

Dark Dice, Chapter 12 - Worse

Travis

Rowena, having put Father Westpike to sleep, was determined to see out the remainder of her watch alone... But as the minutes slowly rolled by and the fireflies, many of which she noted to actually be glowing butterflies, lazily waxed and waned in the dim, she required a constitution saving throw to remain awake.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Oh no, come on man.

Travis

You're doing fiiiine!

Eypór (Sindri)

Busted.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Don't give this to me.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

19.

Eypór (Sindri)

Thank you!

Travis

Father Westpike said in his sleep...

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

I said I was gonna stay awake, I'm doing it man.

Travis

Yeah you're fine... (sigh) Rowena was able to overcome the blissful call of Nis and remain vigilant during her shift.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Yay, I managed to make it through a singular night.

Travis

A singular *shift*... But a restful one... At least so far as Rowena was concerned... But a few paces over Soren's dreams were less than relaxing. A little more violent than in previous nights, Soren experienced a sort of déjà vu of memories that he couldn't entirely recognize to be his own. It started normally: Soren saw his hands cutting up the rabbit he'd caught a few days prior, his hands going through a series of quick, clean motions, but suddenly the rabbit was gone, and in its place, the misshapen body of the creature he now recognized as Pullo. Soren witnessed himself carve more and more into the gnome's legs, chewing the raw strips of pale flesh as the creature struggled against the rope he'd been suspended by, unable to rasp out a scream. Soren, with all the skill of a seasoned hunter, pulled his favourite dagger and carved a particularly deep strip off the gnome's leg, using faint words in draconic to summon a power that now seemed foreign, healing magics to keep the disgusting little Gnome conscious until Soren had his fill... The panicked rasping breaths continued for over an hour while he worked. Both legs removed, both arms broken in multiple places, the smaller eye

plucked from its misshapen socket, Soren attached a note written on the flesh of the gnome's own skin to different dagger in his possession and stabbed it deep into the gnome's chest. Soren smiled, knowing that the blade was cursed, knowing this place was cursed and that Pullo would never truly find peace so long as the dagger remained firmly in his chest. Then, as Soren walked away, he began to dream of nothingness. -Now, on watch, our dear friend Rowena moved to wake someone up... but who?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Flygia, wake up. It's time for us to share a watch.

Kessi (Flygia)

(Yawn) Already? Okay, fine.

Travis

What did the woman of the wilds and the pale bard do during their watch together.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

I was writing in the journal, so probably finishing that out. Sitting looking around keeping an eye on Flygia, shooting glances across to Soren, where he's sleeping, just keeping an eye on both of them and just kind of had, to generally staying looking around, to wrought to properly be wanting to be sleeping so.

Kessi (Flygia)

I'm eating my rations, -but slowly to try and keep myself awake.

Travis

With her passive perception score, Flygia remembered that she hadn't seen Rowena eat anything since the death of Sister Cavernsfall...

Kessi (Flygia)

Here, Rowena, why don't you eat something?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

I'm fine.

Kessi (Flygia)

You need to eat.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Yeah I've already eaten. I ate earlier. I mean Sindri and I shared something earlier, so, I'm good.

Travis

Rowena needed to roll a Deception check.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

23.

Travis

Oh that's pretty believable. Flygia, if she had reason to suspect that Rowena might be lying, could try to, if you wanted to, try and call her bluff by rolling a 20 sided dice and rolling an insight check...

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

The question is if Flygia has reason to suspect that she might be lying.

Travis

You don't have to. This is just a rare moment where I was trying to force you guys to be nice. You can totally ignore me.

Kessi (Flygia)

22.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

You suspect that she might be lying Flygia.

Kessi (Flygia)

"I have not seen you eating so maybe-"

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Yeah, because you were asleep.

Kessi (Flygia)

I was going to say that you could share a second meal with me.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Nah I'll be fine.

Kessi (Flygia)

I was hoping to share a story over a meal. Don't you think you deserve at least a small snack?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Yeah but we've got a long trip back and we really need to ration our stuff.

Kessi (Flygia)

Do you want some of mine? I don't need so much and sharing is a sign of friendship in Dwarven culture. Think of it as a teambuilding exercise.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Nah it's alright, you, you carry on. We just need to be more careful with how much we eat. I'm just thinking about it and all the little ones coming back too. We're gonna have to start being really careful about it.

Kessi (Flygia)

Can I be frank? The boldest task still lies ahead. You need to be at your height, you will need your energy...

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Yeah but, I'm young and stupid and I've got...

Kessi (Flygia)

Exactly you're young, you're still growing...

Hem (Speaking as Rowena) - TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE – I have no idea on that last word

...you know, I can do beers (bears, years).

Kessi (Flygia)

...you're so small.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

I'm a dwarf, of course I'm small. Look I'll eat something...

Kessi (Flygia)

You can have some of my porridge, I already cooked it. I have too much.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

No no no, you, you have it, I'll eat tomorrow. Let's say we just got to be careful, you, you eat that I'll eat tomorrow, I'm fine.

Kessi (Flygia)

I already ate more than my fill. It would go to-

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Because you need to keep your strength up too.

Kessi (Flygia)

(sigh) -Let's try that teambuilding angle again... Also, lady bonding time. We could share horrible things we've been thinking about but not saying in regards to our traveling companions?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

*Thank you for the offer, but maybe, maybe share something tomorrow? But, I'm good... We can shit-talk the others -I mean, **bond**, then.*

Kessi (Flygia)

(sigh) Right... Okay then... Not like my food was prepared specifically for this sort of situation to be shared or anything.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

I'm gonna keep looking around for trouble, both watching party members and the woods alike... Also, as far as Rowena is concerned, Flygia may be evil and I don't trust her, so I'm not eating her food.

