

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 6
"One For The Team"

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6/17/2019
Edits from Rehearsal
PRODUCTION WHITE for Recording 6/23
BLUE Revisions from 6/23 Recording
PINK Revisions in Post

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1 INT. MONASTERY - DAY

1

Replay:

RY'Y

Nia. What a relief to see you.

Location and time are the same as at the end of Chapter 5.

NARRATOR

But of course, when we last left Nia, she was feeling anything but relief at the sudden reappearance of Lord Commander Ry'y lo-Th'yyt.

FREDERICK

Goodness, you look faint! Let me fetch you something.

NIA

No, please, that's--

FREDERICK

--I insist. I've got some fresh oat cakes and chamomile tea with honey. Wouldn't that be nice? Oh, dear Nia, what an ordeal you've been through, I can only imagine. You sit there while I fetch the cakes, and just try to breathe. You're safe now.

NIA

(a morbid, almost spiteful chuckle)
Yes. Safe.

Frederick hurries off.

Once he's gone...

RY'Y

He's a sweet boy. He got worried when you came to see him, could sense something was amiss. So right after sending your letter - clever thought by the way - he notified the City Guard.

NIA

(should've known)
Oh, Frederick...

RY'Y

(whispers)
The building's quite surrounded, of course, in case that's why you keep glancing at the door.
(hams it up on purpose)
So naturally the City Guard let my footmen know. And I rode here posthaste, and told Frederick about the

(MORE)

RY'Y (cont'd)
ruthless band of brigands who had compelled you to criminality against your will. So you can understand his relief when you answered his call. The boy cares about you very much.

NARRATOR
Nia heard the derision in the Elf's voice and thought she understood her intention.

NIA
(*whispers*)
Frederick's a pillar of his community. People will come looking if he goes missing.

RY'Y
(*feigned shock*)
Missing?! Why ever would he go missing?

Frederick's footsteps return.

FREDERICK
Who's missing?

RY'Y
Why, young Nia's afraid you might be departing soon. Have you any plans to travel?

FREDERICK
I don't think so.

RY'Y
Splendid.

FREDERICK
Have you told her? About the commendation?

RY'Y
I was just coming to that. Nia, as we both know, your actions during and after the battle at Freehold were... extraordinary. And there is much you are owed. But when we were unable to find you, we instead sought out your next of kin. Benedict and Mildred are such darlings, by the way. They've been very hospitable to my detachment in Seahold. Had we not found you, we would have been forced to give them what you're owed. But now that you're here I think we can agree it's easiest just to deal directly.

FREDERICK
And now that you're a war hero, Nia, the Knights of the Wood saw fit to personally help you with the brigands. Isn't that right, Lord Commander?

RY'Y

Oh yes, I shall deal with the brigands myself.

NIA

(just the slightest whiff of calculation)
Frederick, I hate to be a bother but might you have any jam for these cakes?

FREDERICK

I'll have to check the cellar...but, I'm sure I can rustle something up!

NIA

Would you mind terribly?

FREDERICK

(thinks he's being cute)
I am eternally at your service.

NIA

(hides her bitterness but not very well)
Yes, that's you. Helpful as always.

He hurries off again...

...And again they wait until he's gone.

RY'Y

I'm sure you can infer the conditions required for your parents' safe release, but for the sake of clarity let's speak them anyway.

NIA

I can't give you my companions.

RY'Y

Can't?

NIA

Aerona Regan is many things but she is not stupid. She wouldn't tell me where they were staying - only where to meet her so she could bring me to them.

RY'Y

Then you should go to your meeting. I've agents who are very skilled at seeing while remaining unseen, and they can--

NIA

--Not in this city. With respect. She is born and raised of this place, as you are of the Hyy1-Ykbyyr.

RY'Y
Explains a lot, doesn't it?

NIA
She knows this city better than her own heart. Track her and she'll spot you, and then lose you, and you'll never hear from me again, even if I wished to save my parents.

RY'Y
And do you?

NIA
Yes, very badly.

RY'Y
(frustrated)
Well then I grow weary of excuses. Tell me what's on offer, that is worth your three wretched lives.
(beat)
Think carefully on what you say next, my time is precious.

NARRATOR
Nia looked down into her lap, deep in thought. Though she remained silent, it was not long before tears began to fall onto the front of Billy's borrowed shirt.
(beat)
Finally, she raised her pained and dewy eyes to meet Ry'y's.

NIA
(meekly, a surrender)
I can tell you where she'll be in three days time.

NARRATOR
And Ry'y lo-Th'yyt grinned.

2 INT. GREY FOX TAVERN - SIMULTANEOUS

2

A door slams!

REGAN
What the mother fuck?

We hear a small fire crackling in the corner.

NARRATOR
Regan, of course, had no way of knowing what transpired in Friar Iohanssen's monastery. Instead, she was reacting at that moment to the actions of her youngest comrades, whom you'll recall had disobeyed her fairly straightforward command.

REGAN

Why is it as soon as we stop treating you like children, you act like 'em again?

A beat of embarrassment.

REGAN

I'm serious. Help me understand, so I can talk myself outta throwing you out a window.

BILLY

We're sick of being helpless. We got pulled away from everything and everyone we've ever known and we still don't know jack shit about how or why.

JEN

This was our only chance to maybe figure it out. And it's like no one gives a shit about that!

REGAN

I give a shit about keeping you alive. You can't go home if you're hanging from a rope with your skin peeled off, can you?

(softens just a little)

Look. Sometimes, there's a hard choice and none of your options are great. But when you take it on yourself to get what you want, and put the people around you in danger, that's when the people around you have every right to drop you like a brick.

She lets the gravity of that sit a little while.

REGAN

There was a time - not that long ago - when I wouldn't even be talking to you right now. You'd just wake up in the morning and I'd be gone. Never see me again. And I can't honestly say that was the wrong move. But for one thing, Brennen and Nia would never let me do--wait. Where's Nia?

NARRATOR

The Pennsylvanians looked at each other, then back at Regan, and then all shrugged.

REGAN

She wasn't part of this little caper?

NELSON

(under his breath)
Heist.

REGAN

What?

NELSON
Nothing.

REGAN
Was Nia in on this or not?

JEN
No.

NELSON
Not really.

REGAN
No, or not really?

NELSON
She drew us a map when we bugged her enough but she didn't say it was a good idea or go with us or anything.

REGAN
So then where the fuck is she?

JEN
She had something of her own to do. Seemed important.

REGAN
Oh, yeah, no, as long as it was gods damned important.
BRENNEN! YLLOWYYN! Fuck me running.

Footsteps approach and a door opens.

BRENNEN
Your Grace.

YLLOWYYN
Your Grace.

REGAN
First - real quick - you wanna tell me how these three escaped?!

YLLOWYYN
They what?

REGAN
They've been gone for close to two hours.

BRENNEN
I...thought they were sleeping late.
(beat)
Their doors were closed.

REGAN
Ohhhhhhh, good good. Hey, um...free tactical tip, lemme show you something, watch.

Some cloth rustles slowly.

NARRATOR

Regan sloooooowly lifted the front of her cowl up to cover her face. And then quickly yanked it down.

Cloth rustles quickly now.

REGAN

Peek-a-boo, asshole, I still exist!

BRENNEN

(taking it)
Aye, your Grace.

REGAN

(to Yllowyyn)
And you! How's those superior senses working out for you? You still got a fever or something? We got you medicine.

YLLOWYYN

Yes, but I don't think it works--

REGAN

--I need to go find Nia. Might take a little tracking, so you're coming with. Put your hood up, and I don't know, try to slouch I guess. With your gangly ass.

YLLOWYYN

(a little sarcastic)
It honors me to obey Your Grace.

REGAN

Don't push your luck. Brennen, get everyone to the Whiskey Church.

BRENNEN

Pardon, Your Grace?

REGAN

Old market district by the east canal. There's a building used to be a church that they built a tavern in. Looks like a church, but they sell whiskey. Whiskey Church.

BRENNEN

Aye, Your Grace.

REGAN

Get a table in the back of the basement, by the coffins.

BRENNEN

Er...sorry?

REGAN

Catacombs in the basement, get a table by the coffins. That's important. And even more important, these three are *not to leave your sight the whole time*. Got it?

BILLY

Man, we were just--

REGAN

--Abup. This is a stay of execution, not a pardon. So practice your begging for mercy faces. Brennen?

BRENNEN

Whiskey Church. Table by the, er...coffins. And not to leave my sight.

Regan **sucks in some air** then **huffs** it out.

NARRATOR

Regan took a steadying breath, tossed up her hood, and departed, with Yllowyyn close on her heels.

A door opens and then slams shut.

3 EXT. VILLAGE OF THREE-BRIDGES (OUT WEST) - DAY

3

Out on the prairie, There is a loud indistinct chattering, a large crowd of people gathered together in an open town square. The voices skew young, old, and female.

THERE'S AN UNDERCURRENT OF CONCERN FROM THE CROWD, BUT NO OUTRIGHT PANIC.

After a moment, we hear a hint of a magic pad. Then, Steady River speaks. (She sounds as though she's coming through a low-quality amp or PA system.)

STEADY RIVER

Neighbors, friends, brothers and sisters. Thank you for attending this town meeting on short notice. As your chosen representative to the Federation, I formally open this meeting.

AS SHE SPEAKS, THE CROWD QUICKLY QUIETS DOWN.

NARRATOR

Steady River, a venerable elder of the western village which named itself after its Three Bridges, addressed a gathering of nearly five hundred of her neighbors. She spoke into a fired clay cone. Nearby, a young girl concentrated deeply on the cone, causing it to twist almost imperceptibly. As a result, the matriarch's voice, although plenty powerful on its own, was amplified enough to carry easily to the far edges of the town square.

STEADY RIVER

There is news, from the Federation House, as well as from the Western fields. However, regular order must prevail. Town issues first. Updates on the planting season?

NARRATOR

Steady River nodded towards an older man standing near the center of the square. At this signal, the young girl with the speaking cone ran to this gentleman, offered the device to him, and resumed her magical duty.

SHRUB SURVIVES THE STORM

(Very stressed)

Neighbors, friends...we all know the update is not good. We just don't have enough hands, nor enough bodies! We've sown seed in half of the field by the hill. By now, we should have completed that field, and half of another! We need more workers!

A murmur of assent from the crowd.

STEADY RIVER

(not magically enhanced, but shouting across the field)

And...

SHRUB SURVIVES THE STORM

(Sighing audibly)

And...Everyone is working their absolute hardest, and I personally thank all of our friends for their dedication in this trying time.

STEADY RIVER

Thank you neighbor. We knew there would be struggles, back when Traft of Six-Hills took so many of our strongest to the East for his war. Yet that knowledge makes this struggle no easier. I appreciate your hard work towards the feeding of our community. We will discuss how to get more workers to the fields. But first, we must hear the news from the Federation, and so I turn to the Signal House Speaker.

NARRATOR

At this, the girl with the speaking device began to run towards the young woman known as First Snow. However, First Snow waved the girl away, closed her eyes for a moment, and concentrated before beginning to speak. When she spoke, First Snow's voice was nevertheless amplified. I should note that this skill, which was made to seem easy by First Snow, would have proven difficult for not a few mages twice her age.

FIRST SNOW

Neighbors, Friends, Brothers and Sisters, thank you for allowing me to speak. As this month's Signal House Speaker, I have news. As a neighbor, I have even more. Yesterday morning, we received a signal from the Federation House. They request more corn, to feed the old and the sick.

A GENERAL HUBBUB BREAKS OUT.

SHRUB SURVIVES THE STORM

Are your ears closed, Signal-sender? We just discussed how dire our own situation is!

NARRATOR

Sensing the meeting spiraling quickly out of control, Steady River made a gesture to the girl with the clay cone. She closed her eyes and focused, and a loud, sharp shriek rang out.

The sound of a loud whistle being blown. The crowd stills a bit.

STEADY RIVER

Friends and Neighbors, we will have order. Signal-sender, please continue.

FIRST SNOW

Thank you Grandmother. In light of this news, I took it upon myself to inspect the Eastern Fields. Those fields should be next in the rotation, and I wanted to check the progress of the soil health for myself. I was accosted by a group of Easterners claiming protection of the White Forest. They have claimed the eastern fields as their own, by virtue of a new Easterner law. The Elves can now declare dominion over any land that is not actively in use. And to be honest, I do not trust them to thus limit themselves. I spoke directly with the Elf himself, who made several threats. I fear our town may be in danger.

THE CROWD HAS STEADILY GROWN LOUDER AND MORE CONCERNED.

THERE'S A REPEAT OF THE WHISTLE SOUND AND A REPEAT OF THE QUIETING CROWD.

STEADY RIVER

Neighbors! This news is indeed grave, but we will learn nothing and get nowhere by shouting over each other. It is my duty to assess the consensus of the town, and by the Matron I will do it! We will hear proposed responses today, followed by two nights of campaigning and discussion, with the vote in three days. As per tradition, the bearer of the news, having had the most time for consideration, is given first right to speak. First Snow, do you have a proposed solution?

FIRST SNOW

Thank you Grandmother. Friends, Neighbors, I have an idea to address both problems at once. Regarding the Federation, of course we must provide food for the old and sick.

THE HUBBUB BEGINS TO RISE AGAIN.

