRAB'S CLAW INN - DAY

8

We hear bawdy, raucous tavern sounds, but  
they're downstairs from us.

NIA

All right, well...

A cork is removed from a bottle.

NIA

Here's...this.

YELLOWYYN

*(unhappy...but polite)*  
Thank you.

Beat.

NIA

Are you ready?

YELLOWYYN

*(something in mouth)*  
Mmm-hmm.

Some liquid is poured.

Biting down on the cork, **Yllowyyn yelps**  
**and groans.**

He also hits his fist on the table a few times.

NARRATOR

It had been three days since our party had come ashore in a desolate cove near Armstrungard, and they had spent that time hopping between the handful of inns, saloons, and public houses where Regan still commanded enough favour, or fear, to be quartered covertly. Unfortunately, although he was a hearty young Elf, cheese barrels, pirate vessels, and musty back rooms had hardly done wonders for the wound in Yllowyyn's arm. The spot where Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's arrow had pierced him was now ringed with a hot and angry red.

Yllowyyn **spits** the cork onto the table.

YELLOWYYN

*(weary)*  
Is it helping at least?

NIA

I've no doubt you'd be worse off without the brandy.  
But...

NARRATOR

Nia's eyes seemed to Yllowyyn to be an apology.

YELLOWYYN

The illness is spreading.

NIA

I'm afraid so. It's still within the realm of treatable  
I believe. For now. But I'd need to leave here and get  
proper medicine.

YELLOWYYN

So we're to, ah...petition the throne, then.

BRENNEN

I've found, Yllowyyn, that there is a certain joy, in  
abdication to a mighty leader who has one's best  
interests in mind.

YELLOWYYN

I...look forward to experiencing that.

NELSON

Hey no offense to Regan - she's dope - but isn't all  
that abdication stuff kinda how we got here?

NIA

Fret not for now, I shall speak with Her Majesty, when  
next she--

BILLY

--Fuuuuuuuuuuuck I'm bored! I'm so fucking bored! We've  
done absolute dick for three straight days. Does anyone  
in this world ever have fun?

NIA

Yes, though it does typically require leaving one's  
chambers.

GWEN

Well, not nec--  
(catches herself)  
--Nevermind.

NARRATOR

Gwen saw Arlene's face turn Redmoor crimson, and had to  
suppress a giggle.

NELSON

We could play the game again, I guess.

BILLY

Who's in? Weenie? Gwen? Who's dealing?  
(waits barely half a second)  
Me I guess.

A deck of cards is shuffled.

NARRATOR

I should note that at that moment, an idea began to form in Jen's head. She recalled another time they played this very game, what felt like ages ago, with some inebriated Armstrungard students.

BILLY

Okay. What to have for dinner. Go.

NARRATOR

Billy drew a card from the deck - a knave - and waited expectantly.

NIA

Hmm, let's see. There used to be a man with a cart around the corner from here who made some very tasty garbage.

NELSON

Sorry?

GWEN

It was always a treat when they served pheasant garbage at Castle Guernatal.

ARLENE

I remember that garbage. I'd always send Gwen down for seconds.

GWEN

Aye, Billy, that's your card.

NARRATOR

Billy's eyes narrowed, and darted back and forth between his various compatriots.

YELLOWYYN

A fitting answer. In the White Forest, we prepare our garbage using a rare flightless bird, found only within our wood. I've grown to miss that garbage.

BILLY

What the hell. Do I have a two? Or do you all...like eating garbage?

JEN

I'm guessing it means something different here.

NARRATOR

In case you're unfamiliar, as the Pennsylvanians were, garbage is a beef and poultry stew.

NELSON

Yeah shockingly this game kind of falls apart if you don't share enough cultural touchstones.

Downstairs, a door slams open.

REGAN

(downstairs)

Jackie! Gimme a whole lotta something strong. I'll take it in my room.

FALLON

(downstairs)

Your friends are already working on a bottle.

Angry footsteps stomp up the stairs.

NIA

(wry)

Sounds like good news.

The door opens.

NIA

Welcome back, Your Grace. Any luck with--

REGAN

--I've fucking had it with the yella sons of whores in this pisshole town. That's the tenth sellsword company in three days. Oooh, we're big, we're tough, our cocks blot out the sun. But ohhhh no we don't mess with Elves. Our mommies said they're scawwy. FUCK!

BRENNEN

Ah, Your Grace. Perhaps my presence may help create the image you need to persuade them.

REGAN

You? You look like your name should be Grandpa Not-A-Cop. Not exactly the image we're going for.

(MORE)

REGAN (cont'd)  
(louder)

All right, you all know the drill. Pack up your shit,  
we're outta here before sundown.

BILLY  
Uggggh.

YELLOWYYN  
Accch.

NARRATOR

Billy and Yllowyyn shared a brief look of astonishment  
at things they suddenly had in common.

REGAN

I don't wanna hear it.

NIA

Your Grace. I regret to inform you that Yllowyyn's  
wound is not improving.

REGAN

Gods damnit. Always fucking something.

NIA

He needs proper medicine.

NARRATOR

Regan rubbed her temples as her nostrils flared.

BRENNEN

Your Grace, I recall when my arm was likewise wounded,  
you told me, "that's my arm and I'm going to need it."

REGAN

Where would you need to go?

NIA

Well, I've--

JEN

--Actually, I've been thinking. They must have what you  
need at the college, right?

NIA

Yes, but--

REGAN

--Out of the fucking question. The one place in this  
city where somebody's sure to know you by name?

NIA

Which is why I wasn't--

JEN

--But they won't know us. And we wanted to make a quick...detour around the school anyway.

BILLY

We did?

JEN

We didn't get to see much our first time there.

REGAN

This isn't a...fuckin'...*We're fugitives!*

JEN

But no one knows us!

REGAN

You mean apart from Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, who's got the whole city crawling with patrols?

JEN

There is no way her patrols each know us by sight.

NIA

This is a treacherous city for anyone. Even those on the right side of the law run no small risk of getting lost, or robbed, which is why I was--

NELSON

--You could draw us a map then. Tell us where the infirmary is, and maybe...the library?

NIA

Ah. I see.

REGAN

What am I in the dark about here?

NIA

Admittedly, I have committed to helping our young companions retrieve some materials from the college's library. Of course that was before we, well...I know they are clever enough to understand the frailty of our current situation.

BILLY

Yeah, we do. That's why we're so gung-ho on this.

JEN

When's the next time we're gonna be close to a library?

NELSON

Close to the library. To literally the one library that seems to exist on this entire continent.

JEN

All we need is a few books. Just so we'll know a little more. And we can get the medicine while we're there. Two birds, one stone.

