Session 11

2 week hiatus, down 2 players, but pushing forward anyways!

The expedition consists of Soren, Kiva, Old Treasa, Rua, Stella, Old Esme, Willem, Fio, Corradin, and Trayhern. While they wait for Willem to come from the homestead, fetched by Rhian, they all get outfitted for the journey and meet back outside of the public house to plan their route. Taking the Maker's Road would be quickest, being able to get to the Barrow Hills in a couple of days, but Esme makes a good point that they will likely have watchers posted at some point on the road. Cutting overland will take extra time, about 4 days to get there, but with a reduced chance of being seen. Kiva has ranged the area around Stonetop extensively and in discussion with Esme and others they plot a route using known animal trails skirting just south of the cliffs that can shave a day off the journey.

As they finish planning Willem arrives geared up and the expedition departs, heading almost due west from Stonetop, avoiding the main exit. When possible they follow the faint animal trails through the grass though at times they need to push through the wait high grasses to forge their own path. At these times Treasa takes the lead, flattening the grass beneath her for others to follow more easily. The afternoon blends into the evening and they find a small dell in the plains where they stamp down the grass and setup a campsite. After the work is done, Esme spends some time with a sheet of hide and a rock, scratching the story of the expedition so far to preserve moments both big and small. After the comp tasks are done and as the group sits around the fire before turning in, Soren takes some time to speak about how to travel through a hilly area like the Barrow Hills without sky lining yourself, sticking to the slopes and valleys. He then launches into a story of how he used these tactics to avoid 3 separate Hillfolk bands that were roving around him after his negative parting with the Yellow-Spear tribe.

The night passes uneventfully, as well as most of the rest of the next day, except for when Fio spots a herd of aurochs on the horizon. Thankfully they are not moving in the direction of the expedition, a few of them look up and eye the group warily but they do not react strongly. Treasa starts thinking about moving towards the cliff, away from the herd if necessary, but realizes after that might be even more dangerous, pinning the group against the cliffs against a potentially stampeding horde of massive beasts. She brings up her plans, and this sparks a discussion between Kiva and the hunters about optimal hunting strategies and the habits and behaviours of aurochs. The conversation helps the time pass, and they reach Beorn's stream as the sun is starting to set. Where the stream goes over the cliff it showers in a white cascade down into a sparkling pool far below, but the view is not easy to see with the rocky terrain. Trayhern remarks that it is beautiful sight from below in the forest. The stream is very deep and fast at this point, crossing would be very dangerous. Esme knows that there is a fordable crossing a few hours west, but it is a trade-off of time for safety. They start moving inland, the hunters leading the way while Treasa and Esme inspect the riverbanks and surrounding foliage to try to spot any resource that could assist the crossing.

They spot a deadfall log laying at an angle in the stream, the roots are stuck in the bank and it points upstream crossing about two thirds of the stream. The water behind the log has pooled and is much calmer, leaving about 6 feet of waist deep full speed flow between the far end of the log and the opposite bank. They spend a bit of time to formulate a plan, Treasa being the biggest and strongest would use her axe and Soren's spear to anchor herself to the end of the log and the far bank, allowing the rest of the group to use her to steady their passage across. The hunters, Esme, and Soren all cross without incident, but as Kiva is making the final push she loses her footing and starts to be swept downstream! Treasa reacts quickly, letting go of the spear anchored into the far bank and catching Kiva with one arm causing them to spin into the lee of the deadwood. In a feat of strength Treasa hauls the both of them up the haft of the axe back to the end of the log where Soren is holding a spear out as far as he can. Kiva takes the spear and with his help is able to clamber up the far bank. They then hold the spear out to Treasa so she can follow in her wake.

They take a moment to catch their breath on the far side and Treasa laughs and crows their victory in a taunt to the river itself. Since the sun is mostly set at this point, they quickly find a sheltered spot to camp and set to gathering some wood and settling down. As they are drying their clothes and themselves around the fire they begin to talk. Soren tells a story about another time he found himself struggling against nature and how with strength, cleverness, and more than a little luck he pulled through and was able to laugh about how he got himself in such a situation in the first place. Esme counters with a story about when she and Olwinn fought against a shadow beast, using song and good cheer to weaken it before eventually taking it down. Soren then gives an involuntary shudder, remarking that he is glad there was no dark water spirit to drag them under. This sparks some thought in Treasa about the wisdom of mocking the stream after their crossing. In a lull in the conversation Soren asks Fio what is going through her mind, she has been characteristically quiet so far. She says that she is thinking about if shooting a person with an arrow is anything like shooting a deer. She has not killed anyone before. Esme says to think about them like chickens, it will make it easier. Kiva then goes on to share that she feels like deadweight, she is much weaker than the other members and feels inadequate. Esme comforts her, placing a hand on her shoulder and says that whenever she needs answers about an esoteric topic, Kiva is the first person that comes to mind. Soren slaps Treasa's shoulder with the back of his hand and says not everyone can be giant hulks of muscle. This causes Willem to bark with laughter, and he chimes in to say that when it comes to bashing heads yeah, Kiva is deadweight, but when it comes to almost anything else she is much more useful than him. Soren says that is the whole reason he decided to stay in Stonetop when he returned was because everyone is not only able but encouraged to contribute to the village in a way most aligned to their strengths. It is a beautiful community, small enough that everyone can contribute but large enough that there is room for specialization. Kiva is comforted by all their kind words and expresses her thanks to the group. The rest of the evening around the fire is spent swapping stories, focused on family and history.

The next day they continue north towards the hills, reaching the beginning of the hills in the afternoon. Grass gives way to rocky patches and dry scrub at the base of the Barrow Hills. The ground is getting more rocky and gravelly as the hills get denser. The group begins to move slowly and quietly, moving roughly parallel to the river with the aim of the hunters finding the trail the bandits use to get to the highway from their camp. As they move Esme is not able to keep her tracks covered well, but Kiva goes along with her and assists her with covering the worst of her mistakes and helping her along. They all keep in mind Soren's words about staying off the hilltops

and not highlighting their silhouettes against the horizon. All except for Soren, who forgets his own advice and is moments from cresting the rise of a ridge when Treasa grabs him and pulls him down, admonishing him for forgetting his own lesson. Fio chuckles under her breath seeing this. Soren stammers for a second, then covers his embarrassment by saying he was totally just making sure Treasa was paying attention. A little after this Fio spots the trail, and after inspecting it for a while and conferring with the other hunters concludes that one or more horses came by earlier that day, heading southwest. This is definitely the trail they are looking for. Corradin says that around the next bend there is a hill with a copse of trees on top, it is very likely a place where they have posted a lookout. If they haven't then they are really bad at their job. The group discusses whether its better to try to sneak up to the hill and take down the watchers or go around and avoid it, but Soren points out that their goal is to cause disruption and not take the whole group head-on, the outer watch is a good place to start causing mayhem and using that to lure more into an ambush.

End of Session!

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