Travis

Flygia continued to pick away at her porridge while writing in her journal, sighing audibly between concerned glances at Rowena.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

I'm ignoring her.

Travis

Flygia and Rowena both required Wisdom saving throws...

Kessi (Flygia)

1.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

That's not good. 22.

Travis

Flygia finished her meal, and over the next half hour she seemed to get like a stomach ache

possibly from over-eating, which caused her to chew on various herbs in her possession. This seemed normal, but then Flygia noticed something off in the distance, the glow of bright lights in the woods that seemed to dance, flickering out and through the trees at a great distance hypnotically... Almost seeming to invite her.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

I kick Sindri awake.

Eypór (Sindri)

No, no, Yes, I'm, I'm awake! What?

Travis

The lights hid behind the trees by the time Father Sindri Westpike came to his proper senses.

Eypór (Sindri)

What is it Rowena?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Flygia's acting a bit weird.

Eypór (Sindri)

More of the same, or just more, weird?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

I don't know, I'm not trusting anything right now, so I thought better have back up instead of none.

Eypór (Sindri)

What pair of shoes are you wearing?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

[Say this but in your own words] You know, blue hip-high's.

Eypór (Sindri)

Alright, is it my turn to take watch again?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

No, just, I, she started acting weird and I thought I'd rather have back up than not... (sigh) You know what, go, go back to sleep, I'll get laus up, she seems to be fine now.

Eypór (Sindri)

Alright, don't hesitate waking me up gentler next time.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Well I was scared.

Eypór (Sindri)

(fatherly sigh) I understand. You made the right decision, goodnight... or whatever time it actually is.

Travis

Flygia went to sleep after the watch ended. Did Rowena do so as well?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Oh no, I'm waking up laus. I'm...

Travis

You're, you're powering through this. Ok. I also almost caught you on a technicality.

Eypór (Sindri)

Oh my god.

Travis

Well then, Rowena had to make a constitution check to avoid fatigue because it had officially been over 24 hours... You can't hear it but I'm silently shooting streamers and party horns on this end...

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Sweet. 8.

Eypór (Sindri)

Ohh.

Travis

8?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Yup.

Travis

Fatigue can be particularly crippling, but given the lack of food and the lulling effects the forest itself seemed to have on her, Rowena gained a level of Exhaustion, giving her disadvantage on ability checks. There is six levels of exhaustion, each worse than the last. The sixth and final level is death...

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

That's, that's not good.

Travis

Rowena moved to wake up laus, gradually began to crash, feeling the physical weight of her last day, the pain in her stomach from lack of food, and the emotional turmoil from the stress of the past week... She now clearly looked unwell, even to laus as he was gently shoved awake.

David (laus)

(tired, waking up) It's time already?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(tired) Yup.

David (laus)

You look like hell. Anything happen while I was asleep?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(tired) No.

David (laus)

Dice?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(tired) Sure... But we're not betting anything this time...

David (Ilaus)

We can play for rations.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(tired) Sure...(out of character) I let him win.

Travis

Ilaus pulled out a few slices of stale bread and took a bite of the first piece while setting up impromptu marks in the dirt for their game. Ilaus passed his Constitution saving throw to remain awake and silently kissed his lucky dice for luck. Just beyond the shadow of their game, the dear father Sindri Westpike was dreaming of his long lost wife Pia, her pale skin visible as she diligently worked in their family's forge. But Pia looked different, her features worn and tired, scars lining her bare arms and face, and her stomach clearly many months with child. Her body language and the condition of the forge told a story of difficult times... But time it seemed was passing in reverse, very quickly, and a few hours earlier before she would arrive at the forge a familiar elven figure with bright green eyes began to set a trap within the room. Sindri could not make out the specifics of the trap but in a blink he was back with Pia in the present. He called out to her, catching her attention just in time as the cruel machination was sprung, exploding in a thunder of smoke and flame. Tears welled in Sindri's eyes as the room collapsed inward crushing wife and forge alike under the weight of so many ancient stones. Time sped up, and his two children were delivered to the Kordalum a few days later. Sindri Westpike could overhear their whispered boasts of total council control within the Westmanshold and that his "orphaned bastard children" would be raised properly. The dreams were less vivid beyond this moment, but he could see the light of Pelor slowly vanish from the hearts of his son and daughter as they grew up, the songs of love and kindness leave their ears, their faces, as they grew up only knowing work and hardship. A voice spoke directly to Sindri, it was his own:

Eypór (Sindri)

You were such a fool, to take the council on their word.

Travis

Back on watch Rowena was down three slices to Ilaus already, and it became clear to him that she wasn't focused, beyond exhausted, and worse yet, she didn't seem to notice or care that she was losing... This somehow bothered Ilaus and he furrowed his brow, not sure if he was more frustrated at himself for caring about her, or not pressing harder to win more food while he had the opportunity.

David (Ilaus)

You know, maybe we should stop playing dice after this round... And I really hate to say this but maybe you should just keep your eyes focused on the others, okay? You watch them and I'll just keep an eye out for anything coming from the forest.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(tired) Sure... Yeah... I'll just... Watch them sleep (relaxed sigh) zzz....