First Snow speaks louder, even despite the amplification.

FIRST SNOW

We must! If we withhold food from the old and sick, that which we keep will be like ash in our mouth.

SHRUB SURVIVES THE STORM

(Shouting over the din, not amplified)

If we give away all of our food, we will have nothing but ash in our mouth throughout the winter!

FIRST SNOW

I am aware. We have two problems. First, we need more food. Second, the Elves will claim any land we do not till. To me, the solution is obvious. We simply till every field available to us. Even those fields which are not yet ready.

THE HUBBUB IS EVEN LOUDER. (IT FADES GRADUALLY UNDER THE NEXT MONOLOGUE.)

FIRST SNOW

Please! Friends, hear me! Shrub Survives, you requested more workers for the fields. I agree. We must make this our only priority, the stakes are too large on both the Federation and the Elven fronts. Every able person in this town, for the next two weeks, must stop their other work to take extra shifts, aerating and fertilizing the fields, so that we can sow them come spring. Exceptions only for medicine.

SHRUB SURVIVES THE STORM

(slightly mollified, mostly confused)

That...still will not be enough people to till all of the fields...

FIRST SNOW

(genuinely excited for her plan - she is still only fifteen after all)

I know. Here is the fun part. We till every field. We do not till *all* of every field. Each field is one thousand paces on a side. We till all around the border of each field, but only about fifty paces deep. Once the plants have grown tall, from the outside it will look as though we have used the whole field, satisfying the Elves' stupid rules. But each field will only require a fraction of the work, making it easier for our limited worker numbers. Those fields which still need to rest--aside from the outer border, they will still have their rest, while still claiming them away from the Elves. And by having the entire town working together, our yield will be higher than expected, allowing us to both feed ourselves *and* deliver to the Federation House.

NARRATOR

The square stilled, as the town contemplated this proposal.

STEADY RIVER

Thank you First Snow. That is certainly a unique strategy. Are there any counter-proposals?

SHRUB SURVIVES THE STORM

Yes! The young Signal-Sender has complicated the scenario far more than we need. I agree, we pull all workers in the town, but only for one week. We till only the three fields we intended to till this season. We all know that the Elves will not be deterred by wordplay and technicalities. This foolish plan would only provoke them, and we don't have enough warriors to survive a fight right now. No, we must allow them to take the other fields, let them believe they have won. The three fields will be enough for us. I say again, they will be enough *for us*. We must regretfully inform the Federation that we just have nothing to spare.

THERE'S SOME GENTLE VERBAL DISAGREEMENT AMONGST THE CROWD.

FIRST SNOW

But the Elves--

SHRUB SURVIVES THE STORM

--The Elves will do the same thing they always do. If we provoke them outright, the bloodshed will be terrible. Ask anyone who used to live further east. But
(MORE)

SHRUB SURVIVES THE STORM (cont'd)

if we do not provoke them, they will play a slower game. They will push our boundaries as far as they can bend, but if we play by their rules, there will not be any bloodshed this harvest season. We will adapt, we will set new boundaries, until they push those boundaries again. And then we'll adapt again. It isn't full of glory, but it is the only path to survival. If we had warriors, we could fight. But that fool Traft took away every soul who could have defended us. Who knows if or when they're coming back. If we fight today, we die. I say, we do what we must to survive the winter, build our strength, and find a better time to oppose the Elves.

FIRST SNOW

(really worked up)

But can't you see that if we don't--

STEADY RIVER

--First Snow! You have made your proposal, and Shrub Survives has made his. Thank you, by the way, Cousin. That is a very pragmatic strategy.

FIRST SNOW

That's one word for it.

STEADY RIVER

Tsst! You know well enough - you're to convince your neighbors over the next two nights, by the strength of your position, not by disparaging others. Before we adjourn, are there any other proposals?

(a pause)

Very well. In three days time, we will vote.

(one more beat)

Now. There is one more matter. As you all know, once the tilling season ends, there will be a meeting at the Federation House. While I am not too old to travel, I certainly am too old to want to travel, especially when at risk of inclement weather. At the end of the season I will step down and we will elect a new Town Speaker.

THE VILLAGERS KIND OF LOSE THEIR SHIT AT THIS.

DISSOLVE TO:

4 INT. SEAHOLD GARRISON - MAIN HALL - MORNING

4

We're in a big wide hall, but conspicuously...
...there seem to be a LOT of pigeons.

D'AYV

And there's breakfast for you, and for you, and - ah! -
who could forget you, you beautiful darling?

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

We've found her, you know.

D'AYV

Pardon?

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

The Memyet cleric. The Lord Commander tracked her down
in Armstrungard.

D'AYV

(blissfully oblivious to the hint)
Oh, splendid!

Beat.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

So...that means...there's no longer a need for pigeons
here.

D'AYV

Oh there's always a need for pigeons once you know how
clever they can be.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

My boy, I'm sure that someone misses y--I mean...
wouldn't you rather be back in the White Forest?

D'AYV

Oh, no! This is much more exciting. It's like in *Duel
of Cronos*, when--oh! You've read it haven't you?

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

(Reluctantly)
...Yes.

D'AYV

Well don't you remember the scene when Lady Greenwich
must send a secret message to her true love?

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Do...do you mean the Prince from the North?

D'AYV

Oh, yes! You do remember it! Wasn't it exhilarating?

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

The Prince from the North is *not* the Lady's true love.

They both start to get heated, and it escalates. Quickly.

D'AYV

Of course he is! The...the...the chemistry! And the passion betw--

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

--Oh nonsense! They spent one night together, and he's barely given a name!

D'AYV

(indignant and derisive)

Oh and I suppose you think she belongs with Mathias the Solicitor.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Who else could be her One True Paramour?

D'AYV

Oh, I don't know, how about *anyone else in the realm?*

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

He is there for her through thick and thin, his love neither possessive nor dispassionate, and he will always--

D'AYV

--HE DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO PLEASE HER!

Zyka'ad unsheathes a blade.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

YOU TAKE THAT BACK YOU LITTLE SHIT!

MILDRED CLEARS HER THROAT.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

(startled)
Reverend!

MILDRED

Sorry. Is everything all right?

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

(regaining composure)

Of course. Just...a bit of sparring. Is everything all right with you? You could have called for a page, you know, instead of climbing all those steps.

MILDRED

Well, we asked the pages if we could take a walk, and they said no.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

(offhand / under her breath)

At least *that* remains under control.

MILDRED

...control?

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

(deflecting)

You and Reverend Ben--

(Ben arrives on this line)

--impeccable timing, Reverend - are understandably restless under the circumstances. You're welcome to stretch your legs in this hall. This is my...mmm, colleague D'ay-vaad lo--er...

D'AYV

You can just call me D'ayv! Pleasure to make your acquaintance!

BEN

(maneuvering the slightest bit)

Likewise. Are these your birds?

D'AYV

Why, yes!

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

(hates this)

Yes they are.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

(threatening)

In any case, D'ayv was just leaving.

BEN

So soon?

MILDRED

Ben!

BEN

What? I find the coo-ing of the pigeons strangely soothing.

D'AYV
(very charmed)
 Why, I agree!

MILDRED
 SCREW pigeons! No offense mister...

D'AYV
(tirelessly jovial)
 D'ayv!

BEN
 You've assembled quite the flock.

D'AYV
(Flattered)
 Why, thank you.

BEN
 For what purpose did you bring them here? If I might ask.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD
 I'm afraid he's short on--

D'AYV	MAJOR ZYKA'AD
--Well it all started when	<i>(beat to plan, then...)</i>
my dear friend Yllowyyn	Sergeant!
returned home to visit.	

ZYKA'AD SNAPS HER FINGERS.

D'AYV
 Yllowyyn and I go far back, and his sister...well, my parents swear she's keen on me but I'm not--

--Sounds of underlings arriving to seize D'ayv.

D'AYV
 Oh, hello!

MAJOR ZYKA'AD
 As much as I hate to deprive us of this sure-to-be charming anecdote, D'ayv and his...retinue were just called away on urgent business. Isn't that right.

D'AYV
 "Retinue" - why yes - that's a lovely way to describe them, but I'm not--

MAJOR ZYKA'AD
 --Quickly. Before they are better described as game, mmm?

D'AYV

(finally clocks the threat)

Oh. Ah...um...Come along little darlings...

*We hear D'ayv escorted away by two Knights,
followed closely by his flock ~~retinue~~ swarm.*

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Back to the matter at hand...

D'AYV

(a few steps away)

My, that grip's a bit firmer than warranted ...

GRUNT from handler, which startles D'AYV.

D'AYV

...but helpful, lest I fall...

NARRATOR

With D'ayv finally fully out of the way...

*Pause for final pigeon exit sounds and line
from D'ayv as he fully exits the space.*

D'AYV

(very distant, but still audible!)

...til next time!

NARRATOR

I think we're in the clear...

D'AYV

(ad lib.)

So sorry, just forgot one pigeon! Oh wait, this one's wild.

*Final pause. This time: sweet, merciful
quiet.*

NARRATOR

(sighing)

I try not to be too judgmental about such things but I'll admit I find the voice of that D'ayv quite grating. Always seems to be trying too hard, you know? Anyway, back to the matter at hand indeed. As Major Zyka'ad returned her attention to the reverends, it was clear that some manner of high stakes discussion was underway, even if the words spoken were rather mundane.

BEN

("I know what I'm doing")

...I'm sorry honey. I'm as torn up about this as you--

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

--Reverends! I trust that I have the solution to both
of your jitters. Good news.

MILDRED

Good news...

BEN

What's that?

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Well, as I was trying to say before, we've found your daughter.

MILDRED

Praise Galadon!

NARRATOR

The Reverends responded cheerfully and embraced one another with relief at this revelation.

BEN

Oh! That's wonderful news indeed, m'lord. Thank you. Thank you!

NARRATOR

Ben bowed his head to the Major, and fervently raised his clasped hands in a gesture of gratitude. He then embraced his wife once more.

BEN

Milly, we should get back to the priory at once.

MILDRED

Yes, our parish must be worried sick. They've not seen hide nor hair of us in three days.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Ah, hmm...Reverends. I'm afraid the pages were correct. You cannot leave the premises.

MILDRED

Cannot?

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

I have explicit orders from Lord Commander Ry'y lo-Th'yyt to...act as your...custodian until further notice.

NARRATOR

The Reverends exchanged a discreet look of concern.

MILDRED

...Well, that's kind of you. We really do appreciate your...looking after us...under the circumstances but--

BEN
 --But we have duties and responsibilities to return to.
 Our congregants and neighbors will start to worry--

MILDRED
 --If they haven't already. Best not to stir up any
 trouble among them.

BEN
 Right, might not be the best to have them come looking
 for us.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD
 Is that a threat?

BEN
 Oh no, m'lord.

MILDRED
 Perish the thought!

BEN
(aside, under his breath)
 And maybe perish us...

MILDRED
(stepping on Ben)
 Respectfully, m'lord, we've cooperated at every turn
 and achieved the mutual goal of finding our daughter.

BEN
(regrouping)
 Yes, we will remain at your service as needed for future
 reconnaissance, especially as it relates to her...

MILDRED
(overlapping, in agreement)
 Uh-hmm.

BEN
 But...you can't just keep us here.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD
 Mm. As it happens, I can.

*We hear a few set of resolute, armored
 footsteps on every side of us.*

NARRATOR
 As the reverends noticed Elves posted in every exit and
 corner of the room, they inched closer to each other
 and ended huddled in an embrace. And when they looked
 back to Major Zyka'ad, all pretense of cordiality was
 at last stripped from her face.

END OF PART ONE.

PART TWO:

5 EXT. FIELD ON THE PRAIRIE - DAY

5

We hear farm work - specifically, punching holes in cold dirt - over the sounds of prairie.

NARRATOR

Dear listeners, we now rejoin First Snow, the Signal-Sender of Three-Bridges, as she works the fields with a good portion of her town. The astute listener may notice that when we last left the young woman, her town was awaiting a vote on which fields to sow. I've jumped forward in our tale, for while the mechanisms of consensus and self-determination are incredibly important to the function of that society, they do not make for riveting storytelling.

(Beat)

I'm getting the sense you don't believe me. Fine, you're such a storytelling expert - here you go.

FLASHBACK WHOOSH:

We're indoors for a moment.

Papers rustle...

VILLAGER #1

One vote for Proposal A

VILLAGER #2

Noted. Currently twenty-seven for A, twenty-six for B.

VILLAGER #3

Confirmed.

...more papers...

VILLAGER #1

One vote for Proposal B

VILLAGER #2

Noted. Currently twenty-seven for A, twenty-seven for B.

VILLAGER #3

Confirmed.

...more papers

NARRATOR

Satisfied?

REVERSE WHOOSH:

We're back working the fields.

NARRATOR

Anyhow, I'm happy to report that the motion proposed by First Snow had won the day. Happy, not because I've any stake in quotidian politics, mind you. But rather because this decision will set off a chain of events which I vastly prefer to its alternatives. Ah, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

But in any case, as a result of this decision, every capable hand in the village was out in the fields on this day. In fact, just as First Snow had proposed, villagers could be found in every field surrounding the town. First Snow was working in one such field when the sound of frantically galloping hoof beats pounded down the road.

Several horses thunder towards us.

