

## Dark Dice, Chapter 14 - Fireside

### Travis

After finishing their short rest, the team followed the path under the darkness of the canopy for 9 additional hours. The tall and languid forest, which started in a mix of earthen browns and yellows shifted, blackening, seemingly charred as if from a recent fire. The greys, blacks, and whites of the leaves seeming more muted, sickly as they continued, the breath of the forest not spurring them to the same motions they'd seen earlier in the woods. This forest was motionless by comparison. These trees and leaves did not bob or weave, but instead creaked in the dry stillness, as their mighty limbs overhead created their own dark sky of shadow and timber.

As the team's footfalls slackened, the forest was briefly sparse and the mix of aurora and stars overhead spurred their feet to action... And as the forest grew dense once again around them, although the trees did not retain any colour, even in the dim light of the dying torch. As the team reached their 18th hour of travel since their last long rest, exhaustion begins to settle in, and weary and hungry, their mood only sank when Soren motioned ahead to a new archway in the distance, directly in the way of their path.

### Peter (Soren)

Up ahead. It's almost like a wall of forest. The trees have literally grown into a weird sort of barrier preventing us from going anywhere but through the archway.

### David (laus)

(sigh) Gods. They even block climbing over it... Maybe this time-shifting stuff fucks with the trees as well.

### Eypór (Sindri)

I seem to be always the first one to ask this, but is it time to rest yet.

### Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

*It's ok, you're getting a bit older, you feel it in your bones more.*

### Eypór (Sindri)

It's, it's my knees. Mostly, my knee bones.

### Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

*If we have to pass through the arch then we should probably rest here, and go through after we've recovered some.*

### Eypór (Sindri)

So our hope for less arches, or no arches in the forest, has been quashed, so now all we have to count on is the hope that the forest trail is quicker. I'm sorry laus.

### David (laus)

That's alright. Part of risk is losing some of the time.

### Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

*It was a gamble wasn't it so?*

### David (laus)

It was... I just... -Seeing the Silent One impersonate Barrin made this whole thing ten times worse. There was a moment where I knew he was fake, but I just... I just hoped he wouldn't be. I wanted to will him into being the real thing... because... Because I don't know if Barrin's still alive

anymore, and the fact that we took the wrong path means possibly missing him if he does actually escape.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Let's not worry about it, let's, let's curl up and get some sleep.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Indeed.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Could use a rest.*

**Peter (Soren)**

Well there are four of us.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Oh god.

**Peter (Soren)**

So we can cut the watches up into 12 hours and all get 8 hours of sleep.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

Yup.

**Peter (Soren)**

I'm likely to want to take the first watch just so that I don't have that poor poor Pullo dream again. Who wants to join me?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

I'm fucking off to sleep, I'm exhausted.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I look pleadingly to laus, rubbing my knees.

**David (laus)**

Just a thought, it was from the two of us that bad things sprouted in that last little encounter. Is it wise having both of us on watch together?

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You're right, you're right. Sorry.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Honestly, I think we're fucked either way. Shit's gonna come for us, don't really think it matters who's on watch now. I trust you both almost as much as I trust him, so.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

But they did get...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*If it's gonna happen, it's gonna happen, just make sure the first thing you is scream or wake us up. Don't bother trying to hit, don't bother trying to solve it, just wake someone up.*

**Peter (Soren)**

Sure.

**David (laus)**  
Alright.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**  
*But if you feel better, I'll take first watch with Soren.*

**David (laus)**  
No, no, no, I'll do it.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**  
*Alright, goodnight!*

**Travis**  
And with that Rowena took her armor off without ceremony, pulled it over her like a blanket, put her head on her backpack, asleep before either of the others could even register what had just happened... But as old Father Westpike took his armor off, set up a proper bedroll, and donned his nightcap, what were the two heroes, Soren Arkwright – Monster Hunter renown, and laus Innskeep – assassin-turned shopkeep, doing.