David (Ilaus)

Ok, you got your, your eyes on the prize... Cool. (sight) Yeah, welp, I've had 6 or 8 hours sleep so I'm all good. Nothing will get past these eyes!... Complete with Darkvision... Not that it matters, because it's some sort of eternal twilight here...

Travis

This would be the end of the watch... All that stood between the party and a full rest would be a single roll. laus Innsekeep needed to make a wisdom saving throw.

David (laus)

Another one of these, last time I did one of those, I got teleported back to the fucking tree... - (out of character) Dice fell under the table, one sec... 4.

Travis

laus rolled his lucky dice, practicing the roll, making sure that it was still balanced properly, synchronised with his ring... But much like his real-life counterpart just now, the dice rolled a bit too far, fell beyond where he intended it. As it rolled under near Flygia's face... laus slowly, cautiously approached reaching down toward the die when her eyes opened... And suddenly, laus was no longer standing and it was clear that some time had passed.

David (laus)

(Unhappy, weakly) Oh fuck...

Travis

laus was now on his back, being dragged, and as he moved his head around he was unable to see anyone else in the camp, save for the one dragging him... Flygia... Who was laughing to herself... (Cough, that was her cue)

Kessi (Flygia) (Please record multiple takes of this so it can loop through my narration)

(Evil cackle) (almost chanting) Dah Haff Wick Mah? Thu myunt!

Dah Haff Wick Zmuh leep-E-Dyaw Kav? (Louder Cackle)

[Do not record, but here's the translation for context: Do you seek him? You might! Do you seek the Nameless God?]

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Nope, nope.

Travis

Who was laughing to herself as she realized laus had awoken... Seizing the initiative, Flygia pulled out a dagger, and still chanting she turned to stab at him, stabbing toward his chest, his heart, but missing as laus' arms flailed defensively. Frustrated by the lack of a quick kill, Flygia redirected her second attack, slashing laus' right arm for 8 damage before he could effectively react.

David (laus)

(defending himself from being stabbed) Fuck fuck fuck fuck! (gets stabbed in the arm) Agh! Fuck! Abyss Take you! "ihk-hiww zicy haff (ick hew zycky hoff)"-Hellish Rebuke!...

Travis

laus' eyes lit up and flames erupted from his wounds engulfing Flygia for 11 damage as she failed to dodge out of the way. She looked thinner than he'd remembered, and hair began to sprout from her face which began to sink inward around the eyes.

David (laus)

(as laus, stressed and pained) I've had enough of being beaten up by- Ha! (slash attack)

Travis

laus pulled his pitted rapier, stabbing upward as his tail and free arm pushed him to his feet.

David (laus)

(quickly as David) 16 to hit, plus a bunch. 9 Damage.

Travis

laus caught Flygia in the shoulder as the edges of her mouth stretched beyond the sides of her jaw before extending into a large wolflike maw filled with canine teeth. Flygia, her shape still somewhere between a mangle of fur and teeth slashed out at laus, who defensively blocked it with his rapier. The motion left an opening, which Flygia exploited to bite deep into laus' shoulder for 15 damage, ripping flesh and audibly catching bone, nearly causing him to pass out.

David (laus)

(scream of pain turning to scream of anger) Die wolf-bitch!

Travis

With the roll of a 21, laus had strength enough for one final slash with his mangled right arm, the tip of the blade catching Flygia in the throat, piercing it but not with enough strength to finish the job. Flygia hissed and shrieked, her form shifting again, the three hollow sockets becoming visible. It was a lucky hit, but it was enough to cause pause to the monster... Now in its natural habitat, the Silent One pulled away from laus, still grasping at its throat. From the fur rapidly fading into its back formed a familiar cloak, which seemed to engulf the Silent One, pulling it into the very shadows beneath it, cast there by the nearby trees... And suddenly all was still.

laus dropped to one knee, pulled his dagger with his good arm and waited for the creature to return again, trying to hold back the increasing flow of blood from his shoulder wound. Eyes darting in every direction they came across the body of Flygia, presumably the real Flygia, mutilated, cut, burned, face-down in the dirt. laus waited as long as he could before he finally dropped his guard, put away his dagger and pulled out the closest thing he had to medical tools...

David (laus)

(30 seconds of heavy breathing as he kneels, trying to not die from blood loss, eyes cautiously looking around for threats)

Travis

Far away from lonely laus, Soren Arkwright and Father Westpike found themselves lost deep deep in the woods, somewhere beyond view of the path, near the ruins of an ancient village. The smells of burnt wood, urine, vomit, and overcooked meat all accented strongly against the rot that seemed to remain with them for the past week. Piles of ash and rubble littered the floor, and while they were not sure how they got there, the bigger question quickly became 'who was in their presence.

Peter (Soren)

Father Westpike, where are we? How...?

Eypór (Sindri)

Where's Rowena? I look around for my hammer!

Travis

Father Westpike noted that he had all of his equipment.

Eypór (Sindri)

You don't know this place Soren?

Peter (Soren)

I don't believe so. It kind of looks like the, whatever that was, village we passed before we made it to this forest.

Travis

A figure ahead, Dwarven, yet tall, with long braided hair and pale skin stood in stark contrast to the stone and ash requiring Father Westpike and Soren to make a Sanity saving throw...

Eypór (Sindri)

Hello?

Travis

As Father Westpike failed, and Soren's resolve held

Eypór (Sindri)

No!