TYYMOS

Girl! Neighbor girl! What in the names of Galadon and Garedian are you doing?

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

(in an exaggerated obsequious tone)

Hello Mister Tyymos. We are farming. Do you not recognize it?

NARRATOR

The Elf Tyymos Lo-Jyf reined his horse to a stop in front of First Snow.

The horses come to a stop.

NARRATOR

Behind him, a retinue of humans - three of Eastern descent, and one of the Black Mountain clans - pulled up behind. First Snow caught the eye of this last one, and held it for a few seconds until finally he looked away.

TYYMOS

I ride around this countryside, twenty miles in any direction. Every spare scrap of land has farmers on it. Do you care to explain?

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

Mister Tymmos, I am obeying the law. The law which you described to me. These fields have been empty for more than two years. My village keeps the history of each plot of land. Your people certainly have not worked them. According to your law, a field which has lain fallow is free to claim. We have claimed them.

TYYMOS **SPITS** ON THE GROUND.

TYYMOS

(absolutely seething)

I'm sure you think you're quite clever.

NARRATOR

The Elf's jaw twitched and his fists clenched.

TYYMOS

Reynold!

NARRATOR

One of the men riding with Tyymos unfurled a bullwhip that he wore on his belt. Although most of the farmers could not understand the discussion, this gesture knew no language barrier. The farmers, more than thirty of them, and all bearing hoes and other farming implements, pulled close together into a tight knot.

A silence settled over the field. On either side of the stalemate, nervous eyes flitted and darted, to and fro.

There's a long beat of nothing but the whistling wind.

After a few moments of scanning the assembled crowd, The Elf and his retinue came to understand their numerical disadvantage. And First Snow was the first to break the silence.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

(gently presses her advantage)

Mister Tyymos. My neighbors and I must work on our fields. If you have nothing else to say, please return to your own. Based on your difficulty in feeding your people, I'm sure they require attention.

TYYMOS

The White Forest shall hear of your impertinence. If you think they'll permit you to just...twist the law to your own advantage you are in for a rude awakening indeed! Within two weeks, I shall have a fully armed company of Knights at my disposal.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

Two weeks? Oh yes, the "latest technologies of the White Forest" must have not yet expanded from farming to communications.

We get the slightest whisper of a magic pad.

NARRATOR

Had you been looking at the ground below Tymmos' mount at just that moment, you might have noticed the slightest shift in the air, and that some thin dry grass was beginning to stand on end.

TYYMOS

When your farm tools are facing six score repeating crossbows, we shall see how clever you are, girl.

FIRST SNOW (ACCENTED)

Mind your horse, neighbor. She seems nervous.

We hear a few small static crackles.

NARRATOR

With this, a small current of power snapped up from the ground and into the hind legs of Tyymos Lo-Jyf's horse. It did not hurt the animal, but did startle it magnificently.

The horse bucks and whinnies.

NARRATOR

As the animal reared and whinnied, her Elven rider gracefully adjusted the movement into a wheel, turning the horse back down the road. This maneuver conveniently hid Lo-Jyf's face from all onlookers, preventing them from seeing the hue of embarrassment rising up his cheeks. As Tyymos and his retinue galloped away, the Elf shouted over his shoulder.

TYYMOS

Two weeks, neighbor girl! I advise you to reconsider your behavior!

NARRATOR

First Snow's eyes followed the interlopers down the road. She stood unmoving, continuing to stare long past when the dust cloud disappeared beyond the horizon.

WE HEAR SOME EXCITED CHATTER GROW.

NARRATOR

Behind her, the farmers were abuzz, those who understood the common tongue relaying the details of

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

the confrontation to those who did not. As I understand both languages, I can assure you, the details were exaggerated shamelessly. First Snow's friend Capall Buí, the boy who had accompanied her on that first fateful meeting with the Elf, came to her side.

CAPALL BUÍ

First Snow, your courage in the face of that Elf and his weapon was incredible! Grandfather used to say "Everyone's a warrior until they stare down the sharp side of an axe". Matron knows, I've seen fighters twice your size panic the first time they see a practice weapon! And you chased his whole army away, without a drop of blood!

FIRST SNOW

First, that wasn't an army Capall Buí. And we're lucky it was not. Second, I did what had to be done. Speaking of "what had to be done"...

(magic pad and amplified voice pad)

Friends, thank you for standing with me. We must report this to Grandmother as soon as possible, but so too must we finish the work here. We just lost a lot of sunlight. So please, let us get back to the task at hand.

NARRATOR

Without a word of complaint - **albeit plenty of gossip** - the farmers returned to their chores.

CAPALL BUÍ

(flat admiration, absolutely no flirtation)

You act calmly under pressure, you reach clever and unique solutions to our town's problems, and the people listen to you. Have you ever considered throwing your name in for Representative? You'd certainly do a better job than that mewling Shrub Survives the Storm.

FIRST SNOW

(deflecting)

Don't bother flattering me. I've already told you I have no interest in "inspecting the fallow fields" with you. And there are no fallow fields left anyway.

CAPALL BUÍ

No, that's...I'm serious. You should give it some thought.

ROAN DOG

He's right, sister. You should think about it.

FIRST SNOW

And you should think about lifting that hoe and doing some work for once, second-born. There's lots to do.

NARRATOR

To prove her point, First Snow lifted her own tool and returned to the task at hand. The pensive look on her face proved that she could work and ponder at the same time.

Sounds of farming continue.

6 INT. CASTLE GUERNATAL - ARDEL'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT

6

We hear the sounds of someone hastily throwing things into a bag.

NARRATOR

It was late, and Ardel Redmoor - at long last cognizant of the wishes of his subjects - was hastily gathering his most essential possessions in preparation to flee.

Several pieces of silver tableware clank into the bag.

NARRATOR

Of course, this was a man who had never before needed to distinguish between essential and non-essential possessions. The process was...less than efficient.

ARDEL **MUTTERS** TO HIMSELF ABOUT WHAT TO TAKE, AD LIB.

ANTONIN
(in the 'Whisperer' voice)
We never had our duel.

ARDEL
Gahhhhhh!

NARRATOR

Antonin Mooncrest, who - if you've not yet guessed it - was very much alive and had been masquerading as a phantom about the castle, stepped out from a shadowed corner of the room.

Footsteps walk towards us.

ANTONIN

You never answered for your crimes. Your overall turpitude of character has not improved. Needless to say, I have not had satisfaction.

ARDEL

(frantic but trying to sound tough)
I knew it! I knew it was you. They didn't believe me
but I knew.

ANTONIN

Trust in a leader is earned. Too late for that now.

A blade is unsheathed.

ARDEL

I'm unarmed!

ANTONIN

As was I when your assassins came for me. But if you
prefer I can kill you with my bare hands. It will be
much, much slower.

ARDEL

What do you want?

ANTONIN

Justice. For your sister, and for everyone else you've
abused in your unworthy excuse of a life.

Antonin takes a few steps towards Ardel.

ARDEL

Wait! Please!

ANTONIN

This is what it feels like to be vulnerable.

NARRATOR

Antonin placed the edge of his dagger against Ardel's
throat.

ARDEL **GULPS.**

ANTONIN

Some people spend their entire lives at the wrong end
of a blade. Too many of them were put there by you. You
deserve to die.

NARRATOR

Antonin pressed in with his blade, just enough for a
bead of blood to pool against it.

He really milks this moment.

ANTONIN

Do you wish to live?

ARDEL

(faint)
...Y-y-yes?

ANTONIN

What was that?

ARDEL

(starting to cry)
Yes!

ANTONIN

There's a decree on your desk. It confesses your crimes, abdicates your regency, surrenders your lands and titles to your sister, forfeits your protection under the law, and begs Galadon and your subjects for mercy. Put your mark and seal upon it, and I'll spare your life. Even give you until dawn before I leave it for the deputy castellan.

ARDEL

My lands. That's what you were after all along. My sister's missing. Her inheritance will pass to her husband. You *did* help her escape!

ANTONIN

I didn't. But I'm glad she's rid of you. I only wish she were here to benefit from her birthright.

ARDEL

I suppose you think yourself a saint for robbing me of my lands.

ANTONIN

I think myself beyond judgment from the likes of you. Now I'm going to begin counting. When I reach ten, either your seal or your blood will be on that decree. One.

ARDEL **SHRIEKS.**

ANTONIN

Two.

As a pen scratches paper, we fade out...

7 EXT. GREY FOX TAVERN - DAY

7

We hear a late morning village crowd going about their business.

We're tracking two sets of footsteps.

YELLOWYYN

You think she'd go back to the Grey Fox?

REGAN

As far as she knows, we're still staying there. I think - I HOPE - she's smart enough not to just walk back in. But I don't know where else to start looking.

NARRATOR

We rejoin Regan and Yllowyyn, as they search for Nia. She was, as you recall, not where her Queen had expected her to be, earlier that morning.

YELLOWYYN

With respect, Your Grace, I think she's more clever than you sometimes give her credit for.

REGAN

Clever's one thing. Staying hidden in this city's another. Can you get up high and check out this square?

YELLOWYYN

I can.

8 NEARBY PUBLIC SQUARE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

8

NARRATOR

Not very far away at all - on the opposite side of the small public square from the Grey Fox tavern - Nia ambled nervously between various merchant stalls, neither staying in constant motion, nor stopping for long at any one.

A beat passes of just street sounds and Nia's footsteps.

Another dead beat.

WE PROBABLY HEAR NIA **SIGH** FROM TIME TO TIME DURING THIS.

Then...

A loud, firecracker-like POP!

...Followed by some gasps of surprise from the crowd...

And then, strangely, some splattering fruit.

NARRATOR

Nia looked across the square to see, oddly, a cascade of fruit, thrown up in a cloud of smoke from a vendor's cart and then dashed against the cobblestones. But before she had time to make sense of this...

A clay pot shatters at our feet, followed by a hiss of rapidly spreading smoke.

NARRATOR

...she was engulfed in a cloud of thick and pungent smoke.

NIA **COUGHS.**

NARRATOR

In light of this, she was not entirely shocked to feel someone grab her arm barely a moment later.

REGAN

Cover your mouth, we gotta move fast.

NIA

(still coughing a bit)
We're being watched.

REGAN

Oh you caught that, huh?

RY'Y

(shouts - very distant but has to be audible)
It's not too late, Yllowyyn!

NARRATOR

Regan was visibly jolted by the distant sound of Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's voice.

9 NEARBY CLOCK TOWER

9

We're above the crowd sounds but dead tight on Ry'y.

(She shouts to be heard.)

RY'Y

It's never too late to return to your true home!

NARRATOR

The Lord Commander was perched in a nearby tower, shouting down over the square and certain that Yllowwyn was hidden somewhere within earshot.

RY'Y

Put the thief dog down for me, and all is forgiven!

FLY BACK TO:

10 PUBLIC SQUARE

10

REGAN

Gods dammit, what the fuck is she doing here? We gotta fucking move.

REGAN **STRAINS.**

We hear a metal grate slid over stone.

REGAN

Little hop, then some water.
(*impatient*)
Go, go, go!

We hear one set of feet splash into shallow water, followed shortly by a second. The metal grate gets pulled into place.

11 INT. ARMSTRUNGARD SEWERS - CONTINUOUS

11

Two sets of feet slosh quickly through shallow water - jogging.

(Regan keeps her voice low but is pissed. Nia matches her volume. They are both moving quickly and out of breath.)

REGAN

What the fuck, Nia? I turn my back for thirty minutes, and you don't just run off - you manage to get made by Ry'y lo-shittin'-Th'yyt.

NIA

I'll explain when we're back with our friends.

REGAN

Yes you will. *If* we get back. Keep moving.

Another set of footsteps approaches from our flank.

Regan levels a crossbow in that direction.

REGAN'S **BREATH CATCHES** FOR A SPLIT-SECOND.

REGAN

Hold it!

Approaching footsteps stop.

YELLOWYYN

It's me!

REGAN

Just you?

YELLOWYYN

(stung by the implication)
Yes, of course just me!

REGAN

Come out slow.

As footsteps slowly resume approaching.

NIA

(disappointed admonishment)
Your Grace...

REGAN

You heard what Ry'y lo-Th'yyt said.

NIA

She intends to sow discord between us. Do not let her succeed.

The approaching footsteps come to a stop a few feet away from us.

REGAN

We good?

YELLOWYYN

Well, you've a bolt aimed at my heart...

A deeply uncomfortable moment passes by.

Finally Regan lowers and holsters her crossbow.

YELLOWYYN

I'm "good," Your Grace. Are you?

REGAN

We gotta move. I'll bring up the rear.

Three sets of footsteps depart.

12 INT. WHISKEY CHURCH - LATER

12

We hear the jovial sounds of a pub, only this space is more echoey than most pubs. Almost like it's a...church. Get it?

BRENNEN

Er...living a modest and austere life in service to Galadon.

JEN

For you, Brennen, I'm gonna call that a jack.

BILLY

Nice one, babe.

JEN

My turn.

NARRATOR

Brennen and his three youngest traveling partners were in the basement of the ertswhile church turned drinking establishment.

We hear a card get drawn.

JEN

Okay, let's do...clearance rack accessories.

NELSON

Are you sure you don't wanna do undead abominations that may *appear beside us at any moment*? You know, because we're hanging out *around a bunch of coffins*? In a world where we know that necromancy for sure exists.