REGAN

I wanna be clear that me even asking this is an attempt to be...what was it? Magnanimous? Okay. These books... they the kind someone can run in, grab, and run out?

NIA

Honestly, I'm afraid not. If the books they seek even exist, which I cannot guarantee, they will be extremely rare and therefore carefully guarded.

BILLY

Pssh. Narc.

NIA

But I must also say that, were we to find these books, it would go a long way towards putting their minds at ease. And mine.

REGAN

I'm gonna try this one more time. None of our minds should be at ease. We're in a fucked up spot here. Decisions we make in the next couple days are life-or-death for everyone in this room. Simple as that. We're getting Yllowwyn medicine so he doesn't fucking die. And all I wanna know is if someone's got an idea how to do it that isn't dumb as shit.

NIA

May I say one thing first?

REGAN

*(To herself with a very long sigh)*  
Magnamimous, Maggie.  
*(To Nia)*  
What.

NIA

If we should only take risks to avoid death, then why did we not keep our heads down and our mouths shut when you returned from that forest?

Beat.



REGAN

Nia...I appreciate your wise counsel. Now shut the fuck up. Okay, ideas for medicine. Not dumb as shit. Go.

NIA

I was originally going to say that I've an... acquaintance from school. Last I heard he was running a charitable apothecary out of his parish.

REGAN

How far?

NIA

No more than an hour's walk.

(beat)

And...I'd like your permission to take some money as well.

REGAN

I thought you said it was charitable.

NIA

It is, for the needy.

REGAN

Well guess what, Nia. Right now we're the fucking needy.

NIA

Is it wise, in your experience, to seek a favor from a reliable contact and come empty-handed?

Regan **sighs**.

REGAN

Here's how this is gonna go. You wear a disguise. You stay off the big streets. You see an Elf patrol? You duck down an alley or bend down to pick a copper off the street or something. You know how to spot or lose a tail?

NIA

Well, ah, I imagine--

REGAN

--That's a no. I'll give you a place to go back to. It'll be different from where we're staying, but I'll come and check on you. If you're clean I'll bring you back to us. If not...cross that bridge when we come to it. Got all that?

NIA

Yes, I think so.

REGAN

Repeat it back to me.

NIA

Wear a disguise, no big roads, avoid Elves, I'll go where you say and you'll meet me when it's safe.

REGAN

Good. You go exactly where you have to, *no additional stops.*

JEN

I can help with the disguise.

REGAN

Fine.

JEN

Billy? Nelson?

BILLY

What?

JEN

*(pointed)*  
Need your help too.

BILLY

You do?

JEN

*(please pick up what I'm putting down)*  
Yes.

BILLY

...Kay.

Three sets of footsteps walk away.

NARRATOR

And as Regan's court disbanded, she marked this last interaction well.

9 INT. ANOTHER ROOM IN THE INN - CONTINUOUS

9

NARRATOR

But thus did Nia and the three Pennsylvanians regroup in another room to assemble Nia's disguise. Their first attempted solution was to simply swap Nia's clerical frock for Nelson's nondescript tunic. The result was... well, not entirely convincing.

JEN

Worked for Shakespeare's heroines.

NIA  
Who?

NELSON  
I'm not sure suspended  
disbelief works in real  
life.

JEN

Last I checked we've been living in an alternate  
universe for - what - like a month now.

NELSON

Point taken.

Beat.

BILLY

It has to work. What else are we--

NARRATOR

--Jen interrupted Billy with a disparaging look.  
Vernacularly, one might say she "ice-grilled" him.

NIA

Thanks Billy. That's...soothing...

NARRATOR

Nia "futzied," as I've heard mortals say, with her  
borrowed "digs" - as they also say.

NIA

It is a bit snug.

JEN

They call it "form-fitting" where we're from.

NIA

I'm a little frightened to breathe if truth be told.

NARRATOR

Jen sized Nia up in the mirror.

JEN

Hmm. Yeah. Okay, try Billy's clothes.

BILLY

Wait, what am I gonna wear?

NIA

We'll switch. Nelson, give him my frock and cloak.

BILLY

Uhh...ok...I guess.

Beat.

JEN

It's...pretty unisex.

BILLY

*(trying to get there)*

Yeah it's...I mean, who cares? ...Right?

Sounds of clothing changes - rustling, grunts  
maybe.

NIA

*(sighs)*

This one's a little too big.

JEN

Nothing a little belting and blousing can't fix.

Some light rustling...

JEN

*(almost absent-minded)*

Things you learn when it's homecoming week but Mom can  
only afford the clearance rack.

Rustling stops.

JEN

And - here - stuff your hair in this hat.

NARRATOR

Jen's powers apparently extended beyond atmospheric  
anomalies to...I believe it's called "styling" in the  
human realm.

JEN

There we go. Solid Cesario vibe.

*(Corrects herself)*

No, Ganymede!

NIA

Who?

BILLY

Who?

NELSON

I'd say Eowyn.

JEN

Is that the "I am no man" lady?

NELSON

Yeah! ...You...knew that?

JEN

Everyone saw those movies, Nelson. We just didn't make them into a lifestyle choice.

NELSON

Fair enough.

BILLY

Nia's is kinda tight on me.

JEN

I think it's fashion forward. And the arms and pecs...  
(we can almost hear the wink)  
...A-plus, babe.

BILLY

(only kinda convinced)  
Ohhkay.

JEN

Nia, I think you're in good shape. You know what would top it off?

NARRATOR

Jen reached for Nelson's glasses, and he leaned away from her grasp.

NELSON

Uh. Sorry. No. I need these.

Beat.

JEN

Mmkay. This'll have to do then.

NIA

Right.

JEN

Hey, um...before you go. What did you think about what Regan said?

Nia takes a breath.

NIA

Her assessment of the risks is not wrong. But only the three of you are in a place to evaluate the risks of not getting those books. And I believe you are mature enough to decide for yourselves.

BILLY  
Bitchin'.

NIA  
Sure.

BILLY  
I mean--

NIA  
I cannot say I endorse this endeavor, but I shall draw you a map of the college and library, and give you what information I can. I'll have to go quickly though lest Her Majesty grows suspicious. So pay attention.

10 EXT. CASTLE GUERNATAL - EASTERN STOREHOUSE - DAY

10

An anxious crowd waits in the courtyard of a castle.

NARRATOR  
Ardel Redmoor had mustered two score armed men outside the Eastern Storehouse of the castle named after Guernatal. Standing in a ring around them were no small number of the common folk about the keep.

ARDEL  
(addresses crowd)  
Now then. We shall soon reveal once and for all that this so-called "phantom" is a foreign saboteur who is very mortal indeed. And I trust, once I've flayed him and strung him up from the ramparts, you will all  
RETURN TO YOUR DUTIES.