Travis

Father Westpike's senses began to betray him. He felt an innate wrongness about the place. His breathing quickened, and his pulse raced. To him, the figure ahead... bore a strong resemblance to Rowena, yet he felt like it could not possibly be her... It was visually similar, yet clearly older, more worn, her clothing reflecting none of the Kordalum heraldry, her equipment alien and clearly marked with forbidden cursed-runes. At her feet were the corpses of naked mutilated figures with grey skin, and while Father Westpike briefly considered that this might be the Silent One, the woman's eyes reflected a harsh coldness, a sadness that spoke to Sindri on a very personal level, something he felt the monster incapable of... Before him was someone, a person, who would do anything, hurt anything, for the right motivation... Before him was someone who was damned and marked by evil, yet carried the heavy burden of remorse. Was this another trick of the forest, was this some distant ancestor or descendant? Father Westpike found himself in tears, confused by his sudden outward display of emotion.

Eypór (Sindri)

(near tears) "Soren, this, we have to leave this place!" I have my hammer out, like in my hand, and the shield in the other, "I am prepared to hit anything that tries to touch me. Soren... I... I..."

Peter (Soren)

(trying to calm the delirious man) Breathe, Father... Let's just try to find the path...

Eypór (Sindri)

(louder, upset, panicking) I do not want to TOUCH anything, I do not want to TALK to anything, I just want to get the hell out of here! We need to -Get me out of here!

Peter (Soren)

(louder to the panicking old man) "Take my hand... Let's go. -This way!" (out of character) -I'm going to lead him back to the path using my tracking skill, rolling a 17), trying to avoid any people, ghosts or bodies, and protecting our backs, and throats from whatever it is that he's seeing.

Travis

Soren, ever focused on finding the way back never did see what it was that unnerved Father Westpike, but he was able to keep them safe and calm the old man down... Gradually, over the length of their twenty minute walk Soren was able to convince him that it must have been a hallucination or a trick of the forest... "This place it... It does things to your mind. Over time, it affects how you perceive things. It weakens those that shouldn't be here." Soren began to explain, not fully sure of his words or how he might have known this information... But over time, Soren's confidence in his newfound

knowledge grew, and he was able to calm the hysterical old dwarf... But somewhere else, somewhere far alone Rowena awoke in a small round room of firm stone walls and ceiling. Small crude dolls lined the edges of the room, each painted a different colour with unique patterned markings lining their bodies, seemingly crafted from wood, hair, feathers, bone, and clay. One in particular, crafted from aged wood and wicker, sat in the middle of the room before a great black cauldron which was mounted on a pedestal. The doll wore a green beard of moss and a small leather parchment was affixed to its hands marked by a scrawling handwriting that seemed to spiral and shape at random, making it difficult to read the words contained therein. Rowena could feel the heads of the dolls turning to follow her as she walked toward the letter, even though she could not directly witness it, and as she started intently at the scrawled letters in the note she could clearly see the wild motions that shaped them, and the dark madness in the mind behind those motions... In the curling common, the note read as follows: "The key is in the cauldron. Drink up. Don't cheat. Or Else."

Rowena looked up from the note and spotted a lopsided door with a curved top fitted perfectly into a similarly shaped frame. The door was painted a cracked and fading yellow, which showcased an immaculate and ornate bronze setting for a key directly above a bronze handle. Rowena's eyes then fell to the contents of the cauldron, the foul odour bubbling up from the grey putrid liquid, illuminated by the crackling fire beneath. Within the liquid were small square chunks of an unknown meat, which, in all it appeared an unhealthy, thick, gritty texture, possibly a stew. A rusted ladle dangled on the side of the cauldron, and the eyes of the dolls seemed to bore into Rowena, her breath hitched as she edged toward decision.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(to self)... Fuck, fuck fuck... The obvious thing and try the handle first... I suspect I know the result of this. (rattling sound)... Fuck.... Okay... Maybe I'm just asleep, maybe I can pinch myself away... (lightly pained) Ah!... Nope, definitely awake. -And I still have all my shit on me... I, oh- wait, the Helm's missing. Dammit!... fuck fuck fuck... Yeah... This is suck a stupid idea... Kick the cauldron or drink the bloody stuff... Kick the cauldron.... -I'm stronger than this.

Travis

Bracing herself, Rowena cautiously lifted the ladle with her gloved hands, the heat of the sickly fire warming her as she stood near... And as she filled the ladle and took her first sip of the fetid bubbling liquid, she required a constitution saving throw.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Gross. Oh natural 20. Ah ha

Travis

Rowena, her ruined sense of taste as one of the lingering aftereffects of the cursed cloak, continued to drink from the stew unaffected, beyond the sense of disgusts from actually ingesting the visually unpleasing gruel. As the bubbling died down it was revealed to be rather small in volume, but it contained little bits of sticky meat... Did Rowena try to avoid those? Or-

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

No, no I have everything, I take it all, I can't taste it but if I'm eating, I'm eating. I'm just, doing that thing where put as far back in your throat as you possibly can and swallowing. I'm not gonna question it, I'm just gonna do it.

Travis

The three minutes that passed while Rowena ate and sipped from the sickly stew. She still felt the eyes of the dolls around her, and on occasion felt as if she could hear whispers call out chanting, voices uttering a word that made her physically weak to hear. As she dipped the ladle again she could innately feel that the word was a name, and that the name belonged something powerful and ancient,

something had have never existed before, and something she would ensure never would so long as she had power. She continued to drink, to chew, to swallow bite after bite of the meat, realizing moments too late that she'd just swallowed whole the first in a set of engorged eyeballs... But she didn't falter, didn't stop, and as she continued her trial, mind far away from the task, Rowena saw something that shook her, forced her to involuntarily drop the ladle into the stew: The severed shrunken head of Sister Tsavorite Cavernsfall... This revelation forced her to make a Sanity saving throw,

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

2.