JEN

(why'd you have to make it awkward)

Nelson...we said we weren't gonna talk about that.

(beat)

Okay. Clearance rack accessories.

NELSON

Uhhhh Jen? Your hair is moving. Are you charging up some magic?

NARRATOR

Jen placed a hand behind her head and, despite her profound desire not to, felt an undeniable movement of stale air coming from a coffin.

JEN

(not even convincing herself)
Old buildings are usually pretty drafty.

Some creaks and groans come from the coffin.

BILLY

Probably just the...wood settling? That's a thing, right?

Then there are three knocks from the coffin.

NELSON

Gah!

JEN

Ack!

BRENNEN

Stand back!

Everyone jumps up from their seats and some weapons are drawn.

NARRATOR

The lid of the coffin began to jitter and shake, as our heroes looked on in stunned horror.

We hear some wood rumbling.

NARRATOR

Until finally it popped loose.

Some hinges break as a big slab of wood crashes to the floor.

NARRATOR

By now, the other patrons of the pub had begun to notice the spectacle of the open coffin, and of the hooded woman climbing out of it.

We hear a few gasps of shock from the crowd, which then goes silent - stunned as well.

REGAN

Knock knock knock means help me out, dipshits.

NARRATOR

But Regan was quickly aware of the dozens of eyes trained on her.

A beat for her to think.

REGAN

(what are you looking at!?)

What? Me and the bouncer used to fuck and I didn't feel like chit chat.

(to her party)

I gotta check the area. Get ready to split real quick if I say. Yllowyyn! Need your eyes.

She starts walking.

NARRATOR

And if the crowd was shocked by the rude-mouthed vagabond emerging from the coffin, you can only imagine what they thought of the finely-armored Elf who followed after her.

REGAN

(over her shoulder)

And help Nia out of there.

NARRATOR

And thus did a thief, an Elf, and a cleric enter the tavern.

(long pause)

What are you--Oh, yes, I see. That sentence construction is typically the beginning of a joke in your tongue. No joke here, I'm afraid. Perhaps I'll think of something later. No promises. Moving right along.

13 INT. WHISKEY CHURCH - BELL TOWER - CONTINUOUS

13

Footsteps approach us on stairs.

NARRATOR

Regan and Yllowyyn ascended the tower that had held bells, back when the Whiskey Church was a church.

REGAN

We got any friends tagging along?

YLLOWYYN

None to the west...none to the south...none to the-- wait. Dead ahead north, three hundred yards. Can you see them?

REGAN

No.

YELLOWYYN

They're walking this way.

REGAN

How fast - do we need to bail?

He doesn't respond.

REGAN

Yllowyyn.

YELLOWYYN

(relief)

No. They've turned.

REGAN

You sure?

YELLOWYYN

They're going the other way. No one to the east either.

NARRATOR

Regan made no attempt to hide her scanning of the Elf's eyes.

REGAN

(convinced juuuuuuust enough)

All right.

14 INT. WHISKEY CHURCH - PRIVATE ROOM - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

14

NARRATOR

While news that these "friends" were no longer on their tails provided a hair's respite, it did nothing to quell Regan's rage that they were in said predicament in the first place.

Regan storms into the room.

REGAN

What the fuck Nia?! Shit for brains of me to expect a bunch of children to use theirs, but I expected more of you!

NARRATOR

Indeed, Regan stormed in in such a fury that she didn't initially notice the group huddled around Nia.

NIA

(tail end of a cry, switches to Cockney)
They have my mum and dad.

MUDDLED KNEE JERK **RESPONSES FROM THE PARTY:** "HUH?" "WHAT?"
"SHIT" "OH NO."

NIA

(tries to collect herself)
They are holding my parents captive in exchange for you.

NARRATOR

Where she might otherwise have instantaneously rebuffed, Regan - surprised herself by the impact of her comrade's state - stumbled to respond in a way that was both empathetic and expedient.

REGAN

Gah. Nia. FUCK. SHIT.

NARRATOR

This was...unfamiliar territory for her as a leader.

REGAN

Gods dammit.
(takes a breath, but blurts out..)
Why didn't you tell me you had parents?

NIA

Everyone has parents!

JEN

(incredulous)
Seriously?

REGAN

Not where I'm from.
(something clicks)
Wait. Hey. Hey! Look at me. Did you set me up in that square?

NIA

(still collecting herself)
No!

JEN

Oh, Jesus, Regan.

NIA

I wouldn't do that.

JEN

Can we take a time out here?

REGAN

Did you know they were on to you?

NIA
I suspected they might be.

REGAN
And you still tried to meet me. Some people might call that a fucking setup.

JEN
Seriously, before we say things we can't take back.

NIA
I would have warned you if I'd had the chance!

REGAN
We'd be dead right now if we'd waited for your chance. Only reason we got out is 'cause Yllowwyn made the lookouts a second before they made him.

NIA
And what was I supposed to do? Throw myself off a bridge?

REGAN
Look.
(calms herself down)
You did the best you could with the cards you had. I get it. I'm just saying - yours ain't the only life on the line here.

NIA
Yes. As I said, my parents are in danger. And I have the beginnings of a plan to get them back.

NELSON
(no hesitation)
We're in.

JEN
Totally.

BILLY
Right on.

NARRATOR
In what I'm told is a Pennsylvanian gesture of camaraderie, our three young friends held an arm out towards each other so that one of each of their hands was held stacked.

Beat.

NARRATOR
And then, after a moment passed, they looked around the table, expecting others to do the same. For their part, Brennen and Yllowwyn shot glances to their Queen, who was frustratingly blank. The Elf and the Man both
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

reached out their hands, but Regan - with a wince of regret - grabbed their wrists to stop them.

REGAN

Nia...Gods, I'm sorry. I really fucking am. But we can't do it.

NIA

As I said, I have the beginnings of a plan. If you'll--

REGAN

(exasperated)

--Nia, No offense - I know you're smart and shit - but have you planned many reverse kidnappings before?

NIA

I smuggled three people out from under the noses of a veteran knight and a master thief.

NELSON

Gotcha there.

REGAN

All right, let me explain this to you. If we--

NIA

(with conviction we've never seen before)

--No let me explain this to you. With respect, Your Grace. They are my parents. They raised me, made me who I am. Perhaps the pain of their loss is not something you can conceive of, but--

REGAN

(flares)

--HEY! I know what it's like to lose family! Don't you dare say otherwise.

NIA

(still strong)

I am sorry to hear that, but then surely you understand that to abandon them to torture and death - after my actions put them in danger to begin with - would be unlivable. So I *will* find a way to rescue them. Because I must. There is no choice here.

(Regroups)

Now. Once again, I have the beginnings of a plan but it cannot be carried out alone. If you value me, or any of my contributions to your endeavors so far, you will help me with the rest of it. If not, then I shall depart your company forever, and find a way to do it alone.

BRENNEN

We won't let that happen, Nia.

A pause. It's not clear what Brennen's implying...

REGAN

I hear what you're saying, okay? This is your hill to die on? I can respect that. You wanna call in your favors here? Fair enough, you've earned 'em. But you've gotta look everyone at this table in the eyes and tell them you'll trade their lives for your parents'. Because that is without a doubt the most likely outcome. Are you willing to do that?

NARRATOR

Nia looked around the table at a group of friends - whom trial and trauma and triumph had bonded into a family of its own sort - and took a deep breath. But before she could speak...

JEN

Oh come on, I'm sure we can think of something.

REGAN

No. Don't bail her out by deluding yourselves. That doesn't help anybody.

NELSON

We've made a way this far, together...

BILLY

Yeah I mean aren't we even gonna try? Aren't you supposed to be like the greatest thief ever or some shit?

REGAN

Don't forget assassin and watch your tone accordingly.

NIA

Your Grace, can you at least explain to us what exactly makes it more dangerous than anything we've done before?

REGAN

Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's gonna control the when, where, and how of this. And she's gonna have all her best knights with her. Shit's gonna be locked down tight.

NIA

And what if my plan would allow us to choose the time and location.

REGAN

How's that?

NIA

(kinda proud of herself)

Because...in my fear and abject desperation, I revealed to the Lord Commander where the Thief Queen Aeron Regan would be in three day's time.

REGAN

(intrigued)

And where will the Thief Queen Aeron Regan be in three day's time?

NIA

Well, it's the Feast of the Harvest Moon, so naturally, you'll be stealing the grand--

REGAN

(Finishing her sentence, maybe...impressed?)

--The grand purse from the horse race.

NIA

I figured large crowds, fast horses...

REGAN

(nodding along)

And our turf. ...But if I'm Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, I leave your parents somewhere safe and show up to the race in full force.

NIA

That's why I was very insistent about the next part.

QUICK FLASHBACK WHOOSH TO:

15 INT. MONASTERY - EARLIER

15

NIA

(crying, generally putting on a pretty good show)

To save my parents, yes I will give you my comrades. Regan will wear a disguise of course. I shall kiss her on the cheek to show you who she is.

RY'Y

That will be acceptable.

NIA

(swallowing her crocodile tears)

But if I'm to do this, I must ask that I see them first. To know they are safe.

RY'Y

I assure you, you will be reunited with them the moment I have the others.

NIA

Oh, Lord Commander. Let us be honest with each other. Save for my parents, you've absolutely no reason to trust me. But likewise, I've no reason to trust you. If I do not see my parents alive and well at the race, I'll be forced to assume--
(stifles another big sob)
 --assume you've already killed them. And then I will give you *nothing!*

Beat.

RY'Y

(through gritted teeth)
 Very well.

WHOOSH BACK TO:

16 WHISKEY CHURCH

16

NARRATOR

The tugging at the corner of Regan's mouth and eyes was *almost* permitted to turn into grin.

REGAN

(Okay, she's definitely impressed)
 That's not bad, Nia. Really. You upgraded our chances from complete suicide to just bugfuck crazy. Now personally, I've done bugfuck crazy before. For a big enough take. But I can't make that call for anyone--

BILLY

--Let's do this shit.

JEN

Hell yeah.

NELSON

We got you, Nia.

YELLOWYYN

Honor requires it.

BRENNEN

Tell me who needs killing.

Beat.

REGAN

Well that's that, then. Somebody go talk to the lovebirds. This involves them too.

BRENNEN

I'd not put promises in her mouth, but the lady Arlene was once known as a fine rider.

YELLOWYIN

To *that*, I can attest.

REGAN

Good. Let's see what she's up for. And get me something to draw on. We got three days to plan and we're gonna need all of them.

END OF PART TWO.

PART THREE:

17 EXT. PINEMARCH HARBOR - EVENING

17

There's a body of water to one side of us, and a busy-ish town to the other.

NARRATOR

Pinemarch is a harbor town on the southern coast of Iorden. It is so named because it marks the point south of which no trees will grow.

The wind whips around a bit.

NARRATOR

Sussmann is a dock worker who lives near Pinemarch. He is so named because it is a common moniker in those parts, and his parents were uncreative. We join Sussmann now, as he peers out into the harbor, in the slim hopes of spotting some vessel whose crew might pay him to help unload it - it had been a slow year - and shivers against the arctic wind.

Sussmann sucks in a **chilly breath**.

Some splashing approaches.

NARRATOR

Sussmann's heart lifted for a moment as he saw a bow break the fog, and then quickly dropped when he realized it was that of a small rowboat.

(beat)

And then it lifted again, ever so slightly, as he realized he recognized this particular boat. At least he'd have the company of friends to look forward to. And maybe a fresh meal.

SUSSMANN

(shouts out to the boat)

Brenda! Rollo! Any luck today?

The rowboat clunks into the docks.

NARRATOR

But as the boat got up close, Sussmann saw not his two friends, but rather a single figure, shrouded head to toe with an ashen, threadbare cloak.

SUSSMANN

Oi! Who are you?

As a reminder: Renault speaks through magic means and FX should reflect that, per 020501.

RENAULT

I could ask you the same thing, my good fellow.

SUSSMANN

What are you doing with my friends' boat?

RENAULT

Your friends insisted on shoehorning their political agendas into a perfectly logical debate about fishing. So I grew frustrated.

SUSSMANN

Frustrated?...Where are they!?

NARRATOR

Sussmann brandished his boat hook in the figure's direction, as one might with a proper polearm. But with a flick of the figure's wrist, the tool was yanked out of its wielder's hands by some unseen force and cast into the sea.

SUSSMANN

Ach!

We hear a whoosh and a splash.

NARRATOR

It was then the figure finally lowered its hood and stepped onto the dock.

Bones clack against wet wood.

SUSSMANN

(horried)

What...what in Selbirin are you?

Scuffling, uneven footsteps retreat.

NARRATOR

Sussmann staggered back from the rotted mask of death which now shambled towards him.

RENAULT

I am but a humble traveler, who seeks that which treachery took from me.

SUSSMANN

Are you the jolly farmer?

RENAULT

I'm looking for a rather tall fellow, not over-clever - the strong silent type this one. He'd be traveling with an old timer in a kilt, whose complexion is not much better than mine. Have you seen them?

SUSSMANN

I've not seen them here. Begone you, and leave our town in peace!

NARRATOR

Sussmann launched himself away from Renault, and sprinted off towards town.

He **screams** as he runs away.

NARRATOR

And Renault calmly followed after him.