A beat. This speech does nothing to alter the anxious mood of the crowd.

ARDEL  
Captain?

GUARD CAPTAIN  
My liege?

ARDEL  
Set to...your task.

NARRATOR  
The unfortunate officer looked at his two nearest men, and nervously jerked his head towards the storehouse.

Beat.

Two armed and armored men start walking.

NARRATOR

As they reached its doorway, the two guards shared an uneasy look.

The footsteps pause for a moment before receding into the warehouse.

A beat.

*The next bit of action is heard through an open door and panned to our right:*

A knife plunges into flesh.

One **Redmoor Guard** groans.

A body crumples to the ground.

Ardel **yelps in fear.**

ARDEL

What's going on? What happened? Is that normal? Did we win?

Outside the storehouse, the crowd shows some worry.

*Panned inside the storehouse:*

REDMOOR GUARD 2

Hagar? Oh, gods, Hagar. Medic!

As this guard panics more, so does the crowd outside.

REDMOOR GUARD 2

Someone! Come and help me--ach!

This guy gets stabbed as well.

*Back outside:*

As gasps peter out, there's a quiet moment of shock.

NARRATOR

The crowd looked on in stunned silence as a small stream of blood began to pool on the dusty ground just outside the storehouse doors.

ARDEL

*(tries to sound tough through cracking voice)*  
Is that...Did you kill the saboteur?  
*(collects himself for a beat)*  
Get in there, all of you. Charge!

GUARD CAPTAIN

Charge!

There's a clamor of men and arms as a dozen  
plus guards run into the storehouse.

Something heavy rolls and creaks...

GUARD CAPTAIN

Oh shit. RETRE--

NARRATOR

--The last thing the point men saw were a half dozen  
barrels of spirits, well, barreling towards them from  
an upper rafter.

He's drowned out by several splintering  
crashes.

There's a grim beat of calm after the  
crash.

It drags on until...

Groans of the wounded and dying waft out from  
the storehouse.

NARRATOR

What few survivors managed to crawl back out from that  
treacherous storehouse were bloodied and shot through  
with thick jagged splinters.

The crowd now openly panics.

ARDEL

*(panics as well)*  
Nyahhhh. Captain? Captain! Call for more men!

GUARD CAPTAIN

*(very badly hurt)*  
M'lord.

ARDEL

Lock the doors and burn this storehouse to the ground.



The crowd's reaction turns from panic to bewilderment at this new order.

GUARD CAPTAIN

But m'lord. The food...

ARDEL

SELBIRIN TAKE THE FOOD! I want the saboteur killed!

The crowd is turning on Ardel, quickly growing furious.

ARDEL

Burn it, I said! I'm ordering you to burn it!

NARRATOR

The Captain of Ardel's guard looked up, through a haze of pain and exsanguination, at the gathered faces in the crowd. He saw people whom, but a few moons ago, before he threw in his lot with Ardel's mutiny, he had called his neighbors and sworn to serve.

GUARD CAPTAIN

...No.

ARDEL

I'll hang you for this.

GUARD CAPTAIN

You're welcome to try.

The Captain **breathes his last.**

ARDEL

Gods blast it all. Someone fetch me a torch!

The crowd begins booing and hissing.

NARRATOR

Only now, as their jeers grew louder, did Ardel remember the crowd, and turn to see their number. He turned back to look at the guards he had brought with him today - all dead or rapidly dying. And in the cold pit of his guts, where a better man might have earlier felt concern or compassion for the men who served him, Ardel nevertheless felt their loss very keenly now.

ARDEL

(voice wavering)

I...return to your homes. Food is sparse and there's work to be done.

WHISPERER

*(inside the storehouse)*

Lo! And hark, you gathered here.

ARDEL

What.

*A few gasps from the crowd, and then silence.*

NARRATOR

In that moment, it did not take much for the voice from the storehouse to capture the crowd's complete attention.

Ardel attempts to **interrupt** the whisperer ad lib. He does not succeed.

WHISPERER

I am vengeance turned to flesh. Food's not sparse but justice is. Ardel's a blight upon this land. I've no quarrel with those who reject him. Forsake the usurper, and eat well!

A moment passes, in the quiet of wordless fury.

NARRATOR

And as Ardel looked into the eyes of his gathered subjects, he saw only rage looking back. He took a nervous step backwards.

*One footfall.*

NARRATOR

And in that moment, though naught but human forces were at work, you'd be forgiven for thinking some spell had been broken. And all at once, the crowd darted for the storehouse.

*We hear a mad, screaming stampede.*

NARRATOR

Not a one of them cast so much as a glance towards their presumptive sovereign. And for his part, Ardel - flush with humiliation and sweating with fear - scurried off the other way.

Ardel runs away, **whining** the whole time.

11 EXT. ARMSTRUNGARD STREET - DAY

11

Street sounds...

NARRATOR

Nia ventured forth head down through the streets of Armstrongard to her friend's Monastery. Along the way, she recalled the counsel given her by Jen and Nelson...

Street sounds countinue underneath this  
FLASHBACK:

JEN

*Walk and talk like Billy.*

NELSON

*Yeah, zero class, grace, or manners.*

BILLY

*Hey what the fuck!*

NELSON

*I'm j.k. bro. You've come a long way.*

JEN

*(consoling)*  
*Totes. We're all works in progress.*

NARRATOR

...which she adhered to with...well, judge her aptitude for yourself.

Someone bumps into her.

PASSERBY

*Watch where you're going, kid!*

NIA

*Oh, pardon me, I--*  
*(catches herself, switches to her parents' cockney)*  
*--Oi, quit hogging the road, yeah?!*

NARRATOR

She scurried away quickly after this outburst. Probably for the best considering that this particular passerby had Sir Brennen's physical bearing...but did not appear to have the warmth, loyalty, and compassion that she'd come to know of her friend. No sooner than she'd dodged that proverbial bolt, she noticed assorted Elves roaming the street asking questions.

NIA

*Bullocks!*

NARRATOR

Nia was apparently emboldened by her "costume." Besides this uncharacteristic verbiage, she was surprised by her own deftness as she weaved through the street. And when she spotted another Elf Patrol asking questions of the nearby townsfolk...

*Mixer: Wherever the Elves are in the sound field, Nia's conversations should be panned in the other direction.*

ELF INFANTRY

*(annoyed)*

The thief queen. Aeron Regan. Have you seen her?

NARRATOR

...She hastily turned to the nearest street vendor.

STREET VENDOR

Garbage here! Hot and fresh!

NIA

*(still cockney)*

How much?

STREET VENDOR

Two copper.

*The Elf walks away from us as they speak.*

ELF INFANTRY

We hear she's back in town. If you hear of anything, the White Forest is prepared to be very generous.

