

Session 1

LETS GOOOOOOO

The spring festival is ongoing, a celebration of the end of winter and heralds the beginning of planting season. This year it has been ill-omen'd, its cold and cloudy and raining all night so the fields are muddy and the atmosphere is not very spring-like. Still the festivities are being observed, there are people out and about in the village square chatting and mingling and the public house has home cooked dishes freely available for people to eat. There are flowers adorning the lintels of the public house and nearby homes. There are casks of the most recent batches of whisky that are being sampled and shared while friends swap stories and catch up after a long winter. Treasa is concerned about the number of strangers in the town, just as much as Esme is excited to learn about the doings of the same strangers. Rua is hyped up about the tug-of-war game, determined to be on the winning team this time! Stella is caught up in her official duties, at her post in front of the pavilion of the gods to give beneficence to passers-by, and preparing for her noon time ritual to welcome back the sun from its wintry retreat.

As the festival progresses Soren stands proudly behind his cask of whiskey, soliciting everyone nearby to come have a taste but especially all the young women. While they taste the drinks he spins a tall tale of when he won a brewing competition out near Gordin's Delve. Kiva is there, sipping a sample and listening skeptically to Soren's story. Elsewhere, Treasa is conservatively sipping her own drink and eyeing those who are drinking more than a little. She looks forward to when the festivities simmer down and move into a more relaxed atmosphere. Old Esme is costumed up and following an old tradition of 'pranking' people as a method of playing matchmaker. Rua is hanging out with Soren, trying to get advice about girls and how to tell if they like you, before asking Betta to dance with him in front of the musicians. Stella is overseeing the ceremonies, it is a comfortable task for her as she has been performing such duties for all her life. Rua and his team are able to handily win the tug-of-war competition, pulling all comers into a muddy faceplant. He and his team are showered with flowers and drinks, the villagers patting their backs and congratulating them.

Those who are not cooking, drinking heavily or making out are gathered near the pavilion of the gods. Dove, the priestess of Danu, welcomes people. Stella gives a sermon about the glory of the sun and the warmth of Helior, but the overcast day casts a shadow on her words and she seems a little uncertain. Honoured Cutha preaches of Tor and his glory demonstrated through the thunder and lightning so present at the current time. He is a great orator and his speech captivates the crowd. While he speaks he is interrupted by a mild earthquake, shaking tables and toppling loose items. This goes on for some time, 20 seconds or so, and has people a bit worried. Is this an omen, for good or ill? Old Esme, in her Trickster costume, tries to speak jovially and make light of the quake, positing it is a prank of the tricksters, to distract from talk about bad omens. While people are mollified, Cutha finishes his speech quickly, its clear nobody is really paying attention anymore. Old Treasa scans the crowd and sees Cutha looking a bit shaken. Shaken, and maybe a

bit guilty?...

Outside, Betta and some of the other young girls are handing out blue bells and other flowers for people to weave into wreaths as is tradition. Rua asks Betta to dance, she says yes but seems a little uncertain. Is she uncomfortable or is it just nerves? Betta hands the flowers to Kiva and her and Rua go to where the musicians are playing and start spinning around gracefully. Their dance gets more elaborate, people circling around them and clapping along to the music. When they are done with a flourish the onlookers clap and cheer, while Esme whistles from a little way away. Rua asks Betta to dance again later, and she agrees. At this time Rua gets thumped on the shoulder and a drunk man yells "Boy get us some more whiskey". Rua retorts instantly, telling them to get their own. Turning around, it's Emmer and some of his friends, clearly drunk at a nearby table. Emmer stands up and reiterates again, telling Rua to get him a drink. Rua tells him to get it himself, if he can even get there without falling down. Tension is rising, Emmer advances slowly towards Rua. Out of nowhere Old Esme throws a bucket of water on the two of them, shocking them both. Emmer, seeing who intervened, grumbles a bit and moves away to get his own drink.

