Session 9

The Council of Elders will decide Rhian/Willem's fate!

The town elders are meeting in the hearthroom of Murdoch's cottage. It is truly night now, with a spring storm raging outside. The loud booms of thunder from lightning striking the standing stone cause small pauses in the discussion but the villagers are well used to the noise. Murdoch has a sour expression on his face but still insists that everyone try one of his tea cakes. Merwyn is there, struggling to stay awake in her old age. Ovin, the old man who runs the public house, Rua and Kiva are brought in by Treasa and Merwyn speaks "Well this is lovely but I don't have all night, what are we here for?"

Treasa begins "You have all been wondering why I brought Rua and Kiva here, I called us together to discuss something they found out accidentally, but the elders should first consider knowing it affects the safety of the townspeople. They have been sworn to secrecy and should be aware of the decision that is made as it will affect all of us. Willem is the subject of the discussion, you know him from the last few days but he has a petition for you."

Willem stands up and speaks "Thank you for your hospitality, I would like to request shelter here in the village or safe passage out of it. I am hunted by the Claws of Marshedge, if you would let me stay here I would be very grateful or at the very least help me move on without returning to Marshedge in chains." Willem falls silent, but Treasa prompts him to go on, the elders need to know everything in order to make a decision. "I killed one of the Claws" He continues "I was one of them, there was a fight and I killed one of Brennen's lieutenants." As he finishes, Esme speaks up to press him for more details. "That is not a full accounting, if we are to shelter someone we need to know the why and the how." Willem stays vague and says that the man he killed deserved it and nobody would shed any tears at his death. This is not enough for Esme who presses even more for details. Willem finally bluntly states "I staved a mans head in because he was beating an innocent to extort them for bribes." Esme stands up and moves before him, staring deeply into his eyes and asks if he is hiding anything further. Willem answers honestly "No." Rua pipes up "Well sometimes things get out of hand and we act before we can think." Murdoch smirks at this while Esme asks Willem what he can bring to Stonetop. Willem says "I am strong, not averse to a hard day's work, and I noticed that Crinwin are becoming more and more of an issue. You could use more fighters to keep the village safe." Honoured Cutha adds his voice, saying with the bandits threatening from the north it could be worth it to take the long-term risk for some short-term assistance. Murdoch angrily retorts that Willem is a killer! They would be crazy to shelter a murderer in their village. Treasa says that the village welcomed her in, knowing she had a sordid past.

Esme again speaks to Willem with a resonance in her voice, "Would you swear an oath to protect the village and possibly give your life in its defense, in return for a safe haven and the support of the people around him." Again he answers honestly "Yes, I would swear." Esme grunts and says that is good enough for her. At this Cutha asks Willem to leave so they can deliberate. Treasa hands him a couple extra tea cakes as he leaves the house to stand under the eaves. Once he has left the elders continue to discuss the proposition, with Treasa bringing up the issue of sheltering a person who is wanted by the Town Watch of Marshedge. Also, if they do decide to shelter him, do we tell the rest of the village? It is hard for hundreds to keep a secret. He is willing to swear an oath, but when the Claws come riding in with his face on a piece of paper and telling his story it is not him who we have to worry about talking. Ovin speaks up to share stories he heard from the bar about how Marshedge performs executions by burying people in the bog. This makes Treasa shudder, but also highlights the other side of the coin in this decision. Keeping him would be dangerous to Stonetop, but he faces a terrible fate without assistance. Rua offers, if they decide to let him stay, to pretend Willem is his uncle who was visiting and learned he is still alive and decided to stay. Esme cautions Rua that this would make Willem his uncle in truth, it would be a an act that would be performed for the rest of his life. Hearing this Rua backs down, nodding seriously.

Murdoch then calls for a vote, should they shelter him in the village? Esme replies Aye, Murdoch says Nay, Treasa abstains as she is too close to the issue and doesn't have a clear mind. Ovin says Aye, if Esme says he is telling the truth them I trust her. Merywn is unsure if this is the best decision but doesn't want to turn away someone in need, so she says Aye. Cutha also says Aye, they could always use another strong sword-arm. With that Cutha remarks, they have a clear consensus. Treasa makes a face at this, not wholly agreeing, but not bringing up any further discussion. Cutha asks Rua to bring in Willem from outside, while Esme brings up that they have decided what they will do but not how. Perhaps it is best to stick to a half-truth, telling the village that he has a dark past but not any details, and if anyone comes looking for him to give them nothing and send them along. Willem comes back in, still munching on the second teacake and asks "So what will it be?" Treasa stands and offers him her chair as Cutha informs him that they have decided to let him stay, though they are still working out the details. The discussion turns to sending him to one of the nearby homesteads, it would prevent visitors and traders from recognizing him and cashing in on the bounty.

