

[The following takes place during Act I scene iii of *Afterall* by Brenton Lengel and Rogue of The Cruxshadows]

REDDY finds herself on the Bank of the River Styx, which resembles a Depression-era shanty town built around the rusted remains of an old railroad who's tracks run over the river's water. CHARON enters upstage and stands beside a dilapidated handcar, silent and immobile. His face is concealed by the billowing hood of a traditional grey monk's robe, and he carries a long metal pole. A number of CHORUS members are scattered throughout the stage. Their clothes are tattered representations of different eras: a Victorian Beggar, The Egyptian god THOTH, holding chalk sign (for tallying accounts) an American Doughboy, a 1920's Flapper Girl, etc. They occasionally move about in the background, but this is without any real sort of purpose, more like movement for the sake of movement. Downstage Center sits CASSANDRA. Presently, she is more than a little obscured by the chorus, and her Greek-style robes are dirty and worn, though still clearly the trappings of the upper-class. ROLAND stands Upstage Right just a little ways away from Center Stage, his back to the audience. He wears armor and over it, the tattered and worn tabard of a crusader. A black hunting-horn hangs from his belt. Everyone's clothes are damp, and the stage is lit in such a way as to imply that it has been raining for some time. The entire scene is dominated by a hopeless sense of ennui, an air of sullen desperation.

Reddy: (*Approaching Roland*) Hey, umm, excuse me, sir? Could you—could you tell me where I am?

Roland: (*He does not turn around.*) You're new.

Reddy: Well, yeah...I guess. I think...I think I died.

ROLAND doesn't answer.

Reddy: It was weird...I'd just laid down for bed, and, nothing...uh, I have epilepsy—so I don't remember...

ROLAND turns to face her. REDDY stops speaking. A pause.

Reddy: Sam?

Roland: You're on the bank of the River Styx.

Reddy: Sam?

ROLAND looks at her quizzically.

Reddy: I'm sorry; you look like...you look like my friend.

Pause.

Reddy: But you're not him.

Roland: I am not.

Pause.

Reddy: Can you help me?

Roland: Do you seek adjudication?

Reddy: (*Short pause*) What?

Roland: Does your soul seek to move from this place between worlds?

Reddy: Yeah. I guess...

Roland: Then a trial must you undergo, and for that, to the far bank must you voyage. There I am told the twelve gates stand, though I have never seen their pearl. The one robed as an anchorite can conduct you across the water, if you have but the payment to move his hand. But I fear that you, like myself and so many other poor souls, lack the tribute to bend that gargoyle to your service. If this you are without, here you must wait until time's ceasing hand moves the creator to sound his trumpet—

Reddy: Whoa, wait, anchor-what-now?

Roland: The monk, my lady.

Reddy: Can you not call me M'Lady? That's kind of weird—

Roland: (*Overlapping*) Though of late I question his allegiance to almighty God as oft I wonder if he is of stone and mortar composed, and the flesh and sinews my natural eyes perceive are but a proxy to hide a heart of forged iron—

Reddy: (*Overlapping*) It's just, that there are these guys, and they have *fedoras* and like, their neck is a beard, umm—

Roland: (*Overlapping*) But once in seven-score seasons I have seen him set his will to the task. With him must you rail, that he then rail with thee along his reddened track, (*Lowering his voice*) have you but the coins; without, he will stand adamant.

Reddy: (*Overlapping*) They're on the internet—you know what? Never mind—you said coins. (*Produces the pennies.*) Is this what I need?

With reflexes honed by a lifetime of battle, ROLAND leaps at REDDY and is on her in an instant. His hand closes over REDDY'S, trapping the coins in her palm.

Reddy: Hey, whoa—!

Roland: *(He places his other hand over REDDY's mouth and hisses in an urgent whisper.)* Keep those out of sight!

Thoth: *(Having inserted himself into hearing range.)* What's going on here?

Roland: Nothing Thoth, Just teaching this wench some manners.

Reddy: *(Muffled, angry)* Wench?!

Thoth: Wench...Ahh yes, I know that term...a colloquialism referring to a young woman, usually of low social status, from Old English wencel; and possibly Old High German wankōn...I believe it is now considered outdated and archaic...

Roland: What do you want Thoth?

Thoth: I thought I heard something about coins—

Roland: Your ears are playing tricks on you again. This one's fresh. They don't bury them with coins anymore. I believe they consider that "outdated and archaic".

Thoth: Thank Aten-Ra for that, the last time a Greek came in here with Drachma? I'm still cleaning up the mess...

Roland: I remember.

Thoth: I hope you'll not think me out of line, Roland, when I point out my suspicions are not unfounded. They do not "Bury them" with "Swords" anymore, either, yet your companion—

Roland: Are swords coins?

Thoth: Well, no but—

Roland: Do swords cause problems?

Thoth: Well, not here. Not USUALLY...

Roland: So why are we still talking?

Thoth: I...I don't, know. Welcome to the River Styx miss. I hope you'll enjoy your stay, because you are here...forever. Probably.

Reddy: ...Thanks.

Thoth: I try to be helpful...Bye.

Thoth returns to his place and resumes tallying sums on his chalk board. ROLAND watches him go, and when he's out of earshot, he gradually releases REDDY, leaving the hand containing the coppers for last.

Reddy: I'm not a wench.

Roland: Do you understand what it is that you carry?

Reddy: I feel like you're not listening to me—

Roland: Do you comprehend your fortune? Do you see what these poor, sad, desperate creatures would do to escape this place? *(Slight pause)* We all marched. Crusader and Saracen alike, Moor and Infidel, we marched under the standard of God. For him we sweated, and struggled, and fought; goaded on by promises of indulgence, paradise, images of heaven's glorious gates. We marched, each of us, to a single doom. Together we clashed, and together, after the swords and arrows had pierced our flesh, after the clubs and axes had hewn bone and skull, and the husks of what we once were lay in final, silent embrace...together we marched, one and all, to this place.

He pauses, remembering.

Roland: All for the glory of God. For our sins, for our blindness were we forced to wait, while the pagan heretics our brothers raked over the coals were given passage into His Kingdom. Some went mad and threw themselves into the River's waters, others wandered out into the desert. I do not know of their fate. I alone have chosen to remain here and await the breaking of the seventh seal. Now I am all that remains, like Job compelled to wait until, at long last, God grants me his mercy.

Reddy: Okay, but...

Roland: I'm sorry I called you a wench, my lady.

Reddy: ...You know what? It's okay, you're—old, or something.

Roland: Archaic and outdated. Do you understand what you have?

Reddy: I think so: without two copper coins—?

Roland: Passage is impossible.

Reddy: And there's no other way?

Roland: I have heard tales of those who, via the left-handed path, sought their own route to paradise through the mountain's pass; but the journey down that sinister road is perilous, and none here have the constitution to travel in that crucible.

Silence.

Reddy: What do I need to do?

Roland: (*Thinks a moment.*) I shall escort thee. Do not speak. Do not cast thine eyes upon a soul. Pass payment quickly and leave this place without looking back, lest the mob rob a future from thee. Do you comprehend?

Reddy: Why are you helping me?

Roland: (*Quickly*) There is no choice. Are you prepared?

Reddy: Are you coming with?

Roland shakes his head sadly.

Reddy: Okay, then, can you at least tell me your name? Mister Not-Sam?

Roland: Roland; Commander of the Frankish Rear-guard and First Paladin in the service of King Charlemagne, beloved of Pope Leopold the Third.

Reddy: My friends call me Reddy. I'm from Jersey.

Roland: Well met, Reddy of Jersey. I hope fortune favors you more than she favored me. Let us begin our business.