Time goes on, the tension of the earthquake during the ceremony is mostly forgotten and the wrestling competition has started. This year it is a mudfest, the wet dirt being churned up by the high-spirited competition. Old Treasa is approached by one of the village elders, Murdoch, asking her to gather Esme and meet him and the other elders at his home. He is obviously sweating, seeming distressed in some way. Treasa, in her usual direct way, walks in a straight line towards Esme who is rather easy to find, being in the most colourful outfit of the entire village. Old Esme reads the situation, moving to the side and taking off the trickster mask. Treasa explains the situation and they move together to Murdochs house. At the house there are some other elders and a stranger. Murdoch closes the door and asks the stranger to tell her story. The stranger is a plump woman, mid 40s, clothing stained from travel. "I come up from Cobben to see the festival but was stopped on the road. There were six of them, bandits I think. They had a couple horses, but all had shivs. They gave me a message and told me to bring it to Stonetop." The woman hands Treasa a crudely written and poorly spelled note, reading "Greetings from Gray's Knives. We will be back in 2 months and we expect some sort of treasure. If we don't like what we find we will start burning." Treasa questions the woman, were the bandits hillfolk? No, they didn't seem dressed for it. They were a rag-tag crew, maybe from Gordin's Delve or farther north? This happened on the highway, down from the foothills. Old Esme, leaning on her years of experience, looks deeply into the woman's eyes and determines she is telling the truth. Esme sends her off to get some food and an extra helper of sweets.

After the woman leaves, the elders discuss their response. They will announce the news tomorrow, no need to disrupt the festivities, but they are not going to take this threat lightly. They plan on preparing the small wall and laying some traps to surprise any would-be looters. But the threat is not for 2 months, they leave to rejoin the festival. Esme goes to Soren, who is a little bit drunk at this point, and Esme wants to know if anyone Soren knows might have some information on the bandits. Soren is trying to hide the fact he is playing bookie for the wrestling matches and isn't really paying attention. He gets, eventually, that it is serious but isn't able to parse a real answer for her. Esme says she will follow up later, when he is not so clearly inebriated.

Kiva always has the puzzle box niggling at the back of her mind. She keeps an eye on the gathered crowd and spots a guest from Marshedge and they meet over a drink. Dermud is his name. Kiva speaks in hypotheticals, about a puzzlebox made of metal and how one might go about opening. Dermud considers the question, there are many ways to open a puzzle box, as many ways as there are different boxes. Kiva invites him to stay at her house for a few days to work together on the box, but quickly clarifies this is NOT a double entendre. Dermud stutters a bit but agrees, this would be a purely intellectual endeavour. They head out to Kiva's house to begin poking at the puzzlebox.

In the meantime, Stella is helping Granny Eadna baking pies in the communal ovens. Ran and Shan appear and grab Stella's attention, she asks Eadna to handle the pies and goes with the kids. They confess to doing something bad to Stella's exasperation. They dared Cayu to write his name on the Tumble-Down Wall but he has been gone for 5 hours now. "We didn't think he would do it! Promise!" Stella decides to go to Old Treasa to help organize a search party. Its a few hours until dark, Treasa gets to business right away. She sends Ran and Shan to their father to get him to start getting people together, and Stella to tell Honoured Dove and Cutha. Treasa then heads to the Public House and gathers the least drunk people she can find along the way. Stella finds Cutha at the Pavilion of the Gods, he is meditatively looking at the shrine to Tor. He sees Stella come in and asks "Have we gone astray? If feels this year is ill-omened". Stella doesn't really answer him, but tells him about Cayu. He agree's, yes, and moves out. Stella then finds Esme, who is with Rua and Betta, and recruits them as well. As they gather around the Standing Stone the commotion draws Soren and Kiva's attention and they join the search party.

A group of about 40 total get together and head down the winding stair to the Great Wood. They string out, staying within sight range and singing the traditional village seeking song while starting to walk through the wood and search for Cayu. As they are about to start, Wickla, Cayu's mother, approaches dragging Dayed, the twin's father, to Esme and asks for permission to beat him as reproachment for his poor control over his kids. Dayed thankfully has an armful of torches and, while avoiding Wickla's gaze, hands them out to the search party. Stella lights one of the torches by whispering to them, and the lit torch is used to light all the others. The torches are handed out, one to every third person, and the line sets off singing all the way. Stella infuses her torch with a consecrated flame, adding a holy light to the party.

The line gets bunched up at a point and some of the farmers find a fallen tree that has snapped off at the base and begin to debate taking it back to town. Treasa asks them to remember the location and come back later, the search for Cayu comes first. The party continues. While they walk, Rua and Betta slowly walk closer together until they are within reach. Betta is catching Rua up on the 'tradition' of daring kids to make their mark and tells about how she scratched an X once herself. It was the most scared time of her life. Rua remarks how brave she was and behind them a voice says "So Brave". Betta screams in shock!

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