**Peter (Soren)**  
I'm going to spend most of my time just kind of manoeuvring the lantern around looking at, at the shadows to make sure they're behaving the way I expect.

**David (laus)**  
I'm gonna be not playing dice this time. I don't want anything rolling off and fucking us over. I'm probably gonna keep watch. I've got a bag of ball bearings, I might just use a few as stress, stress balls. That'll keep me pretty well awake.

**Travis**  
Ok. That's legit, and with a Sanity Saving Throw roll of a 15, laus Innskeep recovered 5 stress and had no difficult remaining awake... But Soren however required a constitution saving throw to remain vigilant.

**Peter (Soren)**  
A twenty. Natural 20.

**Travis**  
The first hour passed without any incident...

**Peter (Soren)**  
So, laus, I've been thinking...

**David (laus)**  
Hm?

**Peter (Soren)**  
(oddly conversational and enthused) I said I've been thinking, about a story. Do you want to hear it?

**David (laus)**  
Sure. Can't possibly be worse than silence.

**Peter (Soren)**

(chuckle) Okay, here goes... Once upon a time, long ago, centuries, millennia even, before the Dark Miracle there was an elf.

**David (laus)**

(joking) I stand corrected.

**Peter (Soren)**

(unphased) -He's one of those ancient elves, loyal to Lord Bitheer, one of the first elven Kings of Tuh'ral. This elf started off as many of his age did, training to be a great warrior to enlist in the mithril army, but due to... circumstance, he caught eye of the princess, and they quickly became friends. They would meet regularly in secret and took a fancy to one another, a brief decades-long romance of passion and youth... But one night the great king's men discovered them together and our elven hero of yore was sentenced to an eternal vigil – a death sentence to join the front lines in every known war until the elves no longer had any enemies to war with. Our hero did this with minimal training and poorly crafted gear, and the controlling nature of elven politics would ensure that he never saw the princess again because the elves very much loved war.

So our hero kept the realm of the Elves, which encompassed most of the continent in those days, safe. First he warred with giants, forcing their survivors into disorganization. He became something of a hero. Then spilled the blood of Yuan-Ti [Yon Tea], taking part in casting their cold-blooded gods into hiding... He did not do this alone, mind you, but as time passed, fewer and fewer of the elves he knew, the great heroes of the age, remained by his side. They either died or retired. Only one elf had endured these centuries of hardships, and the two became more than friends while fighting the many enemies of Lord Bitheer. They eventually had a child of their own, who was raised into military service, knowing only fields of war, a sense of duty, and a parent's love... A sad existence.

But our hero -the elf-, and his partner, one day did something incredible, something so amazingly unexpected that the king of the elves had to even acknowledge them... And they were both gifted with one of the greatest masterworks of the early age of elven craftsmanship, a set of magical shields.

**David (laus)**

What did they do?

**Peter (Soren)**

(smiling) That's not important, because it made no difference to their death sentence, their "Eternal Vigil" and instead of being allowed to return and live a normal life among their kind, they were tasked with spending the rest of eternity in isolation, in a dark cold crypt hidden behind giant statues erected in their honour... They were told that they would be given a most important mission, worthy of the heroes they had become, that they alone would act as scouts against one of the greatest fiends of the Blood War.

**David (laus)**

The Blood War, that's the um, war between the nine hells and the abyss?

**Peter (Soren)**

(unphased) Where devils keep the unending hoard of demons at bay, yes. They were each given rings of sustenance, water, and a very limited supply of books and activities to keep themselves entertained while all of eternity would pass them by and they would never see the sun again... Tracking the weeks themselves became a hobby, and our hero's hatred of their king, of elfkind, of the world itself, only grew.

**David (laus)**

(a bit concerned) I think I've heard this one. It, uh...-

**Peter (Soren)**

Well, I need to pee anyway. I'll be back in a moment to finish the story.

**David (laus)**

Didn't you just go like five minutes ago?

**Peter (Soren)**

Small bladder.

**Travis**

Soren walked just beyond sight... and returned without incident a few moments later, sitting down and calmly returning to his watch.