Travis

Which sent her over the edge... Having consumed the flesh of the fallen party member & friend that she felt responsible for the death of, Rowena took 20 stress damage... She did her best not to be sick, to bury and hide and deny what she was looking at, even as she pulled the ladle up again and continued to drink, -compelled to finish her task... As her eyes swelled with tears, as her shaking hand brought the ladle up to her lips, which slowly parted... But at the last moment Rowena opened her eyes, and could see something in the stew glint in the reflective light of the fire and all at once the chanting stopped...

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(stressed) Did it say I had to drink it all?

Travis

"The key is in the cauldron. Drink up. Don't cheat. Or Else." – And sure enough Rowena could see a key... A bronze key deep within the soup.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(rushed, grabbing the key) Fuck it! (intense breathing for 60 seconds for the below actions)

Travis

Rowena reached her hand into the stew, pulled the key, and ran for the door. Eyes focused on the keyhole, her actions, and her wild breathing, she did her best to block out the sounds of movement coming from all around her. With a successful skills challenge, she used her dexterity to guide her shaking hands to unlock and open the door, pull it open, and run through, slamming it behind herself as the small sounds of impact on the other side began to vibrate it. Rowena was now in a new room, a cramped den, a mangle of dirt and withered wriggling tree roots. She discovered her only way out to be a hole above, she began to climb. As the bones of creatures long-dead emerged from the dirt and reach toward her, clawing at her flesh she kicked at them and continued her ascent... And as the higher she climbed, the more she could feel the tunnel closing up around her, swallowing her like a large earthen giant. She could feel a set of gnarled bony hands grab her leg and begin to pull her back down, kicking and fighting, but they were too powerful and she fell from the full height of the tunnel's mouth, taking 6 damage in the process as she hit her head and bruised her arms... She turned, looked up to face her attacker head on and saw a tall bald creature, its features obscured by a gentle flow of blood that seemed to fall from it like rain. The creature's mouth opened, it uttered two words...

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(sound of pained falling from fifteen feet up) (sounds of pain x3 in increasing intensity) (pained, raspy breathing for 30 seconds)

Travis

And at once Rowena's skin began to peel away from her hands, her arms, her face... This was the magic of Dark Speech, the ancient and forgotten language. Rowena was slow to take initiative,

delayed, and so it spoke again, rusting the strings on her harp, cracking her teeth, bending back all of her fingernails at once, curving and digging them back into her own fingers. She tried to stab futilely at the creature, but she was unable to find her blades as blood fell over her eyes, and with a single strike, the creature knocked her to the ground... Unable to move or speak but not unconscious, Rowena failed her first death saving throw of three as the creature stepped closer, leaving a river of gore in its wake. Rowena failed her second death saving throw as the bones and roots closed in around her... But before Rowena could make the roll for her third death saving throw, the creature grabbed her throat lifting her high into the air, so they could meet, face to face... Unable to struggle, the life fading from her skinless body, the bleeding shape formed a grin as its hand squeezed her neck tighter... Rowena remained suspended for an eternity as her lungs burned, and as her legs swung uselessly... "Not yet" the creature rasped, "not yet", in the common tongue as snapped her neck with a singular swift motion...

.... "The key is in the cauldron. Drink up. Don't cheat. Or Else." – And sure enough Rowena could see a key... A bronze key deep within the soup.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Wait, what the fuck? (30 seconds of scared, heavy breathing with a mild cough to match the below scene)

Travis

Rowena cautiously reached her hand into the stew, pulled the key, and walked toward the door, looking in all directions at the empty room for something she could not find. Eyes focused on the keyhole, her actions nervous, she locked the door... Then she unlocked the door before locking it, and unlocking it again... Had it been unlocked the entire time? Rowena pulled the door ineffectively and discovered that it pushed outward.

She passed through the doorway into a cramped den, a mangle of dirt and withered wriggling tree roots, and as she discovered her only way out to be a hole above from which light was visible... Rowena began to climb, and pulled herself out of the hollow of a great tree, hugging the cold moist dirt as soon as her feet were clear... Ahead of her was the camp, and a strange scene. Father Westpike and Soren Arkwright had their weapons drawn against Ilaus Innskeep, who held his hands up and knelt before the mangled corpse of Flygia...

David (Ilaus)

Okay, so I know this looks bad with my tool kit out at all.

Eypór (Sindri)

(yelling) It's a fucking torturer's kit!

David (Ilaus)

(yelling) It was the only thing with clamps that could close my wounds!

Eypór (Sindri)

(yelling) "Get out of the way!" I run up to Ilaus and push him back and I'm gonna try and to cure wounds on Flygia. (praying in the background) "Lord of Light give me the power to heal the wounds of my ally. Let me help her as you have helped me, as you have helped all of us. Let your warmth bring her back to us, may you guide her away from the places of death. May we seal her wounds and set her back on the path. Let us-"

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(demanding) What in *fuck* did I miss?

David (laus)

(angry, explaining) She came at me, she, -she was dragging me off, and then, and then she dumped me and then, and then she started attacking me!

Peter (Soren)

(angry) Hold on a moment! (to Westpike, sadly) Father, her face...

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(upset) *Don't you... (sad sigh) (quiet, sad) It's been bashed in... She's not going to be able to come back. Stop-*

Eypór (Sindri)

(beyond sad) What do you mean stop?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

We...