NIA

*(still cockney)*

Maybe tomorrow.

NARRATOR

And when the Elves had passed, she nodded farewell to the street vendor...

*We follow Nia's footsteps, away from the Elf, off the streets through a batwing door...*

NARRATOR

Then dipped into the front of a saloon, only to exit through the rear a moment later.

*...Through a bustling tavern, and then back into a smaller alley.*

NARRATOR

Until finally she arrived at the parish she sought.

Nia opens a door.

12 INT. FRIAR IOHANSEN'S MONASTERY - EVENING

12

Nia steps inside a small chapel and closes the door behind her.

NARRATOR

Nia sighed with relief upon entering Frederick's quarters...

She **sighs**.

NARRATOR

...And peered out the window before being startled by the man himself, who approached from behind her.

FREDERICK

May I help you young sir?

NIA

Ah!

NARRATOR

Jen's wardrobing prowess must indeed have been magic, as Nia's longtime friend did not readily recognize her. At least not until she lifted her head, and removed the hat to reveal her hair.

FREDERICK

Nia?

NIA

Frederick!

FREDERICK

It's great to see you. And - a surprise. You're dressed ...Have you gotten wise and chosen a more lucrative profession than mine?

NIA

(*chuckles*)

I'm no richer and only marginally wiser than I was when last we spoke.

FREDERICK

A margin plus a mile wiser than me, then. I must hear all about your life, it's been ages. How is my *alma mater* treating you?

NIA

I'm sorry, Frederick. There's so much I'd love to talk with you about, truly. But I'm afraid I'm in need of a somewhat urgent favor.

FREDERICK

Are you all right?

NIA

It's...my friend. He needs medicine for a putrid wound.

FREDERICK

*(a little surprised)*

Oh. Is the college not--

NIA

--You know how it is at the college. Wrangle up three faculty seals on a requisition letter, wait a week, make corrections. This is easier, and as I said I need it urgently if my friend is to keep his arm.

FREDERICK

*(Taken aback)*

Galadon's mercy. Keep his arm? Ah--yes, of course. Follow me.

Two sets of footsteps.

They walk together for a slightly awkward beat.

FREDERICK

Are...are you sure all is well with you?

NIA

If you were concerned with how I lead my life, you could have reached out any time since graduating.

FREDERICK

No, that's...that's fair.

Footsteps stop.

FREDERICK

Forgive me, I didn't mean to pry. It's just the coincidence is almost alarming.

NIA

Coincidence?

FREDERICK

That you arrive here, after so long, on the same day that a message came from your parents via MoNewstery.

NIA

Pardon, what?

FREDERICK

Yes, they are looking for you, asking everyone where you were last seen.

NIA

Do you still have the message? Can I see it?

FREDERICK

Yes, I believe so. Just a moment.

*Desk drawers open and papers shuffle around.*

FREDERICK

Here you are.

*He hands over a paper which is quickly unfurled.*

NIA

*(a little nervous)*

Probably just my mother being dramatic. I've told you how she can be.

MILDRED (V.O.)

Dearest Nia,

Hadn't heard from you in some time. Tried reaching you at the college, but they said you'd not been seen in weeks.

Your poor pa and mum are worried about you. Sure you're busy, but pray let us know you're well, and pray let us know where to reach you.

You're still our dearest, be the weather foul or fair.

Love,  
Mum.

NARRATOR

And as she read these words, Nia felt a tumult in the pit of her stomach, and a cold sweat on the back of her neck.

*Replay line with a more ominous effect:*

MILDRED (V.O.)

*...be the weather foul or fair...*

NARRATOR

For now she was certain that her parents were in danger.

**END OF PART TWO.**

## PART THREE:

13 INT. FRIAR IOHANSSSEN'S MONASTERY - AFTERNOON

13

NARRATOR

When last we parted, Nia had just read a note from her parents ostensibly requesting her whereabouts.

FREDERICK

Here's your medicine, by the way.  
(a few beats)  
Nia?

NIA

I'm sorry?

FREDERICK

The medicine.

NIA

Medicine?

FREDERICK

For your friend's arm?

NIA

Oh, yes of course. Thank you.

Frederick clocks something weird.

FREDERICK

Again, not to pry, but I do hope all is well with your parents.

NIA

Oh, you know. My mother and her dramatics. Looks like she roped my father in as well this time.

NARRATOR

Nia paced back-and-forth, ruminating over the note, while trying to maintain the cool ruse.

FREDERICK

Nia. What's going on?

NIA

Oh. Nothing...nothing serious.

NARRATOR

Friar Iohanssen followed Nia's lead in pretending to not be as alarmed as he felt he should be.



FREDERICK

...I take it it's been awhile since they saw you last.

NIA

*(grasping)*

That's it. Yes!...Or heard ...

NARRATOR

She wandered around the room to avoid eye contact.

FREDERICK

Well...such things happen. They'll be relieved to know that you are safe here. You can sit at my desk to write your response, if you want...I can send it for you afterward - not that you couldn't do it yourself--

NIA

--I'd appreciate that.

Beat.

FREDERICK

And your medicine.

NIA

Yes, thank you.

Some glass vials are placed on the desk.

FREDERICK

I'll leave you some privacy.

Frederick walks away.

A quill taps in an inkwell - incessantly,  
neurotically.

NARRATOR

But it took Nia a few moments of nervous fidgeting to decide her course.

Nia **sighs**.

We hear the quill scratching parchment. It  
fades out, and then...

...fades back in, the suggest the **passage of a  
few minutes**.

NIA

Frederick?

Frederick walks back into the room.

FREDERICK

All done?

NIA

Are you still in touch with your friend Romulo?

FREDERICK

Why, yes. We write each other letters every few months.  
Why do you ask?

NIA

Does he still have his post up north, in Mooncrest  
lands?

FREDERICK

*(cynical again)*  
Yes...

NIA

And is he trustworthy?

FREDERICK

You know, I claim no right to know your business. But I  
do claim a right to not be treated like a fool. And  
even a fool could see all is not right with you.

Beat.

NIA

Very well. You are a smart man and I am a poor liar. So  
I will say this. I do believe there is some...trouble  
at home. And I do believe you can help.

FREDERICK

Just tell me what I can--

NIA

--But I need you to believe me that I know what I am  
doing, that I know exactly what help I need, and that  
the less you know about this the better it is for  
everyone.

FREDERICK

Does this have anything to do with the Elves? I've seen  
them all around asking--

NIA

--Frederick. Can you believe me or not?

FREDERICK

Yes, Nia, of course I can believe you. It's just that you put me in a very awkward position.

NIA

I know, and I'm sorry for that. I would not ask if I had better options at hand.

FREDERICK

Can I at least ask what I must do before I promise it?