**David (laus)**

So, uh, how's the story end?

**Peter (Soren)**

(curious) What story?

**Travis**

laus stared hard at Soren, looking at the torn cloth and scars marking his right side, the scabbing wound just above his heart, noting Soren's genuine confusion.

**David (laus)**

The story that... (realizing) Um... (conflicted) Nevermind. Just keep a careful watch. I think I'm gonna stop playing dice and focus up a bit more. Don't want any distractions. Don't want the Silent One infiltrating us.

**Peter (Soren)**

(confused) Okay.

**David (laus)**

No more piss breaks either. Buddy system or hold it in.

**Travis**

The uncanny duo were able to maintain their vigil for the duration of their watch... But mere feet away those who were sleeping had less than a pleasant experience:

Father Westpike found himself in a dream even more real than the one that came before. He was face to face with his son Rainar, who rapidly grew up within the corrupting influence of the council-members he so despised, although in a location that he was unfamiliar with. As the events of months flew by in a blink he followed Rainar passing through rooms with so many faces - unfamiliar, hated, and even briefly that of young Rowena, among others. As time passed, Rainar was twisted by those around him, and though dressed as follower of Tempus with a brooch of the flaming sword, he engaged in despicable acts unbecoming of any dwarf, much less a supposed paladin. Sindri watched his son take, hurt and pillage in the name of a god he knew would be against such brazen acts. There was a darkness in Rainar's heart, fuelled by a hatred, which Sindri felt, burned for him. Sindri Westpike watched as his son grew up, never knowing the love of his father, only knowing the ways of those who his parents had spent a whole life fighting. This darkness felt like a sickness, an uneasy sensation of weight and bile, was left within Sindri as he awoke.

Rowena was similarly tortured with more visions of Renaxe with his wife and children. It was a different evening, and Renaxe was reading them a bedtime story, giving each character in the story a unique and expressive voice. He kissed them goodnight. He kissed his wife goodnight, departing for a late meeting at his office, a special work meeting, he told them, that would help their clan. Renaxe met with a different woman Rowena recognised to be an assistant, in a private underground garden. And they began to discuss business while walking together. Seemingly out of nowhere they kissed passionately, as if a hidden fire within both of them had sparked to a full flame once they knew they were truly alone. Rowena's sadness turned quickly to resentment and further feelings of betrayal. These feelings of doubt preyed on her like carrion.

Our friends who were awake were unmarred on their watch. At the end of their shift, Soren quietly noted to laus that it was the first time that nothing bad had happened to them on watch for a very long time...

**David (laus)**

Yay!

**Travis**

After a long day of travel, they woke their counterparts and moved quickly to relax and rest... But what were Rowena and Father Westpike doing, presumably after 15 minutes of uneventful silence.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Father Westpike is wearing his full chain mail and he's polishing the hammer her has. It had gotten no use over the last couple of hours. And he seems to be doing more for a meditative sense then out of any duty of use. He seems very deep in thought.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

Rowena will be looking, really pale and very kind of, green gilled is a good expression for it, but she'll, she'll look over at Father Westpike and *You ok?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

S-Sorry? What did you say?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I asked if you we're ok, you look a bit, well, we're supposed to be on watch and you're in meditation, so you ok?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I'm sorry, I know I shouldn't let my mind wander like this. Just, had a bad dream that's all. But dreams are only that, dreams.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I know, but sometimes dreams are just a reflection of the things you're worried about. And it's obviously got you worried enough that you're, not paying that much attention so, you want to talk about it? Maybe you'd feel better if you spoke about it?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Talking can ease the soul but, I think... I think this is... I think. I don't know...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Just spit it out. It's just you and me, just spit it out.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I fear I am a horrible father. I fear I am a horrible husband, and I fear that I have left those that I love to a worse fate than I thought. My dreams, they showed me my son, that's he's... Fallen from the light... Fallen very far... I have no doubts in Pía's accomplishments and her skills, but I fear that I may have been rash to run away like I did. Run away is not the right term, but it is what it feels like now, in retrospect.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I can't attest to, how you're a father to your own kids but, you're, you're still a good person. And, I'm gonna say something you're probably not gonna like. No, you shouldn't have run away, you've left them for far too long. How, how, how long has it been?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