Eypór (Sindri)

(broken) We need to help her, we can't lose more.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(sad) *She's gone... And besides, we can't trust her. You know it, you know deep down you can't trust her. Don't-*

David (laus)

Yeah! She started it, she just came at me, and., and there was nothing else I could do. This time I did actually defend myself 'cause there was no one else around. I stabbed her in the neck and she ran from me and sort of vanished, and-

Peter (Soren)

(frustrated, but academic) Is that even her? Or is it the creature? Can, can I look at the body?

David (laus)

Well when... When I killed it, it had the, the three-socket thing. It wasn't her when I, -I killed something else... I think I killed the Silent One, or perhaps maimed it.

Peter (Soren)

Please Father Westpike, give me some space... Okay, 19 to examine her. Hmm... There are marks, burn marks all over her body. These are consistent with the Hellish Rebuke we've seen laus use... There are also some shards of glass embedded in her body, and multiple cauterized stab wounds. The glass looks like the kind laus had for his potions and may be some kind of -ow! No, it's definitely some kind of acid, and the acidic substance is covering much of her body. Try not to touch it with bare skin if you can avoid it... Um... Okay, her clothes and skin are badly damaged by the acid, and I'm thinking that this is in line with ooze, or an acid bath, or someone trying to hide a body, but the wounds don't match any of laus's weapons... Which are just lying on the ground between them.

David (laus)

I can explain that!

Peter (Soren)

And the torturer's kit too I hope... But for now it looks like this is definitely Flygia, but that she wasn't killed by laus's blade... Which is covered in blood.

David (laus)

That's what I'm saying! I used the, the rapier, I used the sword to, to kill whatever that thing! The Silent One! And then it, then it just disappeared into the ground and then she was there, behind me like this... For the record, the Silent One is a bit of a little bitch in a real fight if I'm being honest.

Travis

It will remember you said that...

David (laus)

(reacting to Travis) -What?

Eypór (Sindri)

(panicked) I go, I check if I find Flygia's diary in her, like burnt clothes.

Travis

Covered in a gel-like substance, Father Westpike brushed the goo aside, burning himself on the acid for one point of damage. This singular action saved the contents inside from destruction.

Eypór (Sindri)

There it is!... Ow!.., Um, okay... This is Flygia, this is, her remains.

David (laus)

I'll repeat again that the torturer's kit was just to close some of my own wounds. I've already told you I had something of a shady past, you said you could deal with it, and now it's out in the open, so let's move past it!

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

(cautiously) Who all got separated?

David (laus)

Me, from pretty much everyone... These two only just arrived moments before you.

Eypór (Sindri)

So let's try this again. What happened? I remember falling asleep, being woken once, and then waking in a very unpleasant place with Soren.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

You were together?

Peter (Soren)

Yeah we woke up somewhere else. I don't know where we were but it was deep in the woods and it seems that we were able to leave the path without... Well without being teleported back to the tree.

Eypór (Sindri)

Some kind of ruins. Scary stuff. I don't know.

Peter (Soren)

Yeah, there was something else there, but we decided it wasn't the chatting type and tried to get back to the camp.

Eypór (Sindri)

But, but what happened? Who was on watch? What happened? I, I do not follow what

happened here.

David (laus)

Well what happened was, from, from, my point of view was, I was just playing with the dice on my watch and then one of the, one of the die, one die just rolled over towards her, and then suddenly you'd all gone, and I was being dragged off into the woods, by her. And she was laughing and screaming whatever, and then she started attacking me.

Eypór (Sindri)

The two of you were not on watch together right?

David (laus)

No, but she must have been awake.

Eypór (Sindri)

Who was on watch with you?

David (laus)

Rowena.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

She slowly raises her hand.

Eypór (Sindri)

Rowena? Can you explain any of this?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Just wasn't really with it, double watch and all. But, I just remember suddenly being in this, well climbing out of the that tree. I mean I was in a, a... dirt room, like an animal's den or something... and I got out and I climbed and I was back here.

Travis

Rowena gained a point of inspiration, a reroll she could use at any point in time.

David (laus)

What? Why?

Eypór (Sindri)

For roleplaying the situation perfectly, shhh.

David (laus)

Can I also point out to everyone that I've been half jumped by Mr. Death and am still actively bleeding everywhere?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Sure, give me your hand.

Eypór (Sindri)

I put, I push Rowena's hands down before she heals him. laus, your weapon is bloody, is it not?

David (laus)

Yes it is. That's because I, I killed something that was wearing her face! Mr. Three-sockets!

Eypór (Sindri)

Yes, yes. Soren, can you see any stab wounds on the, the remains of Flygia?

Peter (Soren)

I don't see any stab wounds, no. I hesitate to bring this up as, even though she attacked us, she was our compatriot, but I do have the lantern, if we need answers.

David (laus)

Well, do it.

Eypór (Sindri)

I'm sorry?!

Peter (Soren)

From my point of view I, I, feel like we can't tell right now if this was actually Flygia, or whether it's some sort of illusion, or I'm just losing my mind so, I'd like to confirm.

David (laus)

Well if it is her, and if it does get the truth out of her, then I am more than happy to go through that.

Eypór (Sindri)

Alright.

Peter (Soren)

Anyone like to turn away?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Yeah.

Eypór (Sindri)

No, no laus is going to face this with us. Right?

David (laus)

(Sigh) (unenthused) Absolutely.