NIA

I need you to take this letter and send it in a sealed package to Romulo. Ask him to send my letter back to my parents in Seahold, addressed from up where he is. And I also need your word that neither of you will break the seal and read it.

FREDERICK

I don't know, Nia. If something were to happen, I would feel responsible--

NIA

--No. You will have done a friend a great kindness, exactly as she asked. The consequences are my responsibility.

FREDERICK

That's not what the scripture says about responsibility.

NIA

And what does the scripture say about kindness and charity asking questions?

Beat while Frederick considers...

FREDERICK

I've never had reason to doubt you before...

NARRATOR

Frederick peered into her eyes, searching for reassurance that this instance was no exception, that this unusual request was, indeed, justified and necessary for reasons that she could not disclose at that time.

Despite lingering consternation, he conceded.

FREDERICK

So be it. I will send the letter to Romulo with your instructions. You have my word not to break the seal and I will implore him to do the same.

NIA

Thank you, Frederick. Truly.

FREDERICK

But, at the right time, you have to explain--

NIA

--I will. As soon as I can. You have *my* word on that.

FREDERICK

Very well.

NIA

You may receive a response through MoNewstery. I would know that response.

FREDERICK

Can you tell me where you're staying?

NIA

I'm afraid not.

*(ponders)*

Do you remember the green down by Miller's point? With the big--

FREDERICK

--The big silver birch, yes of course.

NIA

If you hear anything, leave a ribbon on that tree. Then I'll come back here.

*(beat)*

I must be going now.

FREDERICK

Do take care of yourself, Nia.

NIA

And you as well.

NARRATOR

Nia hugged Frederick and he responded in kind. Their eyes locked as they unfastened from one another and she kissed him...on the cheek.

NIA

It really was nice to see you. I'm sorry I got cross.

*Nia departs hastily.*

FREDERICK

Don't mention it.

14 INT. GREY FOX TAVERN - EVENING

14

The inn is busy downstairs but we're behind a locked door.

NARRATOR

While Nia was rekindling old...friendships, the Pennsylvanians were settling into the next public house that Regan had moved them to.

We hear chests set down an unlatched.

JEN

(secretive)

Okay, I think we're clear.

NARRATOR

But with Regan gone to retrieve Nia from her sortie, they took the opportunity to discuss the map which Nia had left for them.

NELSON

So thirty minutes to the college gates, once we're inside another ten to the library.

Billy starts **singing** a song which in no way infringes on the copyrights, trademarks, or other intellectual properties of Paramount Pictures or any other Viacom company, but sounds like it could be the theme song to a completely imaginary and original IP called, uhh..."Bission Bimpossible."

JEN

So say an hour and--Billy, do you need to sing right now? We're trying to be sneaky here.

Billy **stops singing**.

BILLY

Sorry.

NELSON

No, actually, it makes it sound more bad-ass. Like we're doing a heist.

JEN

It's not really a heist. It's a library. The books are technically free. This is a caper at best.

BILLY

You mean like that gross salty pea thing?

NELSON

Whatever it is, can Billy sing? It actually makes me feel cool.

JEN

Fine.

BILLY

Right on dude. I got you.

JEN

Just, you'll be quieter when we actually do this right?

Billy **starts singing again.**

JEN

So...say an hour and a half for travel, just to be safe.

NELSON

Which means even if we find what we need in half an hour - unlikely Nia said - we'll still need two hours when we know Regan will be away.

JEN

Ideally more. That's why I've been keeping track of her meetings--or, doing my best with hourglasses and sundials and pre-industrial clocks. She's had ten meetings. The shortest was forty five minutes, the longest was two and a half hours. The median is somewhere around an hour forty five. But definitely the best predictor of the longer meetings is if Regan told me she "went way back" with someone.

BILLY

*(to the song)*  
IF THEY FUCKED, IF THEY FUCKED...

JEN

Well...maybe. I definitely got that vibe on the longest of the meetings. So...next time she leaves for a meeting we'll see how much she's willing to tell us.  
*(beat)*  
Probably far too much.

NELSON

Let's go over the plan again.

DISSOLVE TO:

15 EXT. ARMSTRUNGARD MARKET SQUARE - EVENING

15

We're in an outdoor market that is still  
bustling over the early high crickets.

NARRATOR

Nia had proceeded as promptly as possible to the meeting spot Regan had given her. As instructed, she'd purchased some garbage from a vendor so she'd have a plausible reason to sit still for a while. She'd also been instructed to eat slowly. But between the news she'd just received, and keeping her head on a swivel for Elvish patrols, the queasy feeling in her guts made slow eating quite natural.

Cloth rustles.

Nia gives a quiet **yip!**

NARRATOR

And so she nearly jumped out of her seat when a small but powerful hand grabbed her arm from behind.

REGAN

C'mon sweetheart. Let's go home.

DIP TO QUIET.

FADE IN MORNING SOUNDS:

16 INT. GREY FOX TAVERN - THE NEXT DAY

16

Outside the window, a rooster crows.

NARRATOR

It was early the next morning when Nia heard a very quiet knock on her door.

There's a quiet knock.

NARRATOR

In fact, had she been sleeping deeply she might not have heard it at all. But as it happened, her night had been most restless.

NIA

Yes?

The door creaks open.

JEN

*(whispers)*  
Hey.

NIA

*(matches her)*  
Jen. Good morning. Is everything all right?

JEN

Yeah. Um...We're pretty sure Regan's gonna be gone for a little bit. So...if you've got anything to take care of outside...

NIA

I appreciate it. And what of Sir Brennen?

JEN

We're gonna lock our door from the inside and go out the window. If he asks, say we wanted to sleep in.

NIA

You know I'm loathe to lie to him.

JEN

Yeah. Um, I guess...try and be gone before he gets up?

NIA

*(subject change)*  
Be safe.

JEN

*(a little wry)*  
Always.

We hear Jen walk down the hallway a ways.

She opens one more door.

JEN

*(still whispers)*  
Regan is confirmed taking a bath. So, when she leaves...This is our best shot to grab those books. You ready to...learn something, I guess?



Throughout this next sequence, we will intercut between the main action, and **two** atemporal elements:

-Main action will not be specifically called out. It should be mixed as normal, to reflect the physical reality of the scene.

-**V.O.** will be characters taking the place of the Narrator to help describe the action. It should be mic'ed close and EQ'd intimate with no reverb.

-**Flashback** will function as memories of an earlier conversation, with significant reverb and some spatial distance to imply such.

NELSON (V.O.)

And a few minutes later, when Regan did leave, the heist was--

JEN (V.O.)

--Caper.

NELSON (V.O.)

The "caper" was on? That doesn't scan right.