We're very close to a century now. But it's not like I don't keep tabs on them. I have friends that send me information about them.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Is it "friends" or is it Valen Ironshard?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

(reluctantly) It's Valen, yes. He trades regularly within the Frostiron mountains and brings me updates about them, about the Hold. But it has been a while since I've seen him... My sense of time is feeling particularly muddled here, but I could swear that it's been less than a decade, but I fear that maybe, maybe things have gotten worse. Hopefully not.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well, when you get out of here, you can go find them. Just, it doesn't matter about anything else. I mean good family's, speaking from experience, is not easy to find.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

It's not that simple! It's not like I...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*No it is, it is that simple. I mean look at you. And she's going to put her hand on his arm. You're a good person, but you're just scared. And there are other options to get your family back, there's other ways to check on them. and you're not alone any more, I mean, you've, you've saved one of your family, now let's go save the others.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

He smiles when you say that. Sometimes time is what helps us all. Rushing to action is not always the best thing to do, especially in a slow moving world like ours. I believe what Pía was doing as the right thing, and I believe that if I would have thrown down my hammer in that moment, I think I would have ruined things worse. I am a man of, I'm a man of, pain, and hurt, I deliver it, I receive it. I am not a man of words I don't think things with, with dialogue and talks. I, and that's what's needed right now in Westmann's hold. That is what is needed now in Westmann's Hold, is rational people speaking dialogue, revealing corruptions and the, the awful things that are going on. A single dwarf wielding a hammer isn't going to fix the, the deep seated issues back home. It's gonna be fixed by smart people, like my wife.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well, it's lucky for you that you know me because I can do talking. It's all I can do.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You are a very smart girl.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I really wouldn't got that far.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You very much are. You've surprised me with some of you, -a lot of your knowledge. You seemed to be well read: history, magic, you seem to know a lot for your age.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*It's the advantage of not giving a crap about what my family wanted me to do. Just reading and writing and singing and learning. But...*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You seem to be very much into that, reading and writing and learning.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well it's either that or go and put some signatures on the bottom of an acquisitions form. That, that's not me, I'm not, what do you call it, a company girl? What the family wants for me is not what I want.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

The trader's life is not bad if you don't assign yourself to a desk. Travelling the world, seeing different far-away places. Speaking to amazing people. It can be very fun, though of course difficult. Everybody will try to lie to you to try and get your stuff from you for cheaper. But I don't think they would do that easily from you.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*No, I've been raised by the best in that.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

If one, if it's one thing the Kordalum have, is that they're hard negotiators.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Yeah.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

And I see you picked it up from them, you take crap from nobody.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I try not to but, sometimes you wonder. Like you. I'm not taking your crap about being scared either. We're going to go get them, we're gonna fix this and whatever is going on where your wife and kids are, we'll fix that. Well, you'll fix that.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

No, no, we'll fix it, if you'll, if you want to? But I have a church to build when I get back to Ilmayter, and without Lady Cavernsfall it's gonna be hard.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I think I probably owe a hand in that, too.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I'm sorry, I shouldn't, I shouldn't bring it up, that was dumb of me.