Eypór (Sindri)

Thank you.

Peter (Soren)

Out with the dark lantern.

(In Infernal and common –

Soul of the fallen I command you to return.

Soul of the lost return to this vessel!

Grant me your wisdom, grant me your thoughts, and I might free you from this torment!

Saf'd ao zmy oiddyl xe tappilv haff za ryzfrl.

Saf'd ao zmy dawz ryzfrl za zmuw jywwyd!

grilz py hafr suwvap, qrilz py hafr zmafqmzw, vorv xe puqmqz oryy haf orap zmuw zarpylz!

Travis

From beneath his heavy traveling cloak, Soren produced the old bronze lantern, worn with age and tarnish, and containing a small black candle. Without action, the candle flashed to life, burning with an emerald flame. Speaking low and incomprehensibly, the flame's light grew and grew, casting hideous green light in a wide radius around him.

The flickering light threw writhing shadows that brought the very forest around them life, casting a strange darkness every which way as two ethereal figures descended like a twisting comet toward Flygia's ruined face, kicking and screaming and biting until finally one of the spirits cast the other out, pulling itself through the crushed nose and a gap in Flygia's eye socket, and into the now convulsing body. The sanity of the onlookers immediately came into question...

Peter (Soren)

16.

David (Ilaus)

13.

Eypór (Sindri)

21.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

18.

Travis

Having seen this and worse, a few times now, even Rowena was not disturbed by what came next as the crushed and broken mouth of Flygia began to pop to life and her eyes fluttered, blinking quickly.

Kessi (Flygia)

(pained) Argh! What has happened? Where... How did I escape her domain?

Eypór (Sindri)

Flygia, I am horribly sorry to say this, but you have passed away.

Kessi (Flygia)

What?

Eypór (Sindri)

You are dead.

Kessi (Flygia)

Of course I am, I've been damned to the plane of the Allshadow... But (ugh) why have you brought me back in such a painful manner? Do you intend to (agh!) return me to life? Please be good news...

Eypór (Sindri)

I am very sorry, but that is not why you are here.

Kessi (Flygia)

(pained) Then why! Be quick! It hurts worse than my damnation!

Eypór (Sindri)

We need to know how you died...

Kessi (Flygia)

I was in a fight, but... But my memory of it is -ahh! Is not-so-good.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

We'll be quick. What was the last interaction with us that you remember?

Kessi (Flygia)

I, I was on watch with laus. I was looking around and then I fell through a rock and landed in a room of mirrors... I think... I think I fought a version of myself. An evil version... She was powerful.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

-Let her go.

Peter (Soren)

That was days ago, do you not remember anything else?

Kessi (Flygia)

No. Ugh!!!

Eypór (Sindri)

Flygia, is there any funeral rites you want us to perform?

Kessi (Flygia)

(pained) Not that I wish to spend the time to share.

Eypór (Sindri)

Are there any gods you praise?

Kessi (Flygia)

(pained) I praise none but the Allshadow. Beg for her forgiveness!

Eypór (Sindri)

Then I shall pray for you.

Kessi (Flygia)

(ugh) Make this pain stop! Please!

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Please stop.

Kessi (Flygia)

It hurts, please make it stop.

Peter (Soren)

Alright, I'll put the Lantern way. I release you! (BLOW OUT THE CANDLE SOUND)

Travis

As the light from the candle was expunged, the soul their deceased friend was released from her broken body.

Peter (Soren)

I don't know what to make of what she said, it, it seems like whoever we thought was Flygia with us these last few days, might not have been.

Eypór (Sindri)

It sounds like it. It sounds like she died in the tunnels before we encountered the oozes, somehow. And whatever creature that's travelling with us, brought her here?

David (laus)

I knew something was wrong when she went, she disappeared into the tunnel.

Eypór (Sindri)

You did say so, you did say so. I am, I am, I am sorry for my earlier distrust of you. And I'm gonna cure wounds real quick.

Eypór (Sindri)

16.

Travis

laus' wounds began to seal quickly as the light of Pelor mended flesh.

David (laus)

Well yeah... But thank you.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

And you get 6 from me.

David (laus)

Yeah no, we've all, we've all had our fair share of being duped by things.

Eypór (Sindri)

I'm sorry, my distrust of you for the last couple of days has been unreasonable considering the things you've been going through.

David (laus)

Thank you very much. Yeah. I just want to find my son and get out of this place.

Eypór (Sindri)

Me too. We all do.,

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

With that, we should just leave.

Travis

-Ok, breaking the fourth wall, a couple of updates for you everyone here.

Eypór (Sindri)

Yup?

Travis

First, Flygia, it has been amazing. We love you Kessi.

Kessi (Flygia)

I dead.

Eypór (Sindri)

Yeah you totally dead.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)
RIP Flygia.

Eypór (Sindri)
God.

Travis
You get a little goodbye speech...

Kessi (Flygia)
Thank you dudes for being so fun to play with. I kept forgetting to talk because I'm used to just listening to all of your voices on the White Vault and this was like 'oh, wait, I'm a part of 'da scene!' Anyway, in the months we've been doing this I've been happy to call you guys friends, and I hope that you guys do rescue laus's son and not all die and that Soren doesn't go super-crazy and kill you all... and that the Silent One isn't already someone else in the party... Anyway, It's been fun being evil-Flygia and this was my first D&D game, so thank you for the fun times! Bye bitches! Don't forget to take care of my bunnies!

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)
Bye!

Eypór (Sindri)
Awe... Bye!