(beat)

Whatever. The shit popped off.

17 EXT. ARMSTRUNGARD STREETS - DAY

17

Billy's Song is now treated as **score**, as our three heroes walk down the bustling streets of the city.

NELSON (V.O.)

Nia gave us two books to look for. The first was a gimme.

JEN

You remember the name of the book, babe?

BILLY

An Introductory Treaty on the--

JEN

--Treatise.

BILLY

Right, Treatise...on the Loss of Home, by Elric of Summerhold.

JEN

In the public section, just ask the archivist.

BILLY

That's gonna be the librarian-looking lady.

JEN

Probably. They should be easy to find. And you remember about the bibliography?

NIA (FLASHBACK)

Elric's bloated, self-aggrandizing prose is nigh unreadable. But his citations are impeccable. Would that you had time to comb the library for each of his sources...But, under the circumstances...

BILLY

Grab the first entry for each chapter.

JEN

Exactly. And don't forget the reference book.

BILLY

I won't.

NELSON (V.O.)

But the second book...that was the trick.

JEN (FLASHBACK)

On The Totemic Traditions of Primitive Iorden. By, uh...is that...

NIA (FLASHBACK)

Phyul lo-Dyk the Elder.

BILLY (FLASHBACK)

(snorts)

Good one, Nia.

(beat)

Wait that's really his name?!

NIA (FLASHBACK)

Currently in the private collection of Professor Blu'u lo-Ba'al.

BILLY (FLASHBACK)

Oh come on!

NELSON (FLASHBACK)

So anyone can read it, but they can't leave with it.

JEN (V.O.)

And we needed to leave with it.

NELSON (V.O.)

Fortunately, Billy had a plan to get us started. And I gotta say...it wasn't bad.

18 INT. COLLEGE OF ARMSTRUNGARD LIBRARY - DAY

18

The library is EXTREMELY quiet. We only hear the occasional page being ruffled or stifled cough panned off to our side

The quiet drags on for several beats.

Until...

The door flies open.

Billy strolls in singing his Bission  
Bimpossible song at the top of his lungs

BILLY

BA! BA! BADA DA! DA! BADA--

EVERYONE IN THE LIBRARY

--SHHHHHHH!

BILLY

(loud)

Oh, sorry! I was in--

(quieter)

--I was in the zone.

The song resumes quietly as non-diagetic score,  
as...

We hear Billy take a few steps and then stop.

(He does actually speak at a reasonable  
library volume for the rest of the scene.)

BILLY

Hey.

ARCHIVIST 1

(braces for the worst)

Good afternoon.

BILLY

My, uhh...Patron sent me here to find A Treat--An  
Introductory Treatise on the Loss of Home by Elric of  
Summerhold. Could you show me where to find it?

ARCHIVIST 1  
*(pleasantly surprised)*  
 Oh...why, yes. Right this way.

Two sets of footsteps walk quietly.

ARCHIVIST 1  
 We've just had a new edition come in, with an expanded bibliography.

Footsteps stop.

ARCHIVIST 1  
 Here we are.

She pulls a book down from a shelf.

BILLY  
 Sweet, thanks.

ARCHIVIST 1  
 Is there anything else?

BILLY  
 Yeah maybe actually.

We hear Billy open the book and quickly flip to the end.

BILLY  
 Where can I find this one?

ARCHIVIST 1  
*(tries to be patient)*  
 Ah, yes, well you see the title is "On The Early History of Elven Shipmaking," so it would be in the History section.

BILLY  
 Cool cool cool. So like where in the history section?

ARCHIVIST 1  
 Within each section they're organized by author.

BILLY  
 Right, yeah no totally. So that would be...

ARCHIVIST 1  
*(tries so fucking hard to be nice)*  
 Do you see - right next to the title - where it says Snorli the Lesser?

BILLY

Woooooooooord gotcha gotcha gotcha.

Beat.

ARCHIVIST 1

Is there anyth--

BILLY

--So is that gonna be under Snorli, or The Lesser?

ARCHIVIST 1

Let me just show you.

TIME WHOOSH

They walk up to another book.

ARCHIVIST 1

It's right here.

BILLY

Sick, sick.

ARCHIVIST 1

*(please please please)*

Will that be all, sir?

BILLY

Do you have "Elven Agriculture Prior to the First Concordat?" It says the author's name is Var?

ARCHIVIST 1

Various.

BILLY

Boss name. Is that Varius the Elder, or the Lesser, or...

*(beat)*

...Or was there just the one?...

ARCHIVIST 1

*(scream whispers)*

Hilde? Hilde!

Footsteps - and a cane - walk over.

ARCHIVIST 2

Yes? What's wrong?

ARCHIVIST 1

It's time for my break can you help this young man?

NELSON (V.O.)

Planning a big score means knowing the strengths of your team. And this plan really played to Billy's strengths.

BILLY (V.O.)

Right. Like being an undue burden on the women around me.

BILLY

So do you have like a cart, or something? I need a lot of books.

19 INT. LIBRARY - PRIVATE COLLECTIONS - SIMULTANEOUS

19

*As score continues, two sets of footsteps walk on marble.*

NELSON (V.O.)

So while the library's administrative staff was otherwise occupied, or forced into the break room in desperation, Jen and I went after the tougher prize.

NIA (FLASHBACK)

At the entrance to the wing containing the private collections, there is usually a doctoral candidate, being paid a pittance by the college.

NELSON (FLASHBACK)

So, grad student on work-study got it.

JEN

*(putting on a show)*

So was the Art Department garbage any good?

NELSON (V.O.)

We saw the kid at the desk take the bait immediately.

NELSON

*(following Jen's lead)*

I mean, it's whatever, but hey *free food* right?

DESK MONITOR

Hey, uh, I have to leave. If you go in there can you just sign this book?

*Footsteps straight up sprint away*

DESK MONITOR

*(as he's running away)*

Thank you kindly!

NELSON  
Score.

DESK MONITOR  
*(even farther away)*  
What?

NELSON  
Nothing!

20 BLU'U LO-BA'AL'S COLLECTION CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

20

NELSON (V.O.)  
But the next part would be something else.

JEN (V.O.)  
We got lucky twice. First, the shadows of the two Elf guards tipped us off to them before we rounded the corner. And second, I spotted the window at the other end of the hall.

NELSON (V.O.)  
When we ducked behind the big bookshelf, I could tell Jen had an idea. But the next part...man I never got tired of seeing her do this stuff.

We hear a bit of Jen's magic pad.

Off to the side, a wooden window shutter rattles...

...then rattles louder...

...Louder still, until--

--It BURSTS OPEN with a big gust of wind behind it.

*(The Elves begin panned to the opposite side from the window.)*

LIBRARY GUARD 1  
Go check on that, will you?