18 EXT. PINEMARCH TOWN SQUARE - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

18

We hear the nervous buzz of a riled-up crowd. A few torches crackle.

NARRATOR

As Renault rounded the corner of the stables into the center of the town, he was met by dozens of the townspeople, all of them brandishing pitchforks or boat hooks, or torches, or whatever other cudgels could be mustered in a hurry.

SUSSMANN

There he is!

The crowd roars in a mix of anger and panic.

RENAULT

Ah, good. You're all in one place.

SUSSMANN

Get back, Demon!

RENAULT

(ignoring him)

I'm looking for two men who were likely traveling together, one would have been very tall. Have they come this way?

SUSSMANN

Come on, lads. If we hold fast together we can drive him back.

NARRATOR

The gathered townsfolk leveled their crude weapons, in a loose imitation of a phalanx. But what they lacked in formal discipline, they made up for in resolve, as they advanced on Renault.

SUSSMANN

Get back, I say! You're not welcome here, fiend.

RENAULT

Well that won't do at all.

NARRATOR

Renault searched his surroundings for any means with which to repel the advance, and across the way from the stables, he saw a modest chapel. Beside the chapel was a small yard filled with a few dozen headstones. Renault raised an arm in the direction of this yard.

We hear a really gross and disturbing magic pad.

NARRATOR

And the world around him seemed to shift, in a most unsettling way.

Off to one side of us, bones begin to rattle and creak and pop.

SUSSMANN

Oh gods help us.

The townsfolk begin to panic.

NARRATOR

The denizens of Pinemarch looked on in horror, as the mortal remains of their kith and kin arose, from what should have been their final rest. Some had already been picked clean by the worms, while others were still recognizable. And none of the living could say which was more terrible.

The undead begin to groan and shamble towards us.

MR. RAWLS

Now just what's going on here?

RENAULT

(caught off guard)
Hmm?

The sound of Renault's spell cuts out abruptly,
as does the groaning of the undead.

NARRATOR

Standing betwixt Renault and the crowd, and flanked by two hired guards, was the mayor of Pinemarch - one Mister Rawls. You've met him before I believe, for he was a frequent patron of the Horse's Head Inn, and badly allergic to pepper.

MR. RAWLS

Well? What's all this commotion?

TOWNSPERSON 1

There's a demon come among us, m'lord!

MR. RAWLS

A demon?

TOWNSPERSON 2

Look at him! And by some dark spell, he's mustered the bodies of the dead to march against us!

RENAULT

Erm...no I haven't.

We hear dozens of bones immediately clatter to the ground.

SUSSMANN

Look at the bones, m'lord!

RENAULT

That's...there was a very small earthquake. The ground shifted.

The crowd reacts with incredulous anger.

RENAULT

It's been known to happen!

SUSSMANN

Will you help us drive him away, m'lord? Summon the Civic Guard from Freehold? Or perhaps a few priests.

MR. RAWLS

Well let's see if it need not come to that.

SUSSMANN

I...LOOK AT HIM!

MR. RAWLS

Now mind those torches, you lot. You're liable to destroy some property if you're not careful.

NARRATOR

And then Rawls turned to Renault with a cordial gesture.

MR. RAWLS

Greetings, Sir. My name's Rawls, and I'm the landlord here. What brings you to my town?

RENAULT

I'm searching for two thieves.

MR. RAWLS

Thieves? Well we can't have that, this is an honest and hardworking town. I'm sure we can help you find the villains.

SUSSMANN

M'lord, he killed two of our friends! And stole their boat to get here!

Angry shouts of agreement.

MR. RAWLS

Is that true?

RENAULT

I did *not* kill them. I did throw them off of the boat. In my defense, I was simply trying to engage them in a civil debate about who should and shouldn't be permitted to benefit from doing certain types of labor. And then they had to go and make it all political, which I find very rude.

MR. RAWLS

Hmmm.

NARRATOR

Rawls looked at the gathered crowd, then back at Renault, then back at the crowd, until finally...

MR. RAWLS

Have a word, lad?

NARRATOR

...He put his arm near - but very carefully not on - Renault's shoulder and beckoned him to step aside.

MR. RAWLS

(furtively)

I'll be honest with you. I quite like the cut of your jib.

RENAULT

My what?

Something rotten cracks off Renault's body and splashes to the ground.

RENAULT

Oh, beg pardon, that's mine.

MR. RAWLS

Not at all, my lad. I mean I like your whole...outlook.

NARRATOR

The muscles which had previously held Renault's jaw in place twitched upwards - in what Rawls could only assume was an attempted grin.

MR. RAWLS

You ask me, everyone around here's become far too political these days.

(we can hear the air quotes)

All this talk of "safe working conditions" and "fair wages." I mean, really...what in Galadon's Green Garden is a wage?

RENAULT

Yes, well, some people cannot resist injecting their agenda into everything they say and do. For instance, the two-timing harlot who--

MR. RAWLS

--Precisely, my lad! Precisely. You've said it just right. Now, suppose I was to help you find the ones you seek. Perhaps you could do me a kindness in return?

RENAULT

What did you have in mind?

MR. RAWLS

There's a sight too many agitators and instigators in my town. I'd like to encourage them to leave, if you take my meaning.

NARRATOR

What had been a half-hearted grin before soon spread to the rest of...what was left of Renault's face.

RENAULT

It would be my pleasure.

MR. RAWLS

Splendid, lad, splendid.

(Turns to the crowd)

All right you lot, listen up! We're going to have a town meeting at dawn. Everyone to attend.

There are grumbles of confusion.

MR. RAWLS

We're going to tell our visitor whatever we might have seen or heard about people passing through here, so he can find who he's after.

The grumbles turn to anger.

SUSSMANN

But he's a murderer!

The crowd shouts their agreement.

MR. RAWLS

Now, now. You'll have a chance in the meeting to air all your grievances and have them heard.

SUSSMANN

Who knows what else he'll do before morning?!

MR. RAWLS

Well we haven't lost our ability to resolve disputes like civilized adults have we? I've always prided myself on this town being exceptionally civil under my watch, and I don't plan to change that now. I see no reason not to hear the shambling, malevolent abomination out.

TOWNSPERSON 1

Really? You see no reason?

MR. RAWLS

(to Renault, re: shambling, malevolent)

Erm, no offense.

RENAULT

Oh not at all. I've very thick skin.

Something else gross sloughs off Renault's body.

RENAULT

...In a manner of speaking.

Then, from off right...

FISHERWOMAN

(shivering but fuming)
STOP THAT MONSTER!

The crowd gasps their surprise.

SUSSMANN

Brenda? Rollo! You're alive!

BOATSMAN

(also shivering)
No thanks to him! We'd be drowned and frozen by now if a bit of driftwood hadn't passed us by.

SUSSMANN

I've heard enough. To Selbirin with the Mayor! Let's get him out of our town, lads!

The crowd yells a crude battle cry.

MR. RAWLS

Ah...this is getting out of hand.

RENAULT

Allow me.

We hear a blast of vile, sickly magic.

TOWNSPERSON 1

Ah! Ah! AAHHHHHHHHHHH!

Flesh sizzles and burns.

NARRATOR

The townsfolk saw one of their comrades disintegrate in front of them, as a gob of putrid fluid from Renault's staff caught him squarely in the chest.

Beat.

The crowd screams in panic.

NARRATOR

And that was enough to disperse the crowd.

Footsteps scatter away.

RENAULT

See? They're not so tough when you get down to it.

NARRATOR

And now it was Rawls' turn to fake a smile, as his color drained and his brow perspired.

19 EXT. AN ARMSTRUNGARD INN - BALCONY - VERY LATE NIGHT

19

We hear a few crickets chirp. There might be a few city sounds but they are sporadic and boisterous. The very few people who are still awake are impressively drunk.

A French window-type door opens.

NARRATOR

Jen stepped out onto a small balcony outside the edifice where most of her comrades slept.

JEN

Oh, I'm sorry.

NARRATOR

She was surprised to see Gwen and Arlene, wrapped in each others arms and gazing out onto the city.

JEN

(her voice catches a little - she's been crying)
I didn't mean to...yeah. Sorry.

GWEN

No, it's all right. We were leaving.

We hear the embrace release.

GWEN

...You been crying?

JEN

(tries to make light of it)
Ohh, yeah, ya know. When everything's nice and you're having a good time and you just start crying for no good reason.
(The crying has fully caught up with her by now)
Like ya do.

Gwen and Arlene are at a loss for how to respond.

ARLENE

Why don't we leave you some privacy?

GWEN

Aye, let's. Just, um...we don't hardly know you, but...

ARLENE

(unsure - a huge leap of vulnerability)
I used to cry like that. I still do sometimes. I can't say I fully know why. But it's much less scary now that I...have someone I can be honest with.

NARRATOR

Arlene, still holding Gwen's hand, gave it a gentle squeeze.

ARLENE

I...hope you have that as well. It's...very important I think.

Arlene and Gwen's footsteps recede, and they close the door behind them.

We sit on just the city sounds for a good...

...long...

...while.

DISSOLVE TO:

20 INT. BEDROOM

20

We hear the last embers of a fireplace dying out.

NARRATOR

It was quite some time before Jen willed herself back in from that balcony and into the cot she was sharing with Billy.

Bedsheets rustle.

JEN

(whispers)
Hey, Billy?

BILLY

(half-asleep)
Wassup?

A long, tentative silence.

BILLY

Babe?

Jen hesitates. And then...

JEN
 ...It can wait.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

21 INT. PHILADELPHIA BROWNSTONE - 2003 - DAY

21

WE'RE IN THE LIVING ROOM OF A FAIRLY NICE
 PHILADELPHIA HOME.

ON ONE SIDE OF THE ROOM, A DVD OF A SEVENTIES
 EXPLOITATION FILM PLAYS: WE HEAR A FUNKY
 SOUNDTRACK, AND BAD CANNED SFX OF GUNFIRE AND A
 CAR CHASE.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM, WE HEAR SOMEONE
 TAKING NOTES ON A SHEET OF PAPER.

YOUNG NELSON
 Mom?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE
(waiting for something specific)
 Just onnnne minute, sweetheart.

WE HEAR A REMOTE CLICK AND AND THE DVD STOPS.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE
 Mmm. Almost. Yes, love, what is it?

YOUNG NELSON
(not what he came in for but genuinely interested)
 What are you watching?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE
 It's an old movie that I like to show my students on
 the last day of class.

YOUNG NELSON
 What's it called?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE
(a little wry)
 It's called *Black Harry Saves Thanksgiving*.

YOUNG NELSON
 Is it good?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

It's...complicated. And interesting. Not for you yet.

YOUNG NELSON

Oh.

A beat lost in thought.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

Nelson? What did you want to ask me?

YOUNG NELSON

Do I still have to go to Grandma's next week?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

Yes, sweetheart. Just while your Pop and I are busy with Finals. It's not so bad is it? Grandma's a much better cook than either of us. And you can bring your...Boy Game and your...what was it? Pocket Monsters?

YOUNG NELSON

She makes me come in before dark.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

Yes, well...Grandma's house, Grandma's rules.

YOUNG NELSON

She thinks I'm gonna do fireworks. I'm not gonna do fireworks! I just wanna look at them. And catch fireflies. What's even the point of living in the middle of nowhere if you can't catch fireflies?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

You can go outside during the day.

YOUNG NELSON

But Mom! It's not fair!

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

It's the rules, Nelson.

YOUNG NELSON

We have pictures in the living room from when Pop got arrested!

SHARON LETS OUT A **GOOD-NATURED LAUGH** AT THIS. AT HER OWN EXPENSE AND PLEASED WITH HER CHILD.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

(still chucking)

Let it never be in doubt that you are our son.

(nurturing more than scolding)

Come here, Nelson Malcom Contee.

WE HEAR NELSON WRAPPED UP IN A HUG.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

I love you with my whole heart. Now, to answer your question...First, protesting a racist law and disrespecting your grandmother are very different things. And I think you know that. Second...hmm...

(searching for how to explain)

Grandma grew up in a different time and place.

(Half to self)

...that, admittedly, in some ways, isn't that different than ours...

YOUNG NELSON

Mom...you're mumbling.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

Sorry, dear.

(under her breath again)

The perils of parenting a young black boy without giving him a complex...

YOUNG NELSON

Huh?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

It's...tough to explain. You know how your dad and I have taught you about not talking to strangers.

YOUNG NELSON

(confused)

Yeah...

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

Well...your grandma's concern about you being out after dark is a little bit like that.

YOUNG NELSON

Oh, so she doesn't want me to be taken by a stranger?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

(fumbling)

Well, sort of, except that's not really my point.

(considers)

The simplest way to explain is that grandma, growing up, had to be very, very, extra careful all the time.

YOUNG NELSON

Because of strangers?

PROF SHARON CONTEE

(jolted by irony)

...Well, yes. In her old age, although she still needs to be careful, things aren't as scary for her as they used to be...sometimes - but it doesn't feel any different for her.

(beat, trying to get to the point)

...I'll just say that sometimes the things we learned to keep us safe stop being helpful, well, as helpful, once circumstances sorta change.

(exhausted)

Does that make sense?