**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

You can see her eyes are definitely beginning to tear up.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Rowena, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have spoke of that. He like puts his hands on her shoulders, as like pushing her against his chest, trying to hug her. I'm sorry I shouldn't have.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

She kind of pulls away a bit and looks at him. *I lied earlier. When I said that all that happened was that I was in a room, climbed out of a tree.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

That... What happened?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well, I, I woke up in this room and, there was this cauldron and it had a note over the top of it and it said that I couldn't cheat, that I had to drink it all and that the key to get out of the room was in the bottom. And I tried the door because why wouldn't I? And well it was locked, at least I thought it was. And I didn't know where you were...*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

This was just your dream. Like the dream I had.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

She shakes her head. *No, this is not a dream. You know how you went and came through a portal, and you thought you were definitely awake, I was definitely awake. This wasn't a dream. Anyway, I couldn't open the door, it was locked, and I, I didn't know where you were. I didn't know where anyone else was and I figured this roaming forest being what is is just do what I said. And, I drank the stew, I drank it, I drank down to the very bottom. And I tried not to taste it, I tried not to think about it, but when I got to the bottom, and there were two eyes in there and...*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Eyes?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

She nods. *And there was lady Cavernsfall's head in there.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

No, this isn't...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I didn't mean to kill her, I didn't.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You didn't, it wasn't you, it was the sword. It's just the forest's tricks. It's not real Rowena. Don't believe the forest.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*It doesn't matter if what I drank was her or not, it doesn't matter, I still killed her.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

No you didn't, you silly girl, you didn't. That sword was cursed. Created by some mad magic. It

wasn't you, it wasn't your hand. It was the blade. You're not responsible...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*You know I thought it killed you? And when I saw it go into her instead, that I was really relieved. I know it sounds horrible, but it's true. I'm really, I'm so sorry I didn't mean to.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

He doesn't let you struggle any more and he like forces you into a hug, Rowena, this is not your fault. None of this is your fault. This place makes a mad man out of all of us. It's not real, that was dream, a trick. The forest is trying to break you and you are stronger than this.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I just want to go home.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

As soon as we find the children, we will all go home. All of us. And I will vouch for your sanity and for your, your innocence. I will not let anyone harm you or claim that you did anything wrong. You came here out of the goodness of your heart. And this god forsaken place has turned you, turned your mind against you, turned your body against you. You are not responsible Rowena. And he squeezes you into a hug.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

She hugs him back, like really tightly. She's basically just trying to contain her sobbing.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

It's ok. Don't... I know it's beyond me to tell you not to think. Your mind is a great place but just know you are not responsible for this. Just know you, you're a good person. You could have stayed back in Ilmater's hope. You could have helped the women plough the fields if you wanted but no, you decided to risk your life to come here running with me. You didn't come here out of malice, out of hate, or out of jealousy, out of greed or any of the things that motivate most of the people I know. You came here simply out of the goodness of your heart. You came here to help.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

She pulls back a bit and wipes the tears on the back of her hand. And she says *yup, and that's, that's really working out great for the both of us.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

He wipes away a single tear as that was like welling up in his eye as he's trying to stay stoic, listening to Rowena cr... sob. It's fine, it's fine. Lady Cavernsfall knew the dangers we were going to face, and she choose to sacrifice herself. You did not choose wield the blade in that way.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

As you talk about choosing to sacrifice herself, she looks like she's coming to a decision. And she nods and *Ok. Ok so we've got a plan. We get home and we fix all the shit when we get home. That's the plan.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

First we fix Ilmater's Hope, and then we fix ourselves. Let's do the easy things first.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Yeah. Sounds like a plan.* And she'll pull out her harp and she'll start to play some of the kind of music that she's heard in the church that she was around you guys with when she first arrived.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

He picks up quickly what's she's playing and starts a hymn along with the tunes.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

**Eypór (Sindri)**

**NOTE: Sindri's song goes here!**

**Travis**

That was awesome... I love you guys... -er, hem... Back to our regularly scheduled program. Rowena and father Westpike both recovered 10 stress.

