

**[The following is excerpted from Afterall, Act I Scene iii, by Brenton Lengel and Rogue of the Cruxshadows]**

*As the song ends, 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 bridge. 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: an Egyptian Taskmaster, a Victorian Beggar with a chalk sign slung around his neck that reads "Help," 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.*

**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 copper; without, he will stand adamant.

**Reddy:** *(Overlapping)* They're on the internet—you know what? Never mind—you said copper. *(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!

**Beggar:** *(Having wandered into hearing range.)* What are you on about?

**Roland:** Just teaching this wench some manners.

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

**Beggar:** I thought I heard something about copper—

**Roland:** Your ears are playing tricks on you again, McSweeny. This one's fresh. They don't bury them with coins anymore. You know that.

**Beggar:** They don't bury 'em with swords no more, neither. I didn't get no sword, they just threw me inna grave with nothin' but me chalk and board—

**Roland:** Sweeney!

**McSweeny:** *(Shocked)* Wot?

**Roland:** You tell this one what it's like being stuck in limbo.

**Beggar:** Cor, It's bloody wet, it is! Don't know if it's got to do with breathers always cryin' at funerals, but the bleedin' sky's always ready to open up on us poor dead blokes. Damp socks, damp shirt, damp britches, that's what it is here, day in and day out all bleedin' eternity. Damp enough to drive a man mad! Damp that claws its way through your coat and into your bones till you can't feel yourself breathe, till you can't hear yourself think, till you'd strangle your best mate for a pair of dry socks! Get used to the damp, that's what it means to pass on and—

**Roland:** Thank you. Now exit, before I make you uglier.

**Beggar:** Right. Right. I get the message, ya lug. I'm leaving.

*BEGGAR hastily returns to the shanty town. 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 now?

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

**Roland:** Do you comprehend you 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:** Do you understand what I told you?

**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.

*ROLAND leads REDDY toward CHARON. Tension mounts as they work their way through the crowd.*