YOUNG NELSON

Not really.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

(of course it doesn't)

Well, like I said, we'll talk more once you're back. Until then, be a good boy for grandma, hm? She's had a long life and deserves some peace and quiet. And she loves you very much. As do we.

WE HEAR ANOTHER HUG.

YOUNG NELSON

(muffled in his Mom's arms)

Wait.

YOUNG NELSON

(layered)

You're not supposed to be here.

NELSON

(layered)

You're not supposed to be here.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

(bewildered)

Where did you come from, sweetheart? Are you...Oh my God, you're hurt.

YOUNG GIRL

(intense magical reverb)

My enemy, Nelson, is nearer than you can possibly imagine. And the danger is great. You contain tremendous power, but you must not let it be corrupted. I have given you the clues you need Nelson, but you have not asked the right questions. And now we are running short on time. The enemy will corrupt you.

We hear the breathing of some terrible beast approach us from behind.

NARRATOR

When he felt the hot breath on the back of his neck, Nelson turned around. Though he already knew what he would see.

There's a horrible and other-worldly SCREECH!

NARRATOR

The Nightmare Demon let out a piercing cry. Frozen with fear, Nelson could only raise his hands in front of his face. And he felt the creature wrap its clawed and scaly hand around one of his fingers.

YOUNG GIRL

The enemy seeks to corrupt you. You must refuse to lower thyself. DO NOT LOWER THYSELF!

22 INT. A ROOM IN AN INN - PRE-DAWN

22

NELSON

Ah!

NARRATOR

Nelson bolted upright in the room where he slept, soaked in cold sweat.

NELSON **BREATHES HEAVILY**. WE STAY WITH HIM AS HIS BREATH GRADUALLY SLOWS.

23 INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

23

Light footsteps down a hallway.

A knock on a door.

REGAN

Yeah?

24 INT. REGAN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

24

A door opens.

NARRATOR

Nelson entered the room which Regan had commandeered, to see her very much awake, with a small arsenal spread out on the floor in front of her.

Regan preps weapons for this entire scene unless otherwise noted - we hear swords sharpened, crossbows loaded, flipknives set, vials corked, etc.

REGAN
Can't sleep?

NELSON
I don't like my job in the plan.

REGAN
Okay.
(*beat*)
I guess the polite response is "I'm sorry you feel that way and I appreciate you doing your part anyhow."

NELSON
Why can't Billy watch the baby?

REGAN
Can you lift those satchels over there?

NELSON
(*excited, pleasantly surprised*)
Oh. Yeah, probably!

Some footsteps.

NARRATOR
Nelson walked over as if to demonstrate.

REGAN
Now careful! If you start to pick 'em up, and you can't, and you drop 'em too hard, they'll be mopping us off the walls for weeks.

NELSON
(*a little cowed*)
...Well...there's gotta be something else I can do!

REGAN
You good at rock climbing? Horseback riding? Can you out-shoot an Elf? Got any magical powers you haven't told us about? You wanna get a jockey to try and fuck you?

NELSON
I know things. Stories! I figured out who you were before Brennen told us - before you even knew.

She finally stops with the weapons.

REGAN

Believe me, I remember. And I'm gonna need your smarts later, I'm sure of it. But tomorrow, I--the *team* needs you to wait on a boat with a baby. Okay?

NELSON

And be a hostage.

REGAN

It's the safest place to be on this job.

NELSON

What? How?

REGAN

The rest of us are gonna get shot at. Ren's got no reason to touch you unless we don't hold up our end. And the only way we don't hold up our end on this one is if we're all dead. So worst case scenario, you're still last man standing.

NELSON

This is my fight too, you know? Nia's my friend. And I don't like the Knights of the Wood any more than you.

REGAN

I know that. But on *this one*, this is how you do your part. So...pretty fucking please. Do the rest of us a solid. All right?

NARRATOR

Though Regan looked Nelson in the eyes as she said this, she did not wait for a response before returning to her grim work.

The weapons prep resumes.

25 HALLWAY

25

Footsteps again.

NARRATOR

And so, sensing the impasse, Nelson made his way to where Nia slept.

Footsteps stop.

NARRATOR

But he was intercepted on the threshold by Brennen.

BRENNEN

I'd let her sleep, lad. She's a hard day ahead of her.
(*Aside, maybe more than he should say aloud*)
Perhaps harder than she knows.

NELSON

Yeah. Fine.

26 BACK WHERE WE STARTED

26

A door shuts behind us.

NARRATOR

And as Nelson returned to his room and looked out his window, he abandoned all hope of returning to sleep. For the sun was already beginning to redden the horizon. And today was the day of the race.

END OF PART THREE.

PART FOUR:

A27 EXT. RACETRACK - DAY

A27

A large and excited crowd chatters loudly.

NARRATOR

Now, I know it does not necessarily come easy to your kind to hold several locations in mind at once, given the corporeal limitations of your perception. But you're going to need to, for the duration of the affair to follow.

The morning sun was still low in the sky, and the grass still thick with dew, on the cliffs overlooking Old Armstrong Bay. But already the crowd trickling up from the city was abuzz with excitement.

Near the start - and end - of the race course stood a structure - a cascading slope of wooden benches, ingeniously designed to be put up and taken down as quickly as possible, due to the illicit nature of this event. The location and height of these seats made them hands-down the best available, which is why they were at this moment filled with various vagrants and vagabonds, being paid to hold seats for the wealthiest spectators. When their patrons arrive, these enterprising individuals will of course leave the benches to stand huddled with the other unwashed masses straining for a decent look at the race.

We hear "Main Title Theme from Black Harry Saves Thanksgiving," only this time it's mixed well and played as score.

Amidst this mileu were two very meek and nervous-looking country preachers, flanked conspicuously on either side by two of the best-armed, best-trained Elvish Knights you would ever set eyes on. A few rows behind and above them, keeping keen watch on this peculiar foursome, was - simply put - the highest ranking military officer in all of the so-called civilized realms.

B28 EXT. RACETRACK - UNDER BLEACHERS - SIMULTANEOUS

B28

The same crowd as before is above us and to the right, but heavily muted through thick wood. We probably hear some footfalls above us, resonating through the wood.

To our left are several conversations that more aurally present but hushed and furtive.

NARRATOR

Not far beneath their feet, in the shadows of the raised seats, worked the artisans of those trades which require additional discretion - even at an illicit horse race. Here a boy of seventeen years approached, carrying some satchels with a grace and care that was entirely unlike his usual boisterous presence.

C29 EXT. RACETRACK - PAVILION - SIMULTANEOUS

C29

We cut under a tent - same ambience as the main racetrack scene but filtered ever so slightly.

NARRATOR

Some thirty yards from the the foot of the raised seats - that is, just the race track's width away - was a covered pavilion, in which the racers are permitted to swap their mount and tack once during the race's eleven laps.

To the side of us, a horse snorts.

NARRATOR

Here was one woman of sixteen years, and another woman a few years her elder. Both wore hoods pulled low over their eyes, but the younger was considerably more fidgety than the elder.

(They both speak barely above a whisper.)

REGAN

Stop it.

JEN

I'm not doing anything.

REGAN

This is your job, remember? You do it every day.

JEN

I'm not allowed to be nervous at work?

REGAN

Not when Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's looking for us you're not.

D30 EXT. RACETRACK - WINNER'S CIRCLE - SIMULTANEOUS

D30

We hear the main racetrack scene again, but now their are a few gulls to our far, far right.

NARRATOR

Farther away from the raised seats and towards the cliff's edge, there was a raised platform, which held a large and sturdy chest of oak and iron. It was surrounded by no fewer than a dozen heavily armed and gruff-looking men in tattered goldenrod cloaks. They also had their hoods pulled low.

Not terribly far from them was a woman of not quite thirty years, to whom the seated preachers bore a striking resemblance. She was pacing between the various vendors and merchants nearby, and unlike the girl in the pavilion or the brigands on the platform, she made no effort to hide her face. Or her nervousness.

E31 EXT. CLIFFSIDE - SIMULTANEOUS

E31

NARRATOR

From the platform with the chest, it was less than five yards to the sheer hundred-yard drop that ended on a rocky beach.

We feel like we've fallen off the cliff - not quite in free-fall but not gently either. Fairly quickly, the sounds of the racetrack become more distant, and gulls and lapping waves become more present.

NARRATOR

About three quarters of the way up the cliffside were a slender, golden-haired Elf, and a broad, grey-haired man. There was a rope tied between them as they climbed, and another rope ran down from each of them fastened to something on the beach.

Something metal is hammered into rock.

NARRATOR

The broad man hammered a metal spike with a hook at one end into the rock, and then tugged on it to make sure it was secure. Having done so, he nodded to his comrade.

F32 INT. STABLES - SIMULTANEOUS

F32

We're in a small, musty space. Horses are all around us - snorting, pacing around their stalls, grazing on hay.

NARRATOR

I would of course be remiss not to call your attention to the stables, where riders and their retainers saw to their mounts before the race. Each species fed off the energy of the other, until both were nearly beside themselves with nerves. Poor sweet horses - frequently clever enough to read the emotions of their masters, but rarely clever enough to simply kick things until they are the masters.

But I digress. Anyway, it is in this state of heightened nerves and excitement that one of the riders was approached by a dark-haired woman in peasant's clothes, with a hand on her hip and a glint in her eye.

JOCKEY

Help you, miss?

GWEN

(extremely flirty)
Aye. Believe you can.

33 EXT. RED REAVER - SIMULTANEOUS

33

We're near to - but not inside - a large creaky ship.

NARRATOR

And finally of course, there was the ocean vessel anchored somewhere nearby. Its sails were very intentionally concealed at present but I can tell you that they were blood-red. And on this ship a boy of sixteen years cradled an infant with eyes so light a shade of brown that some might call them orange. But there's not much for me to tell you about this place. At least, not right now.

B34 EXT. RACETRACK - UNDER BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

B34

All the conversations we overhear in this section should be panned.

SEX WORKER 1

(shouts to a passerby)

Hey stud. Why don't you come over here and tell me how you like it.

SEX WORKER 2

Say again dear?

(beat, then...tries to play it cool)

Oh. Ah, right, sure, sure. That's...extra though.

NARRATOR

Under the seats, it grew crowded. Far too crowded, in fact, for the boy with the satchels to do what he needed. He looked around, wracking his mind for a solution.

F35 EXT. BEHIND STABLES - CONTINUOUS

F35

Some footsteps sneak towards us.

JOCKEY

(impatient)

So is this happening or what?

GWEN

Hold your horses--Heh. Get it? Just need a quick freshen-up.

JOCKEY

I ain't got much time. The race is about to start.

GWEN

Just one question. Which perfume d'you like better? Rosewater...or ether?

JOCKEY

Ether? I never--

He's muffled mid sentence and very quickly trails off.

NARRATOR

As Gwen held a dampened rag over the short man's mouth, he rapidly crumpled into a useless heap. And she quickly set to disrobing and then binding him.

We hear some clothing move around.

A36 EXT. RACETRACK - CONTINUOUS

A36

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Do you see your daughter? Point her out to us.

NARRATOR

In the seats beside the race track, the two preachers remained stolidly silent, their gazes fixed straight ahead.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Excuse me.

(beat)

Your better is speaking to you.

MILDRED

Ow! Don't you pinch me!

We hear a loud and furious slap!

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

(fuming)

Mem-rhypoas!

BEN

(cautioning)

Milly!

MILDRED

She pinched me!

RY'Y

Major! Mind your temper. I see her. Twenty yards south of the winner's circle. See?

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Has she signaled to us?

RY'Y

Not yet.

NARRATOR

Major Zyka'ad unsheathed a diminutive and discreet dagger and held it close to the Reverend Mildred's side.

A very small knife is unsheathed.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Lest you forget yourself again.

NARRATOR

Mildred squeezed Ben's hand as his jaw clenched in rage.

RY'Y

Patience, Major.

NARRATOR

Yet even as Ry'y spoke thus, she was fidgeting with several of the myriad weapons on her belt.

E37 EXT. CLIFFSIDE - CONTINUOUS

E37

NARRATOR

But the first serious mishap of the day happened along the cliffside.

Brennen and Yllowwyn are climbing this whole time, so they **strain** accordingly.

YLLOWYYN

Do you think we're high enough?

BRENNEN

Ten more yards should do it.

A beat as Brennen **hoists himself up** once more.

BRENNEN

Good thing, too. We're nearly out of--Yah!

Some rock breaks loose and cascades down the cliff.

We hear rope zip through a loop for a split second and then catch and pull.

YLLOWYYN

Ach!

Yllowwyn's shoes scuff on rock.

YLLOWYYN

Are you all right?

Brennen is a little more distant than he was before.

BRENNEN

(breathing hard)

Aye. I'm all right. Damned bastard popped right off.
Hold still while I head back up.

We hear him climb under narration.

NARRATOR

What had just happened was a very common type of mishap in tandem climbing. One climber relied on a handhold that proved faulty, and fell. But, tethered as he was to his partner with a rudimentary pulley between them, he merely fell a few yards and yanked his partner upwards, rather than meeting a very messy death. Indeed, this is routine and expected - precisely what this type of climbing is prepared to handle.

Less expected, however, was the jagged rock between Yllowynn and the pulley, on which the rope had caught. And worse, Brennen and Yllowynn did not see it, even as their rope began to fray.

We hear a rope straining.