**Travis (Speaking as Soren Speaking as laus)**

However, mere feet away, in Soren's dreams, or wait no... These felt more like memories or *deja vu*, where he could plainly see his hands on flesh, on his knife, torturing people, so many people, men, women, the elderly, children, elves, humans, dwarves, dragonborn, a screaming frost giant, and... a... a unicorn? -So many victims. The blade in Soren's hands was always the same, his favourite one, his cursed dagger with its singular edge. The patterns it cut into the flesh of the innocent are so familiar, so beautiful, intoxicating, genuinely enchanting. A mixture of infernal and delightful imagery. And above it all, a phrase repeated over and over in his voice. *Do you seek him? Da haff wick mah? Da haff wick mah? Da haff wick mah?* And as Soren beamed proudly at his workmanship with flecks of flesh and muscle in his beard, breathing heavily as he surveyed the beauty of his magnum opus, he thought very seriously that after so many years of seeking him, he might finally have found way to reach the Nameless God from his dreams... And just like that, Soren Arwright woke to a distant clicking sound.

**Peter (Soren) (this line is from later in the episode)**

Absolutely, and I wake up very perturbed.

**Travis**

laus, mere feet away in the physical world relived the day to day of his pleasant activities at Ilmater's Hope, running his inn, fetching water, afternoon tea with the mayor. However, laus' son was absent in all of these memories. As weeks flashed by in an instant, laus enjoyed the special winter festival of his son's birthday alone. Barrin's first day of school, his previous birthdays, afternoons of work now as if he'd never existed at all, never had a son. And the more laus saw, the more it felt like his previous memories were imperfect, perhaps even incorrect. Did he ever have a song? Instead he remembered simply walking by the school building on the way to the well staring coldly at Gilly, celebrating his own quiet birthday alone during winter festival, meeting with the children of the village at the parent's request as a bogeyman of sorts to warn them of the dangers of the wider world. laus begin to actively question if Barrin was real at all. In his dreams, laus saw his own acid-scarred face in a mirror smugly reproach: "if he's real, then why don't I have any memento of him on my person?" laus could hear the words, see himself saying them, but he was still not sure it was really him. But the fear that it could be made his blood run cold as he found himself suddenly awoken, shivering, feeling around desperately with his injured arm to find some proof of his son's existence. Yet... laus could not find it.. In his panicked state, failing his sanity saving throw, he also did not notice three missing candles, one missing dice set, one day of missing rations, and 17 gold that seemed to vanish into thin air.

**David (laus)**

(smugly) If he's real, then why don't I have a memento of him on my person.

**Peter (Soren)**

(creepy chanting) *Do you seek him? Da haff wick mah? Da haff wick mah? Da haff wick mah?*

**David (laus)**

(Panicked, whispered, to self) If he's real, then why don't I have a memento of him on my person?!  
(Terrified) fuck fuck fuck fuck! Something (louder) anything!

**Travis**

The others watched as laus frantically searched his pack and pockets. Soren, noticed that the air was heavy with the scents of mildew and fresh dirt, and just beyond the edge of the camp light he could swear that he heard a clicking sound... But it stopped just as suddenly as it started.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

I'm going to rush over to laus and basically just help him to his feet, but stand in front of him. Just holding onto like having pulled him to his feet but still holding onto his arm.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Father Westpike gets up holding his hammer and his shield and puts himself between the party and whatever the sound was.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*laus you ok? What's happened.*

**Travis**

Now on his feet, laus's hands continued to search his pockets compulsively, checking and rechecking the hidden linings on his clothing, uncaring if the others could see him.

**David (laus)**

(near breaking again) I, um... I... My son... I just had a horrible dream, about my son, he he wasn't there and I don't have anything of him at all, anywhere. I... You know he's real, right? You saw him, right? I didn't just make him up? I'm not crazy, right?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

Seeing that Westpike is in front of us, I'm just gonna turn round and like, take both, like put my hands either side of his arms and just look him straight in the eyes like, or look up I guess. Look up at him and say *You have have memories of him right, who he is?*

**David (laus)**

I, I, Yes, and no... but the, the dreams...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*No, no, no, ignore... we've just had a pretty lengthy discussion about dreams. Trust me, what you feel here, and she'll put her hand over, up to his heart. That's what important. Everything here is just fucking with us alright? So long as you...*