Footsteps approach center.

JEN (V.O.)  
When he came around the corner, I just gave it one more little push.

There's one more BIG GUST, and tons of papers and scrolls and parchments go whipping away.

The guard runs towards the window.

LIBRARY GUARD 1

Blast it all! Can you help?

The second guard runs to help.

*(This next bit should recede, as our heroes walk away from it.)*

LIBRARY GUARD 2

I'm coming! Close the damned window!

LIBRARY GUARD 1

I am! Catch that damned scroll!

Billy's incessant score reaches a climax and then...

21 BLU'U LO-BA'AL'S COLLECTION READING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

21

...quiets down.

NELSON (V.O.)

And just like that, we were in.

JEN (V.O.)

But we still needed to find the book, and we knew we didn't have much time. Fortunately...

*(When not in Voiceover, they both whisper.)*

NELSON

They're all in order. Talismans of Dominion and Their Origins, In the Time of the Chieftains...

*(bingo)*

On the Totemic Traditions of Primitive Iorden. I...this is it!

JEN

That's great! Grab it!

NELSON

Wait! We should check for traps.

Beat.

JEN

Do you know how to do that?



Beat.

NELSON  
I do not.

One last beat of deliberation.

NELSON  
Fuck it.

JEN  
Fuck it.

We hear a book removed from a shelf.

JEN  
Hey what's that?

NELSON  
You mean on the pedestal behind the glass?

JEN  
Looks janky but it was probably worth something once.

NELSON  
*Probably worth something. Definitely hella trapped.*

JEN  
Bringing in some green could buy us a lot of good will  
with Regan.

We wait. For kind of a while. But then suddenly--

--CUT TO:

22 EXT. ARMSTRUNGARD STREETS - DAY

22

They walk down the same crowded streets they  
were on before.

BILLY  
That went pretty well, actually.

NELSON  
Yeah I can't believe the Indiana Jones thing worked in  
real life.

JEN  
You keep looking over your shoulder.  
(whispers)  
Is someone following us?

NELSON  
No I just keep waiting for the boulder.

NARRATOR

And thus did the three Pennsylvanians walk straight out of the gates of the College of Armstrungard, carting a dozen common books, one rare book, and one exceedingly tarnished bronze statue.

DISSOLVE TO:

23 EXT. ARMSTRUNGARD - MILLER'S GREEN - DAY

23

We're still in a city but it's not horribly  
hectic. Think like Central Park.

NARRATOR

Now, as the Pennsylvanians were carrying out this... vaguely illicit venture that was somewhere between a caper and a heist depending on whom you asked, Nia was venturing an excursion of her own. On Jen's advice, she had used Regan's absence to make for the public square upon which she and Frederick had agreed.

Footsteps walk towards us--

--and come to an abrupt stop.

NARRATOR

And she stopped in her tracks when she saw the ribbon tied around the limb of a venerable birch tree. She looked up at the sun, hoping to estimate how long she'd been gone. And then, realizing that she could not do otherwise whatever the time, she hurried off in the direction of Friar Frederick's.

She walks off quickly.

DISSOLVE TO:

24 EXT. ARMSTRUNGARD STREETS - DAY

24

Return to the streets the Kids were walking  
down.

JEN

Oh! Did you get the reference book?

BILLY

Yeah! Uhh...sorta.

JEN

Okay...

BILLY  
I got an encyclopedia.

JEN  
Well that could work. Can I see?

Billy rustles through his bag.

JEN  
Dweezil's Encyclopedia of Oddities, Maladies, and  
Plagues?

BILLY  
It was only encyclopedia I could find!  
(beat)  
Okay, it was the first encyclopedia I found and I  
wanted to look at the pictures.

JEN  
Billy...

BILLY  
But check out the page I marked!

Pages flip.

JEN  
Ugh. Gross.

BILLY  
Yeah it's pretty gnarly. But look!

JEN  
Oh, no way! It says this drawing of some guy's giant  
pustule is to scale. And there's a ruler on the side of  
the page!

BILLY  
Yeah! And look here!

More pages flip.

JEN  
Where?  
(beat)  
Oh! It compares the density of this tumor to water and lead.

BILLY  
Yeah I didn't remember exactly how to do density but I  
think it has something to do with weight.

JEN

No, this...this is perfect. This is exactly what I need to make sense of their units of measurement. You did great honey.

BILLY

Thanks.

JEN

That thing you said...about being a burden? It's not true.

BILLY

It is a little bit.

JEN

*(how to approach this...?)*

You did great today. We couldn't have done that without you. And I love you.

BILLY

*(very proud)*

Check out the last page.

JEN

Okay!

More pages still.

JEN

*(grossed out)*

Oh. Um...what am I looking for?

BILLY

Nothing, it's just a dude with huge balls. I thought it was funny.

JEN

Okay, we are gonna talk about how you think about illness and difference, but still...progress is progress.

REGAN

And we're gonna talk about whose ears don't work and who's about to have no balls.

Footsteps come to an abrupt halt.

JEN

Oh shit.

REGAN

Inside. Now.

END OF PART THREE.

## PART FOUR:

25 MONTAGE

25

NARRATOR

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

Sounds of an army camp. Transitions to...

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

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

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

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

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

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

26 EXT. WESTERN VILLAGE - DAY

26

Cock crows. Sounds of a rural morning.

NARRATOR

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

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

NARRATOR

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

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

NARRATOR

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

First Snow is just a little winded.

FIRST SNOW

Good morning, Auntie.

NARRATOR

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

STEADY RIVER

*(very good-natured teasing)*

Morning, girl. Slept in today I see.

First Snow strains as she puts the buckets  
down.

FIRST SNOW

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

STEADY RIVER

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

FIRST SNOW

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

STEADY RIVER

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

FIRST SNOW

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

STEADY RIVER

Chasing boys? Matron knows I did at your age.

FIRST SNOW  
*(embarrassed)*  
 Auntie.

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

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

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

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

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

STEADY RIVER  
 Standing up for yourself is never pointless.

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

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

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

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

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

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

First Snow strains to lift the two buckets  
of water.

FIRST SNOW

*(exerting)*

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

*She quickly puts down the buckets.*

FIRST SNOW

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

FIRST SNOW

*(anxious)*

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

STEADY RIVER

*(trying to calm her)*

Girl, girl, girl. Do it  
later.

FIRST SNOW

What?

STEADY RIVER

*(what's the big deal?)*

Do it later.

FIRST SNOW

He won't be insulted?

STEADY RIVER

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

FIRST SNOW

Oh.

STEADY RIVER

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

FIRST SNOW

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

STEADY RIVER

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

(MORE)



STEADY RIVER (cont'd)

(beat)

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

ROAN DOG

(distant)

--First Snow!