B38 EXT. RACETRACK - UNDER BLEACHERS

B38

All around is a swirling cacophony of lewd propositions - whispered, but like...not THAT whispered.

BILLY

(not subtle)

All right, here we go. World's oldest profession.
Beautiful day for it.

(beat)

Not a cop. Am for sure definitely not a cop. If I was a cop I'd have to tell you.

NARRATOR

Everyone around the boy turned and stared.

All the conversations stop.

NARRATOR

They considered him carefully...

A moment passes.

NARRATOR

...And then departed to ply their trade elsewhere.

BILLY BREATHES A **SIGH OF RELIEF.**

NARRATOR

Very, VERY, carefully, the boy set his satchels down and opened them.

F39 INT. STABLES

F39

Two footsteps on hay rapidly come to a stop.

NARRATOR

Those in the stable turned to see the rider who had just entered. This rider was dressed just like the one who recently left the stable, but was of a wider and decidedly more womanly stature. Her entire face but for the eyes was concealed beneath a cloth mask - a common enough precaution against the dust of a horse race. But the riders stared at her regardless, and she froze in their collective gaze.

ARLENE

(muffled through cloth, and VERY nervous)
Good morning. Oh, yes, sorry.

Some cloth shifts.

ARLENE

(no longer muffled but still very nervous)
...Last...minute...substitution?

A long and quiet moment - not unlike that between Billy and the sex workers - passes.

NARRATOR

And then the other riders - as if remembering it was none of their business anyway - shrugged and returned to their tasks.

A40 EXT. RACETRACK

A40

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

She's still not hailed us.

RY'Y

I know.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Is it possible she means to mislead us?

RY'Y

Of course it is. If she's not hailed us before the riders are called, we shall remind her of the stakes.

NARRATOR

A very worried look passed between Mildred and Ben.

E41 EXT. CLIFFSIDE

E41

A rope continues to creak and strain. Below us are slow and deliberate climbing sounds.

BRENNEN

In some ways, it's easier the second time. One is more tired, but one knows the route.

YELLOWYYN

You'd better hurry. They'll be calling the riders soon.

NARRATOR

Despite the difference in whether and how they chose to acknowledge it out loud, both climbers were keenly aware of what was at stake. If they were to fail at their assigned task, several of their comrades - including their leader - would surely die.

BRENNEN

A few easy ones here...

Climbing sounds speed up for a short while...

NARRATOR

And in the Elf's restlessness while he waited for his partner to climb back to his level, his eyes began to wander. They found an Elven frigate patrolling the bay - don't worry, the Red Reaver was well-concealed in a hidden cove. But as Yllowyyn's keen eyes focused on the warship - so much like the toys he played with and dreamt about as a child...

This hangs for just a moment.

As it does, the climbing sounds come to a stop.

BRENNEN

One more big jump.
(beat, then, to get his attention...)
Yllowyyn!

YELLOWYYN

(remembers himself)
Yes? I'm ready!

BRENNEN

All right.

The rope creaks again...

BRENNEN

Here we--

--The rope SNAPS!

NARRATOR

The rope between them snapped! It was only thanks to truly super-human reflexes and grace that Yllowyyn was able to leap down to a rock below and grab the now tattered rope before it fell.

YLLOWYYN

(wind knocked out)

Oof! I've got you, Sir Brennen.

BRENNEN

(reining in panic)

I've no holds within reach.

NARRATOR

He tried for one anyway...

BRENNEN **STRAINS.**

BRENNEN

Gah!

NARRATOR

...And almost lost his very tenuous hold on the rope.

Some more rocks careen down below us.

BRENNEN

(still reining in panic but not as well now)

You'll need to pull me up a wee bit.

YLLOWYYN

Just hold on!

YLLOWYYN SUCKS IN A **BIG BREATH.**

We drop into a very introspective sound-space for Yllowyyn. Ambience quiets and muffles and score becomes distorted.

NARRATOR

And as Yllowyyn took a steadying breath to summon his strength, his eyes flicked once more to the Elven warship. As you're already quite aware, if he was to fail at his assigned task, several of his comrades - including their leader - would surely die. I'm sure

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

you've had thoughts before, which you wished would leave you be but simply refused to?

RY'Y

(Flashback)

It's not too late, Yllowyyn! It's never too late to return to your true home!

NARRATOR

I should note, in passing, that the distance to this frigate was just about swimmable for a healthy young Elf.

We sit on this beat.

Waiting.

And waiting.

YLLOWYYN **GROANS** AND **GRUNTS** AND **STRAINS** AND THEN...

YLLOWYYN

Hyah!

Score and ambience slam back in.

BRENNEN

I've got it!

YLLOWYYN

Good! Just one more!

BRENNEN **HEAVES** ONE LAST TIME AND THEN **LAUGHS** WITH RELIEF.

YLLOWYYN

Hold still I'll tie you back on.

We hear rope fastening.

NARRATOR

As the Elf re-tethered himself to his climbing partner, that partner gave him a warm and hearty clap on the back.

Brennen practically pounds on Yllowyyn's back.

BRENNEN

Well done, Yllowyyn. Well done. I thought I'd seen my last sunrise for sure.

YLLOWYYN

Let's try not to repeat that, shall we?

BRENNEN

Come, let's finish what we started.

YELLOWYIN

There's less rope now, so we'll need to stay closer
tog--

--In the distance, over by the racetrack, we hear a HUNTING HORN.

BRENNEN
Come on.

NARRATOR
And thus did they return to their assigned task with a renewed sense of urgency.

B42 EXT. RACETRACK - UNDER BLEACHERS

B42

We hear the same horn from our new sonic vantage point.

NARRATOR
Under the bleachers, Billy removed several cloth sacks from his satchels. They were sticky with some kind of grease. He scanned the wooden beams that held up the seats, and then headed straight for one of the thickest. He affixed one sack to its center.

F43 INT. STABLES

F43

The same horn again.

CRIER
Riders to your gates! All riders to your gates!

About a dozen horses begin trotting away from us.

GWEN
Be safe, love.

ARLENE
And you, my treasure. I'll see you on the ship.

GWEN
You'd damn well better.

They **kiss** very quickly.

One last horse trots away.

A44 EXT. RACETRACK

A44

One last time we hear the horn. We maybe even catch a faint echo of the **Crier** on the wind.

RY'Y

(out of patience)
That's it. Stand them up.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

She's hailing us, Th'ayyd.

RY'Y

Hm. Indeed she is.

NARRATOR

Ry'y lo-Th'yyt returned a distant wave across the track.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

What's she doing?

RY'Y

Shielding her eyes it seems. Perhaps she can't see them. Hmm.

A moment while Ry'y considers. ("Is this a trick?")

RY'Y

(reluctantly)
So be it. Stand them up.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

You heard her. On your feet.
(beat)
Stand I said.

We hear some intentionally slow shuffling around.

RY'Y

She's waved again. She sees.

C45 INT. RACETRACK - PAVILION

C45

REGAN

You got 'em?

JEN
Yeah I saw. You good?

REGAN
Got 'em.

JEN
God, Nia looks just like her Mom. Dad's eyes though.

REGAN
I count six Elves besides Ry'y. Two with Nia's parents and four nearby.

JEN
Yeah, same.

Beat.

REGAN
(a reminder)
Nice weather we're having today, ain't it? Unseasonably clear.

JEN
Right.

Jen's magic pad fades in...

E46 EXT. CLIFFSIDE

E46

On the cliffside, we hear hammering.

NARRATOR
And as a gentle fog began crawling in from the sea, up the cliffside, Yllowynn was fastening a rather large support pole into the rock.

BRENNEN
You'll have to climb over towards me so I can reach. We can't get far apart enough on this rope.

YlLOWYYN
Blast it all.

Hammering quickens for a moment, and then stops.

YlLOWYYN **PULLS HARD** ON SOMETHING.

YlLOWYYN
This one's secure. I'm heading your way.

BRENNEN

Look. The fog.

YELLOWYYN

Jen. We haven't much time.

B47 EXT. RACETRACK - UNDER BLEACHERS

B47

NARRATOR

Under the seats, Billy had already attached each of eight cloth sacks to the eight largest beams. Next he removed a glass bottle from a satchel. Eight lengths of cord ran from this bottle to as many sacks. He placed the bottle on the ground, with his foot nearby. And waited.

F48 EXT. RACETRACK - STARTING GATE

F48

We're on the back of a trotting horse,
surrounded by a dozen other trotting horses.

As we pass some threshold, the large buzzing
crowd erupts into a roar.

NARRATOR

As Arlene saw and heard the size of the crowd surrounding the racetrack, her eyes widened. Though her face was already covered, she fidgeted with her mask, trying to pull it even higher.

A49 EXT. RACETRACK

A49

The Elves now have to **shout** over the roaring crowd.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

She's still not moving. What is she waiting for?

RY'Y

Keep your eyes open, Major. I mistrust this.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Should I send one of the sergeants over?

RY'Y

Yes.

NARRATOR

Major Zyka'ad caught the eye of one of her cohort and motioned him towards the Winner's Circle.

D50 EXT. RACETRACK - WINNER'S CIRCLE

D50

NARRATOR

And over by the Winner's Circle, Nia noticed the Elf walking towards her with purpose. She looked towards the gruff men near the chest. She tried to take deep breaths, which nevertheless caught in her quivering jaw and came out shallow and strained.

E51 EXT. CLIFFSIDE

E51

We hear rushed hammering.

YELLOWYYN

How many nails is that?

BRENNEN

Three more to go.

And then in the distance, a horn blows again.

BRENNEN

Galadon help us.

The speed of the hammering intensifies.

52 EXT. RACETRACK - STARTING GATE

52

We almost feel the breath of snorting horses in our ears.

CRIER

Riders to your marks!

The horn blows again.

CRIER

Riders get ready!

The horn blows louder and in a different tone.

Almost a split second even before the horn, the horses explode into mad gallops!

The crowd erupts into its loudest cheers yet.

B53 EXT. RACETRACK - UNDER BLEACHERS

B53

NARRATOR

At the sound of the third horn, Billy brought his heel down hard on the bottle.

Glass shatters.

NARRATOR

He watched intently as a puddle leaked onto the ground.

Nothing for a moment.

NARRATOR

And then the puddle began to smoke. And finally, to his obvious relief, the ends of all the cords ignited.

We hear eight fuses light in quick succession and being crawling away from us.

NARRATOR

As soon as they did, he took off at a sprint.

Billy runs away.

D54 EXT. RACETRACK - WINNER'S CIRCLE

D54

NARRATOR

And as Billy ran, Nia set off walking towards the chest and its stewards.

Footsteps. A rush of blood in our ears.

NARRATOR

Her heart was beating just as fast or faster than the sprinting young man's.

The footsteps come to a halt.

Horses gallop past us.

NARRATOR

Just as the horses blew by the Winner's Circle, a very frightened Nia got close enough to the chest to attract
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

the attention of one of the gangsters guarding it. A particularly short one, as it happened.

GANGSTER

(not very helpful)

Help you?

A switchblade springs open.

NIA

(tries to hold it together)

Galadon's mercy be upon you.

NARRATOR

And as tears moistened her eyes, she quickly leaned in to kiss this short brigand on the cheek.

GANGSTER

Hey, who the fuck are you, la--

--Crossbow bolts fly in from multiple directions at once and just shish-kebab this dude.

NIA LETS OUT AN **ANGUISHED CRY**.

Some of the crowd notices and begins to scream as well.

NARRATOR

As the fallen knave's shocked comrades looked around for the assailants, one of them squared on Nia and drew his sword.

A sword is unsheathed, and immediately another crossbow is fired.

NARRATOR

But this one was immediately shot by the Sergeant that Major Zyka'ad had sent over. Now seeing at least one of their foes, the band of rogues turned to the Elf Knight, some with bows.

A hail of crossbow bolts flies in and strikes fleshy targets all around us.

NARRATOR

But Ry'y's many retainers made short work of these.

The crowd is panicking now.

NARRATOR

Of course, once the bolts were set in flight - which the Elves could have always chosen not to do - it was inevitable that they would strike some bystanders in the crowd.

NIA IS SCREAMING OUT A PRETTY **CONSTANT STREAM OF IMPOTENT PROTESTATIONS**.

NARRATOR

It is in this tumult, that the Elf nearest the Winner's Circle finally got a look at the brigand doomed by a kiss.

ELF SERGEANT

(shouting)

It's not her! It's a trick!

55 EXT. RACETRACK

55

RY'Y

Major! Kill them!

All SFX and ambience ramp down to SLOW MOTION.

NARRATOR

Now several things happened all at once here.

Hoofbeats thunder.

NARRATOR

One: The horses rounded the last turn into the completion of their first lap.

Two blades are unsheathed.

NARRATOR

Two: The Elves nearest the two preachers drew and raised blades over them.

A repeating crossbow cocks and readies.

NARRATOR

Three: The Elf nearest Nia squared on her and raised his crossbow.

An arrow buries in flesh, followed closely by a throwing axe.

NARRATOR

But four: This Elf's life was ended as Brennen and Yllowyyn emerged from the cliffside and fog and entered the fray. Then five: a half dozen hidden Elves took aim at the two new combatants, and should have had them dead-to-rights, if not for Six. And this is the critical one.

A brief tense pause...

Eight explosions ring out, shattering wood to splinters.