Peter (Soren)
Bye Kessi!

David (laus)
Bye!

Travis
Additionally...

David (laus)
Is this where you're gonna talk about Bombas Socks? Or how to make a website?

Travis
Not unless they pay us to say that, but it's a pretty good spot to say that Lefty Games makes really great terrain that's affordable and high quality... Wink wink...

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)
(groan)

Eypór (Sindri)
(groaning) Duuude!

Travis
... Or that you can support our show on Patreon, get hours of bonus content, and that every dollar helps us do more cool things on the show.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Okay, that one is legitimate... But what were you really going to say?

Travis

It was at that time that everybody needed to make a constitution saving throw to avoid the draining effect that the Roaming Forest has on those from the Material Plane.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

20.

David (laus)

16 plus whatever.

Eypór (Sindri)

17.

Peter (Soren)

17 from me too.

Travis

Everyone except Rowena lost two points in an attribute of their choice.

David (laus)

What are those? What?

Travis

So you have Strength, dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, wisdom, and Charisma. Pick any one or two of those and bring them by a total of 2. You can do 1 and 1 or knock down one attribute by two.

Eypór (Sindri)

Can I be a complete bitch and take 1 and 1 so my ability modifier doesn't change?

Travis

You can, you can totally do that.

Eypór (Sindri)

Wow look at me, being a bitch.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Just need to be made of studier stuff like me.

David (laus)

Ok, I'm gonna, I'm gonna do 1 and 1 as well on wisdom and charisma.

Peter (Soren)

Same for me.

Travis

Alright, that's great. You guys passed the first night in the Roaming Forest, well except one of you, because she's dead! But you've all eaten, one of you more so than the others, and well, that's, that's the end of that. Let's get back in the story:

The team stood next to the body of their fallen friend, just beyond the shadow of a great gate, a

stone archway.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

One more house-keeping item: Do I still have, do I have my hat back, Sister Cavernsfall's Helm?

Travis

No it's gone.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Fuck!

Eypór (Sindri)

What?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

God damnit!

Eypór (Sindri)

Oh yeah, I wanted to roll religion for the god Flygia mentioned.

Eypór (Sindri)

19.

Travis

Father Westpike had heard much on the topic, but none of it firsthand knowledge. The faithful to her calling believed that the Jalveldrin or the Allshadow, the Goddess of darkness and Mother Night, created half of existence. At best, she is said to wait in the shadows of battlefields, providing protection through the cover of darkness for the wounded, and revealing the bodies of beloved heroes. The Allshadow represents the cycle of life and death in opposition to Pelor's control over the sky and light. She is said to be the mother of Ferati – the Dreamweaver. She is the Patron deity of the Darklands who has given power to two beings with enough favor to be called the Avatars of the Allshadow. Tagniz Zur, the first avatar, died 500 years ago, ruling the Darklands from the dawn of the Dark Miracle onward for two hundred years, and Jalveldrin, the current Avatar, who has ruled since. According to rumors there are crude traditions where the Allshadow requires blood sacrifices to give her power, and most agree that she is a being that has come to enjoy suffering, else why would she show the Darklands her favour? In divining shapes, The Allshadow is represented as a triangle within a circle atop a mirrored image, representing the hunched over woman surrounded by the endless cycle of death and life in the shadows. Often times just the lower half of the symbol is used. She is not a good god.

Eypór (Sindri)

Oooh.

Travis

However, she was one of the gods depicted in the murals fighting against the Nameless God.

Eypór (Sindri)

Yeah. Are we giving her a shallow dirt grave like everybody else until this far?

Peter (Soren)

I'll help absolutely.

David (laus)

She's kind of dissolving.

Eypór (Sindri)

Gods. She is not like dissolving more right now is she?

David (laus)

A little bit.

Eypór (Sindri)

Oh god.

David (laus)

That'd be the acid...

Eypór (Sindri)

Gross.

David (laus)

Residue...

Eypór (Sindri)

Gross.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

We should at least cover her over.

Eypór (Sindri)

Yeah. I'm gonna, yeah, me and Soren are definitely gonna dig a shallow grave and say a few words. It should take about an hour.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

I... I would like to check her for food.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Rowena's not a complete idiot.

Travis

Covered in acid, this would require a survival check to find usable rations.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

9.

Travis

Rowena recovered 3 days worth of trail rations.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Sweet.

Travis

And also Flygia's book of serious poetry should she want it.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Oh hell yeah.

Eypór (Sindri)

Serious poetry?

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

That's what the cover says, book of...

Eypór (Sindri)

I like that.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

... poetry. I dig it, I'm in.

Eypór (Sindri)

Oh you kind of totally need that right now Rowena.

Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

Yeah.

David (laus)

Any chance Flygia's Veronica Nightengale novel survived? The one about the Chief's son?

Travis

With the roll of a 19, laus recovered the copy of Islands of Passion.

Peter (Soren)

Okay, the grave's done...

Eypór (Sindri)

(speech) I would normally ask us to sing a song, and take a longer time with this prayer, but Flygia worshipped an evil god, and I do not wish to offend it, nor offer it songs of praise... However, our friend's soul is within the Domain of the Allshadow. She is not coming back... (calling out) -Evil one, if you can hear us, please grant our friend some form of peace. Ease her suffering in your world, and grant her the strength to endure the sinister trials you undoubtedly have in store for her. (Sadly, transitioning from calling out to giving a funeral sermon) We did not realize how important she was until it was too late... May we find forgiveness in her, as it was we who were wrong...