**David (laus)**

(weakly) Alright.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*... know here that he's still your son, and that you love him. That's what counts. Everything else here is to fuck with us. So just don't pay attention to that, we've got you. Alright?*

**David (laus)**

...Thank you Rowena. (sincere compliment) You're okay for a murderess.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*-It's ok. Just stay with us, we can't lose anyone to anything. We can't afford to freak out. You're*

*gonna be ok.*

**David (laus)**

(upset with self) You're right. -You're right. Sorry.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*No, no don't, don't worry, it's better we express these things than keep them bottled cause it'll just niggle at us right, don't ever be sorry for saying things that are concerning you. Just, remember what's real...*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

(half-whispering, serious AF) Rowena, can I say something to you in private?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*(distracted) Yeah, sure. What?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

(whispering very softly, concerned) I seriously do not remember ever meeting his son... I never have, and I'm essentially the village priest. There is a very real danger that both of our traveling companions may have started the journey... in less than full mental strength.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*(whispered, very softly, concerned) I really don't want to believe that...*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

(whispering very softly, concerned) But it may be true. And we have to be ready for that possibility that either or both of them may turn on us when we find the... the children.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*(whispered, very softly, concerned) (sigh) laus hates religion, is it possible that maybe he just never let his kid hang out with us because he thinks we're bonkers?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

(whispering very softly, concerned) It is possible, but I am just saying, prepare yourself mentally for the alternative.

**Travis**

Six hours into their long rest, Soren caught the glint of eyes in the distance, five pale yellow eyes, one of which was bisected.

**Peter (Soren)**

While notching a flaming arrow Soren is going to say "We are not alone any longer. Get to the gate!"

**Travis**

As Soren let loose the arrow the light missed its target but briefly illuminated the heaving stretched monstrosity of chintin and claws. Its features warped and stretched as it began to charge toward the team from where it crept in waiting, eighty feet away.

**David (laus)**

(panicked) Next time, we'll take the left path ok?!

**Eypór (Sindri)**

(hurried, in combat) Of course we will!

**Peter (Soren)**

(commanding, loudly) Retreat to the gate! Now!

**Eypór (Sindri)**

(hurried, in combat) We can do that! We can do that! -Leave the pack laus!

**Travis**

The team was able to reach the archway before the creature was on top of them, and once they passed through, they immediately felt again that strange sense of familiarity, like they had been here before, like they almost belonged here. They watched as the pack with three days rations was crushed underfoot by the creature, which -oh, by the way, before the long rest you all consumed an additional day of trail ration unless otherwise noted.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Yup.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

I will not. I refuse to eat my dinner.

**Travis**

That's understandable under the circumstances... Also, each of the team lost 2 points to an attribute of their choice. -Back to the adventure, as the team looked back they could see the creature moving at an unnaturally fast speed, a blur of motion that left the blurry trail of its outline as it moved. The creature paced with relaxed motion but deadly speed a dozen times in the blink of an eye, before returning back into the darkness from where it came.

**Peter (Soren)**

That thing's not following us through the archway. I wonder why.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Probably knows about the weird time dilation thing.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Perhaps something about the time is un, un, like, is dangerous to it.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*You two should go back to sleep.*

**David (laus)**

Yeah, we need like another four hours to get a full rest at this point, assuming no funny business.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Yeah.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*We should, you two should go back to sleep, we'll finish out our watch, don't you worry.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You're the one who's mostly spent on the fight against those freaks, you threw everything you

had at them. You should definitely be the one who goes back to sleep! None of us got a real rest.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Yeah, but we have a watch to do, if I'm not doing much, I'll be fine. I've got our music.*

**Travis**

Behind them, the creature returned to circle around the gate, pacing another twenty or so times its blurred outline trailing behind. It looked up, stares directly at Soren and vanished again into the darkness. None had time to react, as the entirety of that description took place in the blink of an eye.

**David (laus)**

I suddenly feel very vulnerable standing this close to the portal. Let's take the conversation a few feet further away...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Ok maybe, we should move on a little bit before we rest, too.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Yeah let's keep moving. Yeah we keep moving.