SFX and ambience slams back to real time, as people and horses scream.

NARRATOR

The cloth sacks left by Billy expelled air and heat so rapidly that they ripped the beams under the seats to shreds.

Wood creaks and groans very badly.

NARRATOR

The raised seats could no longer hold the weight of their occupants. Within seconds, they gave way entirely.

The seats collapse!

NARRATOR

Meanwhile, the sound of this rapid demolition caught the attention of the Elves near the Winner's Circle...

A bow is shot twice and an axe is thrown.

NARRATOR

...Giving Brennen and Yllowyyn the chance to kill three of their opponents and then dive to cover behind the sturdy prize chest.

After the chaos of the wreck settles, there is a long moment of bruised and confused people coughing and moaning.

NARRATOR

And back over by the seats - just as Major Zyka'ad and her peer were returning to their senses - from out of the the fog and smoke, came flying a human-shaped blur, nimble as it was furious.

A knife plunges into a neck, and an artery
sprays onto the dusty ground.

REGAN

(an exertive grunt more than uttered words)
Mother FUCKER.

MILDRED **SCREAMS**.

As she screams, the crowd around us begins to
react. A bunch of bruised and banged up people
begin shuffling and shambling away.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

She's he--

--MAJOR ZYKA'AD IS **CHOKED**.

There's a moment of scuffling as she
sputters and struggles. Then...

Three quick stabs.

REGAN

(whispered through gritted teeth)
Shut the fuck up.

MILDRED

(crying)
Ben, Ben, Ben, I can't see
you!

BEN

Milly? Milly!

MILDRED

Are you all right? Where are you?

NARRATOR

An Elf lined up a shot at Regan, but Regan was ready
for it.

A crossbow shoots, and a bolt hits a body.
Someone groans and falls.

NARRATOR

And then Regan stalked off hastily, on the hunt.

Someone scooches up next to us.

JEN

Hey.

MILDRED

Ah!

BEN

Who's there?

JEN

(kind but firm)

We're with Nia, we're here to help. But you gotta stay quiet and listen to us, okay?

MILDRED STARTS TO **CATCH HER BREATH...**

Several yards away, we hear Regan stab another Elf to death.

MILDRED HEARS TOO AND HER **BREATH QUICKENS** FOR A BEAT, BEFORE SHE **CALMS HERSELF DOWN AGAIN.**

...And then a crossbow fires off to the side and a bolt WHIPS past our head.

MILDRED **MUFFLES** HER OWN **EXCLAMATION OF DISMAY.**

Jen blasts some lightning in the direction the bolt came from. We hear someone over there fall.

BEN

Galadon above, who are you?

A horse gallops up to us, winnies and bucks, but eventually comes to a stop.

JEN

That's your ride. Let's get you going.

REGAN

Behind!

Regan shoots her crossbow and we hear it hit another Elf.

REGAN

Got 'em.

(To Mildred and Ben)

C'mon, gotta go, gotta go.

JEN

Arlene, you ready?

ARLENE

Yes. But get them up quickly, the horse is nervous even now.

JEN

I'm gonna give you a boost but you gotta swing the other leg over real quick, okay?

A crossbow bolt zips right past us.

JEN

Shit!

The horse whinnies and bucks.

REGAN

(to herself)

That'll be Ry'y lo-Th'yyt.

(out loud)

Move, move, move!

Another bolt buzzes us.

BEN

It won't hold still!

Regan returns fire with her crossbow.

REGAN

It can tell you're scared, you gotta calm down.

MILDRED

(not trying to calm down)

Oh well why didn't you say so?

Regan shoots again, just before another bolt whizzes by us. But this one sticks in flesh off to our right.

A horse cries out in pain and alarm.

REGAN

Gods dammit.

Regan shoots again.

ARLENE

Was that your other horse?

REGAN

We'll find another and catch up, you gotta go.

ARLENE

But wh--

JEN

--Go!

There's a tiny taser zap. Arlene's horse blows away at a gallop.

Another bolt flies past us in the horse's direction, but we continue hearing the horse run away uninterrupted.

One more bolt nearly wings us.

REGAN

Behind the horse!

As Jen and Regan run, Regan shoots once more.

The reach other other horse, who is panting and snorting and in obvious pain.

REGAN

Shit, right in the leg. Sorry, bud. Wrong place wrong time.

A knife opens a neck as the horse collapses to the ground.

REGAN

(whispers)
Stay down.

Another bolt smacks into the horse right behind us.

Regan shoots back, and then begins the reload cycle.

Both continue to talk quietly but excitedly.

REGAN

She's gotta reload. When she does, I'm gonna bait her into shooting. You watch where the bolt comes from and you let loose in that direction, got it?

JEN

Yeah.

REGAN

Give her everything you've got.

We hear a gathering of Jen's magic pad.

NARRATOR

As Jen concentrated deeply, she stole a peek over the back of the unfortunate horse. Or at least she tried to.

She's grabbed and pulled.

REGAN
Giddown, stupid.

JEN
I can't see anything.

REGAN
Neither can she, which explains us still breathing. But that won't last long. You just get ready to blast, then we run for another horse.

JEN
Wait, aren't there people over there?

REGAN
She doesn't care, and right now neither can you. This is her or us, anyone else is just luck. And luck ain't anybody's fault. Right? ...Right?

JEN
(*unsure*)
Right.

NARRATOR
And though Regan was not attuned to these things, I can tell you about the little bit of stored potential that Jen let dissipate into the ground at that moment.

REGAN
Okay, ready?

NARRATOR
Regan unclasped her hood, and draped it over one of her blades. She lifted it up over the horse.

This time we hear the crossbow fire. The bolt flies in and strikes metal, knocking Regan's sword away to clatter across the ground.

REGAN
Now!

A blast of electricity crackles towards Ry'y. We hear a body crash to the ground and roll, maybe ten yards away.

There's a moment of quiet. Jen and Regan are both kinda stunned. Then...

REGAN
Move.

NARRATOR

Jen took off running. And after a moment of uncertainty and almost consternation, Regan did the same.

They both take off at a sprint.

56 EXT. RACETRACK - WINNER'S CIRCLE

56

In the distance a horse gallops but it is nearing us VERY rapidly.

BRENNEN

Hyah!

Brennen throws an axe. It finds its mark.

BRENNEN

I think that's the last of them.

YLLLOWYYN

Help me with the ropes.

NARRATOR

Their foes dispatched, Brennen and Yllowyyn fastened several ropes to the now unguarded chest.

We hear some ropes being tied.

YLLLOWYYN

Here they come.

The horse is really close now.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyn stood at the ready, with a hook in his hand.

The horse blows by us.

NARRATOR

And as Arlene's mount blazed past, it was again thanks to his reflexes that Yllowyyn managed to hook a rope onto the harness that Arlene had affixed to it.

As the horse recedes, we hear the chest begin to drag along the ground.

NARRATOR

And thus the horse towed the chest behind it as it raced towards the cliff's edge.

We're dead on top of the hoofbeats now.

NARRATOR

Now this next part is a great credit to Arlene as a rider. Though Jen's fog undeniably helped, it is still not many equestrians who could intentionally drive their mount straight off a cliff.

ARLENE

Hyah!

We hear some gravel thrown as hooves leave the ground...

57 EXT. CLIFFSIDE

57

For a moment, we hear nothing but some wind rushing by us, as we're in free-fall. And then...

NARRATOR

And after a heart-stopping split-second of being airborne...

...A half-ton of muscle falls into a taut rope net.

NARRATOR

...the beast and its passengers fell into a very sturdy fishing net.

The horse screams in terror.

MILDRED, BEN, AND ARLENE **ALL SCREAM ALONG WITH IT** IF WE'RE BEING HONEST.

But on either side of us, two pulleys wheel gently.

NARRATOR

And as the net descended, so did it pull up on two ropes, strung over a wheel on each of the poles Brennen and Yllowyyn had affixed to the rock face. And so did each rope pull up on a very heavy bundle of sandbags down on the beach. So heavy in fact, that after a brief moment of terrible speed, the net's descent to the beach slowed to be quite pleasant and peaceful.

THE PEOPLE STOP SCREAMING.

The horse is still losing its shit though.

NARRATOR

The horse was, naturally, still kicking like mad - might've helped you if you'd done that sooner, friend - but with its legs dangling through the bottom of the net, it could do no harm with all its might.

58 EXT. WINNER'S CIRCLE

58

We cut back up to the top of the cliff.

NIA

(recovering from her earlier screams and sobs)
Is everyone all right?

MILDRED

(shouting up from below)
Nia? Is that you love?

BEN

(shouting up from below)
Oh, thank Galadon!

YELLOWYYN

Is anyone hurt?

ARLENE

(shouting up from below)
I don't think so.

YELLOWYYN

Nia, you have to jump. The net will soon be too far away.

MILDRED

(shouting up from below)
Who in Galadon's Name are these people?!

BRENNEN

Where are the others?

ARLENE

(shouting up from below)
Their poor horse was--

--SHE'S INTERRUPTED BY NIA **SCREAMING** AS SHE JUMPS OFF THE CLIFF.

Beat.

ARLENE

(shouting up from below)
Their poor horse was shot. They had to look for another.

BRENNEN

Dammit.
(A moment of deliberation)
So be it. Ylloyyyn - You go down with them. Send the net back up, be sure to cut some of the bags like Jen said so it'll still descend for us. Get the chest on the sled and push it out of sight. Then come back up if you can.

Ylloyyyn

I will.

BRENNEN

(quickly)
And I never fully thanked you before.

Ylloyyyn

(jogging backwards)
I expect repayment, so you'd better stay alive.

NARRATOR

And with that, the Elf took a perfect athlete's dive off the cliff, and into the net.

The pulley descends for several beats and then finally stops. At the same time, we hear a horse approaching.

NARRATOR

And it wasn't long after that Brennen heard the sound of another horse approaching. He readied his axe, but soon recognized Regan and Jen.

The horse comes to a stop beside us.

JEN

Did the net work?

BRENNEN

Perfectly.

JEN GIVES A **RELIEVED SIGH/GIGGLE**.

We hear exactly one person dismount the horse.

REGAN

Ylloyyyn?

BRENNEN

I sent him down with the others to help keep the chest out of sight. Thought you should know he saved my life while we were climbing.

REGAN

Good. Good.

BRENNEN

The net should be coming back up any minute.

Beat.

NARRATOR

And as Brennen, Regan, and Jen waited for their conveyance to return, some of the fog around the cliff's edge began to disperse. And then the carnage that surrounded the winner's circle became clear.

Bodies lay shot through, trampled, and bloodied all around. None wore fine clothes. Many looked as ragged and threadbare as Regan was when you met her. And quite a few were younger even than Jen.

Jen closed her eyes and took steadying breaths. Brennen bowed his proud head in a silent prayer. But Regan... Regan stared at the faces of the dead, her eyes burning and her jaw twitching.

The pulley starts to wheel.

QUICK TRANSITION TO:

59 INT. RED REAVER - BELOW DECK - A LITTLE WHILE AGO

59

We're below deck on the wooden pirate vessel we hinted at before. Above us, crew members are going about their work but that's pretty faint from where we are.

NARRATOR

Now, I regret to inform you that in this moment everything went very badly astray. And I promise we shall return to that bit of misfortune just as soon as there is more to be said about it.

But first, I must return you to the boat anchored off the bay. There, Nelson was looking after a child when no one else could or would.

The infant starts crying.

NELSON

Aw, come on. Don't tell me you need a change.

NELSON **SNIFFS**.

NELSON

Hoo. Lucky break. What do you need then?

NARRATOR

So when that child began crying, Nelson made a very simple gesture of kindness - a playful, waggled finger in front of its face, to distract from whatever was causing the disturbance.

NELSON

Uhh...heeeere, baby baby.

The baby coos and giggles.

NARRATOR

And this babe-in-arms made a very simple gesture in return - one quite common for its ilk. He wrapped his tiny hand around Nelson's finger.

The score here is mysterious, contemplative...

NARRATOR

And Nelson could not help but recall the last night's dream, and of a similar gesture, by a very dissimilar creature.

...and then it's revelatory?

NARRATOR

His brow furrowed, and a look of recollection crossed his face.

Replay:

YOUNG GIRL

(with some dreamy reverb)
My enemy, Nelson, is nearer than you can possibly imagine.

NARRATOR

But this did not look like any enemy. The babe was, as you know, sweet. And vulnerable above all else.

The baby coos again.

NARRATOR

Nelson shook his head as though trying to jumble loose an errant thought. But soon his face was even more

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

grave than it had been before. For some thoughts are not so easily dislodged.

NELSON

Ookay. Sometimes a dream's just a dream, right?

NARRATOR

And then the babe began gesturing towards the small escritoire in the corner of the cabin. Where Nelson had stored the books from Armstrongard's library.

NELSON

You...wanna look at books?

Nelson walks over to the desk.

NARRATOR

Nelson took out the books that he and his friends had acquired.

NELSON

The one with the pictures maybe? That might be good for you.

The baby cries.

NARRATOR

And then the infant began to reach for one book in particular.

NELSON

On The Totemic Traditions of Primitive Iorden?

The baby coos and giggles with joy, as the score reaches a climax.

NELSON

Uhhh dude, what are you?

END OF CHAPTER.