

Session 4

The search for Cayu continues!

The much smaller search party moves north deeper into the forest, away from the Tumble-down Wall. Treasa asks Stella to light the way and she does, moving to the front with Fio to provide guiding light with her consecrated torch. As they continue they begin to hear a song, beautiful but also haunting. Kiva thinks back to her studies and knows that this is either a nature spirit or something Fae. Treasa asks Fio if this might be the forest folk, but Fio replies that the forest folk aren't Fae, the folk are more mortal and grounded in reality. Old Esme says there is nothing to be done to prepare for the Fae, we should move forward.

The party continues towards the singing and they come upon Cayu sitting in the loam, his head drooping to his chest and breathing steadily. A creature like a person-sized stoat with a waistcoat is singing to Cayu, walking around him. The stoat has rings on its fingers and earrings on its ears. Esme brings out a small jug of milk from her satchel and a small saucer and approaches saying "An offering for a friend?". The creature turns and says "Ah, more of you. Welcome!". Treasa offers him the milk but he refuses, saying he is currently satisfied. Treasa asks what it is doing here and it replies in kind. This is the forest, its home, and not where humans live. Esme says we are there for Cayu. The Stoat suggests we should leave, and there is a magical suggestion to it as well causing Esme to stagger a bit.

Treasa is keyed up at the situation and can tell that the Stoat is not what it seems, alone against the group but speaking eloquently and with confidence. She can tell by how it stands between them and Cayu that it wants the group to leave without him. Reading the situation, Treasa leaps forward with her staff yelling to Esme "Careful, it bewitches you!". She thrusts with her staff in an attempt to push the Stoat away from Cayu. Esme reacts by pushing Treasa's staff back with her shield and then turns to the Fae creature and says she will pay the price for Cayu. The Stoat introduces itself as Thistledown and asks for Esme's name. Esme introduces herself and Thistledown says that Cayu came of his free will and wants to leave with it. Cayu responds weakly saying "Yes". Wickla is trembling with fury, barely restrained by the scene currently playing out. Thistledown asks for Esme's eyes, her voice, or a year of her life.

While this is happening Rua starts burning with righteous anger at the mental oppression and darts forward, throwing Cayu's arms over his shoulder and stands to run away yells "I got him, lets get out of here!" Thistledown hears this, breaks eye contact with Esme yelling "Treachery!". As soon as its back is turned Treasa whips her staff forward, striking it as hard as she can. The staff thunks into Thistledown but it doesn't feel like she is striking flesh but instead hard wood like a tree. Soren takes this moment to dart forward and stab at the back of its knee in an attempt to hobble it. His knife doesn't strike true, sliding off the side of its leg, but the blood on the knife appears to

boil away and Thistledown screams a piercing cry. It turns into a white bird and flies up to the branches above. "Traitors!" it cries "You have dealt falsely!" Treasa replies saying no, it is it who has dealt falsely, Cayu was not of his own free will but under its enchantment. The Fae promises threateningly to deal fairly with the next humans it meets, it will give them what they deserve. It then flies away and Stella invokes the sun and causes it to bloom from her torch with Solar filaments, bringing warm light to flood the forest.

Wickla darts forward and hugs Cayu sobbing. Cayu's eyes still have a blankness to them as he looks around and asks why are you all here? He explains that he scratched his name on the wall and met a friend. Soren explains that it was not his friend, it was going to take him away but he belongs with us. Treasa takes Cayu's hand that is not already held by his mother. Soren approaches Fio and asks her to show him some woodcraft on the way back, how she knows where she is going and how to move quietly in the forest. Fio replies bluntly "I can either do or teach. I need to work, step back and if you must, watch what I do."