**Travis**

The team walked 80 feet, 90 feet, 150 feet. laus, eyes fixed upon the archway, nearly tripped as he saw the creature creep through slowly and sprint off into the woods.

**David (laus)**

Guys, that thing came through.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Through the archway?

**David (laus)**

(gulp) Yup.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Ok, what have we got? We, we really have to rest, I mean...*

**David (laus)**

(confidence returning) I suppose I could set up my little rope string and bell thing to let us know if it's coming.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Do you have, I know you said you got a bag of ball bearings, have you got a bag of caltrops or anything?*

**David (laus)**

Of what?

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I take that as a no.

**David (laus)**

No I don't, probably.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*That's...*

**David (laus)**

Fuck, my rope appears to only have ten feet left. I think it cut and frayed in a few spots when I was bit earlier.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

So we hunt it. The next person who sees it, take a shot. We need this creature dead, it's not gonna let us rest.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Alright, where did you see it go?*

**David (laus)**

It went East... Or whatever way that is.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Right side of the path, gotcha.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Can you do that warding thing you put on me earlier, yesterday?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

It had a limited time span. It will only, it will last less than an hour.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Alright, let's make one of us a target.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Oh. Interesting and it will last exactly an hour, sorry.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Let's make one of us a target, I can protect myself good enough.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

What's your plan? Lie down in the road and look like road?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Oh, I was thinking just standing here looking like I wanna try and beat it in the face and look really like pathetic, and you know, to be fair, I'm not really wearing much in the way of armor.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You don't look like much, but you pack quite the punch.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Yeah, but they don't know that.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Exactly. Alright so we're trying to lure it out?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well we need to rest, and if we keep walking, we're not going to get any rest. Let's deal with it*



now.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Alright, I touch her and give her a warding bond. Give her a gentle touch.

**Travis**

Rowena felt more prepared to take on the horror lurking in the woods as the protective wards of Pelor flowed through her.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

Sweet.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I say we make camp, the three of us, make sit around the lantern and she will walk off a little bit, not more than 20ft, make herself a target.

**David (laus)**

Ok.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*No, you guys need to be ahead of me. That way I can't lose track of the road.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I, yeah I, imagined...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Oh wait no, if I'm ahead then you can run to me, that's even better, fuck that.*

**David (laus)**

Actually, you know what guys, I think we're letting far too much time pass with all of our resting. If we can keep going, I think we should. And we just need to keep on, keeping our eyes out behind us for, for this creature. I've just got a feeling that, that we should just keep going.

**Peter (Soren)**

We do feel stressed for time now that we're on this side of the archway. I'm inclined to agree.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Fine. Then I say we continue, but like I said earlier, shoot at the thing if you ever see it! Lure it out of, -force it out of the forest if we see it!

**David (laus)**

I like this plan. -And I start walking to lead the team.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well if we do, you two are gonna have to take watch tomorrow, because I've lost half my spells, I've got nothing right now.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Don't worry, I'll take care of it.

**Travis**

laus led the team onward and over the next two hours, picking the left path every time a split

presented itself as the trees themselves changed from black to a new variety of white. Some of the trees were almost bony and rigid while others were soft, pale, and fleshy. Long dark strands of moss that almost resembled hair replaced leaves, and the trees they saw looked sickly, covered in knobs that twitched, pustules filled with bubbling liquid that sloshed as the trees shifted during the strange breaths of the forest, which had become more laboured... almost like a wheeze, and also more frequent. As more time passed all four of team felt as though they could see faces in the trees and they were not sure if they were truly alone any more, even without the presence of monsters.

Their only reprieve came a few hours later, when in the distance, they could see light up ahead as the trees became more sparse and visibility increased greatly. Nearing the edge of the forest they could just make out the shape of a ruined structure 5 miles ahead of them, and about a half mile in the distance, an empty stone archway that the path that continued through it... At long last they had reached the Domain of the Nameless God.