Footsteps come sprinting toward us.

ROAN DOG

First Snow! They need you at the listening post.

...And the buckets hit the ground again.

FIRST SNOW

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

NARRATOR

Then she took off at a jog.

She jogs away.

FIRST SNOW

(over her shoulder)

Or better yet mend the blasted well!

27 INT. LISTENING POST - A FEW MINUTES LATER

27

NARRATOR

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

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

NARRATOR

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

NARRATOR (cont'd)  
town. One of these bells - the biggest one in fact -  
was ringing. Its placard read "Federation House."

The door to the structure opens.

FIRST SNOW  
(windes)  
What is it?

TRANSCRIBER  
The Federation.

FIRST SNOW  
Did you take down the message?

TRANSCRIBER  
Yes, of course. Now will you tell them it's received so  
they'll shut up?

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

A magical pad becomes just barely audible.

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

We hear a small electrical zap.

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

...Stops. The magical pad fades away.

It's a moment of relief.

FIRST SNOW  
Have that message?

TRANSCRIBER  
Here.

A beat as she reads.

TRANSCRIBER  
What do they say?

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

TRANSCRIBER

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

FIRST SNOW

I must speak with grandmother.

28 EXT. MILL - A FEW MINUTES LATER

28

NARRATOR

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

A mule clops in circles as a stone wheel creaks.

FIRST SNOW

*(walking towards us)*  
Auntie! Auntie!

STEADY RIVER

Catch your breath, girl.

FIRST SNOW

Bad news.

STEADY RIVER

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

FIRST SNOW

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

STEADY RIVER

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

FIRST SNOW

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

STEADY RIVER

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

She pats the mule and it brays.

STEADY RIVER

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

FIRST SNOW

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

STEADY RIVER

Now what's your news?

FIRST SNOW

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

STEADY RIVER

Mmm. We've not much corn to spare.

FIRST SNOW

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

STEADY RIVER

And what do you think we should do?

She thinks.

FIRST SNOW

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

STEADY RIVER

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

FIRST SNOW

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

STEADY RIVER

Anywhere else to get more corn for next year then?

FIRST SNOW

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

STEADY RIVER

I agree.

FIRST SNOW

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

NARRATOR

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

STEADY RIVER

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

NARRATOR

First Snow smiled, despite herself.

STEADY RIVER

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

29 EXT. THE FALLOW FIELDS - LATER

29

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

NARRATOR

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

ROAN DOG

Is it close?

FIRST SNOW

Yes.

ROAN DOG

My feet hurt.

FIRST SNOW

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

CAPALL BUÍ

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

NARRATOR

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

FIRST SNOW

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

CAPALL BUÍ

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

FIRST SNOW

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

CAPALL BUÍ

You know...I've seen sixteen harvests now. You're not the first girl who ever invited me to take a walk and inspect the fallow fields. But you are the first one to actually mean that.

ROAN DOG

Gross.

FIRST SNOW

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

ROAN DOG

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

CAPALL BUÍ

How about I fallow your fields, runt?

We hear one last big push through some dead stalks.

FIRST SNOW

Will both of you be--

--Some repeating crossbows click.

NARRATOR

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

RANGER CAPTAIN

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

NARRATOR

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

RANGER CAPTAIN

Answer me. Why are y'all here?

LESSER RANGER

Maybe they ain't speak Common.

NARRATOR

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

LESSER RANGER

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

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

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

I speak some Eastern-tongue.

NARRATOR

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

RANGER CAPTAIN

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

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

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

*(beat)*

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

RANGER CAPTAIN

*(amused)*

Ha!

NARRATOR

First Snow's two companions could not understand what was being said, and thus did not know the reason for, nor intention behind, this man's laughter. They looked at each other uneasily.

RANGER CAPTAIN

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

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

No.

RANGER CAPTAIN

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

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

Who is your boss? This cannot be their property.

RANGER CAPTAIN

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

FIRST SNOW (ACCEPTED)

May I speak with him?

RANGER CAPTAIN

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

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

(*firm*)

I won't leave until I speak with him.

NARRATOR

The mere tenor of First Snow's speech here caused her brother and her friend to exchange concerned glances.

RANGER CAPTAIN

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

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

Yes. After I speak to your boss.

NARRATOR

The armed man sighed, and rubbed his temples.

LESSER RANGER

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

RANGER CAPTAIN

Can you negotiate on behalf of your people?



NARRATOR

First Snow looked at him quizzically.

RANGER CAPTAIN

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

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

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

RANGER CAPTAIN

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

One man trots off.

RANGER CAPTAIN

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

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

I said we were unarmed.

RANGER CAPTAIN

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

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

I give you my word.

RANGER CAPTAIN

Uh huh. Hands up over your head.

30 EXT. UNFINISHED PLANTATION HOUSE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

30

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

NARRATOR

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

Eight sets of footsteps approach.

NARRATOR

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

TYYMOS

This is them, I presume?

RANGER CAPTAIN

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

Footsteps stop.

TYYMOS

Your man here says one of them speaks passable Common?

RANGER CAPTAIN

Yes sir. That one there.

NARRATOR

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

One step in dirt

FIRST SNOW

Hello. Pleased to meet you.

TYYMOS

*(intrigued)*

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

She ponders.

FIRST SNOW

For now, call me Neighbor.

TYYMOS

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

FIRST SNOW

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

TYYMOS

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

FIRST SNOW

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

TYYMOS

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

FIRST SNOW

By what law?

TYYMOS

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

FIRST SNOW

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

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

TYYMOS

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

FIRST SNOW

*(holding back her temper)*

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

TYYMOS

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

FIRST SNOW

*(snaps)*

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

Two quick footsteps. Crossbows immediately click.

NARRATOR

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

TYYMOS

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

31 EXT. DIRT ROAD - DUSK

31

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

NARRATOR

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

CAPALL BUÍ

What does he mean it's his farm?

FIRST SNOW

Says it's some new Eastern law.

ROAN DOG

What do we do?

FIRST SNOW

I don't know.

(beat)

This won't stand.

32 EXT. ARMSTRUNGARD STREETS

32

NARRATOR

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

33 INT. FRIAR IOHANSEN'S MONASTERY - CONTINUOUS

33

Chapel door flies open.

NIA

Frederick! What news?

FREDERICK

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

NIA

What do you mean?

FREDERICK

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

NIA

What is it you've heard?

FREDERICK

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

NIA

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

NARRATOR

Nia's knees had already begun to feel weak.

FREDERICK

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

NARRATOR

And then the door to Frederick's office opened.

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

NARRATOR

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

Nia collapses into a pew.

RY'Y

Nia. What a relief to see you...at long last.

END OF CHAPTER.