We return to the village and pass the stream, feeling a weight lift off their shoulders as they exit the forest. Esme peels off immediately to the Chronicle as Treasa asks her without looking to start a song as we go up the mountain. Treasa is surprised there is no answer and looks around, finally seeing Esme leaving. Rua takes the initiative to start a song of belonging, where things have been restored to their right way and everything is alright. As the group approaches the top of the bluff the entire village comes to greet them and fuss over them. Eadna is in the crowd, waving happily to Stella. Eadna congratulates her on bringing Cayu back safe and sound. Stella asks about the pies and if they turned out alright. Eadna chuckles and says the pies are fine, she is just happy Stella is back and nobody was seriously hurt. They hug tightly and Eadna leads her away to get a pie.

Esme is in her home inside the Chronicle, etching the story into the walls about how they saved one child but angered a Fae creature in the process, potentially bringing harm to many in the future....

Soren gets a mead pushed into his hands and starts retelling the story with his own embellishments, about how they fought off a horde of Crinwin almost too large to count where he single-handedly wrestled one of them into submission and shows off the scratches on his arms. He goes on about how Fio used her amazing skills to track Cayu and lead us to this Fae creature that was beguiling the child and trying to beguile us too! He tells about how Treasa and him fought the creature head on and Soren dealt a decisive blow, causing the creature to flee into the forest. Treasa grabs a bottle of whiskey for herself, not correcting Soren's story but nodding along. She slips away at some point with the bottle, planning to use it to sterilize her own wounds. Rua walks Betta home and asks her to have dinner with him sometime. She says she will be around, it was a crazy night and she needs to rest. Kiva goes to her home and starts going through her books trying to learn more about the Fae to see what kind of mess they had gotten into.

After the spring festival some weeks pass. Despite the parties triumphant return the season is still ill-omen'd, the weather gloomy and dreary and people are on edge, with small arguments sparking up here and there. Stella and Kiva bicker about the Fae, Kiva trying to ask questions and keeps bringing it up but Stella wants to put it behind her but mostly keep the kids from worrying about

forces beyond their control. Treasa is avoiding Honoured Cutha, he has been as gloomy as the weather and while they haven't argues per se but she always comes away from her encounter more annoyed than she was. Old Esme had to settle a dispute between two homesteaders who argued about whose land a tree was on. She was still feeling a bit off from the misadventures in the forest and snapped at both of them, not really resolving the dispute right away. Rua and Betta had dinner together a couple times, Rua thought it was going well but when he went to her house her mother, Gwann, tells him that she has found a better match for Betta and he should go away. This kind of breaks his heart, Betta appears to be avoiding him even though he thought it was going well. Soren spends a lot of time at his parents grave, the gloomy weather and low spirits in the village have been getting to him and he misses them. Stella struggles with her studies, not knowing why but isn't able to progress very much.

After some time Esme seeks out Treasa, going to her home and knocks at the door. Treasa opens the door, sees her and steps back opening the door wider. Treasa goes to a shelf and starts making tea while Esme moves inside and sits down. Esme speaks "So tell me the story of that night."

Treasa takes her time making tea, taking the hot kettle off the fire and pours two cups. Finally she speaks while looking up into the rafters "The thing about Esme is that she always sees the best in everyone. I like that. But I can't do it". As she finishes she looks down into Esme's eyes.

Esme replies "That is a funny thought. Esme doesn't see the best in people, she asks for the best but not always seeing it."

"The story of that night was you seeing the best in people and me acting on my fears. I am not sure who was in the right."

"I feel like I was made a liar that night. The Fae are not to be treated lightly, and going into the future that Fae will have a power over me that is ten-fold greater than it would have been."

They go back and forth, Treasa asking if Esme would have brought more people into danger, and Esme replying saying she would have had more power with the group and more civilization. Treasa realizes that she did not know if what she did was right, but is still not sure if Esme's path was correct. Esme wanted to treat fairly with the Fae. Treasa counters that no interaction with the Fae would end well, they always end poorly. Esme is willing to give a year for her life for the lives of any of the villagers. At the end of the day, Rua forced their hand. Treasa put a lot of effort into staying her hand while Esme treated with Thistledown. Esme acknowledges this, and Treasa says they will all stand together against it. Esme asks that if the creature does return, for Treasa to trust in the magic of Aratis. Treasa replies that she trusts Esme. At this, Esme leaves.

End Session!

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