As the discussion winds down, Esme motions for Willem to come with her, giving Murdoch's shoulder a quick squeeze before leading Willem outside. Soren is standing under the eaves of a nearby building, not listening in to the council but knowing something is going on due to Kiva and Rua's evasiveness earlier in the day. Esme motions him to join them, and Soren looks behind him to see who she is motioning to, quickly realizing that it is him. He moves forward to join them, greeting Esme and asking who the stranger next to her is. Willem introduces himself, they shake hands, and Esme starts moving to the Chronicle. On the way she tells Willem about the coming of age ceremony that all village kids go through, that is also done for anyone who is looking to join the village. Soren, hearing about the details, has the ceremony cast in a new light. For him, this ceremony was another one of the oppressive factors of Stonetop that initially drove him away, but now he has returned and is committed to the village he is understanding the seriousness and importance of the ceremony for recording the history of Stonetop and binding the village together. As they enter the Chronicle Willem looks around in awe at the centuries of history inscribed on the

walls. Esme gets a black paste and direct Soren to smear some on Willem's face while beginning to sing a song. Soren is burning with curiosity about who Willem is and where he came from, but goes along with Esme's directions. The song Esme is singing is short, and she repeats is twice. At the second repeat the song stirs Soren's memories and he joins in for the third repeat. Once the song ends Esme snuffs all the candles and lights a special blue one and asks Willem to state his oath. "I vow that as long as Stonetop gives me shelter I will give them labour and protection, like the old guy said. As long the village is here to support me, I will do my best to support them." After he is done she gives him an onyx tool and directs him to chisel his name in the list of Stonetop residents. He says "Is now not a good time to bring up that I can't read? What if you mark the letters and I will carve the shape. Esme nods and says that is fine, and directs Soren to do so. Once the letters are outlined Willem carves his name in the wall. She then gives Willem a hug, who stiffens at first then responds in kind. She then talks a bit about Soren, how he makes the second-best whiskey in the village.

Esme says they will find a permanent home for him soon, but he can continue to stay where he has been for the last few days. After he leaves Esme turns to Soren and breaks into a grin "So how cool was that!" Soren replies "It really cast this ceremony in a new light for me. The trick with the blue candle was nice trick, really added to the solemnity of the occasion." Esme takes some time to fill in Soren about Willem's circumstances, asking him to support him and help him integrate safely into the village. Soren agrees, he can sympathize with how past decisions can get you stuck in a bad situation. We have done a good thing to offer him freedom from his past and give him a new start. Esme says that she trusts Soren, and he replies that her regard means a lot to him, he will do his best to make sure Willem feels welcome. Esme then speaks about the importance of stories, knowing Soren tells many of his own. He starts to launch into a story of how he distracted an entire crowd while-Esme cuts him off and shoos him from the Chronicle.

Elsewhere, Rua and Kiva are back in Soren's still discussing the council. Rua asks Kiva if that was the first council she say. She answers that is the first one where they knew she was listening. Rua asks her if all the council sessions are like that, he expected it to be more plotting and scheming, but they all seemed so reasonable, even Murdoch. Kiva replies that yes, it is mostly just boring discussions about mundane things. Rua shares more about his confrontation with the elders during the winter festival, he always felt they looked down on outsiders and on him particularly, and it was a shock for him to see they accepted Willem into the village, even knowing what he had done. Kiva replies that all friends start out as strangers, it is how people meet and grow to trust each other. Rua is still upset and talks about how he felt like his family was pushed to the side because of how his mother left the village and came back married to an outsider with a child. Kiva offers to help him continue to investigate, see if there really is any malicious plotting against him by the elders. At this point Soren enters to get another flask and they speak of little things for the rest of the night.

A few weeks pass with the party living their lives in Stonetop, Esme helps Willem get setup in a nearby homestead while still communicating with the nearby people by raven to plan for the bandits who promised to come soon. She also spends some time with Kiva researching into the Fae and how to counter them. Kiva starts her research by reviewing what books she has concerning the Fae, and works with Esme to tease out old stories of the Fae and try to pin down some of their names. In the stories they find multiple references to the Fae being servants of the

Green Lords in ages past, but there was a rebellion against them. They also find that the Fae can eat and drink but they don't need to, primarily drawing sustenance from intense experiences and emotions. They tend to hover around the edges of civilization, drawn to the emotions and energies within. They can get energy from animals and such, and also from deals or rituals. They also find that Fae cannot lie, and that makes any deals or debts very powerful indeed. Iron is the most effective against Fae, it is the only way to truly kill them. Other materials can inconvenience them but they will only stay dead if they are killed with Iron

Stella has had a rough time, the madness that took her when she tried to help Mad Gethin slowly recedes over the course of a week and a half, with Gethin getting more and more mad as she gets more and more sane. While she is recovering Ridney, one of the kids in the orphanage, injured her arm and Stella cares for her through her hallucinations and disorientation. It is an annoying process, the kid is not one to sit still and let someone fuss over her and is always trying to get out of the house and explore. Stella's attention sometimes slipped and would realize she wasn't there anymore and has to rush outside to find her. Thankfully her older brother, Anders, also was helping care for Ridney and was able to pick up the slack. When they were spending some time together Anders speaks up "I heard that Treasa used to be a bandit, can you believe it?" Stella asks where he heard this from, and he says Corey told him. "What do you think, was she a bandit?" he asks. "Yes," Stella replies, "I can see that being the truth."

The spirit talkers stay for a few more days to make sure that Flossy is recovering well, and he is. Before they leave they seek out Soren. Garnuss sticks out his hand and says "No hard feelings, yeah?" Soren takes a moment to looks closely at his hand before grasping it and saying "Yes, you did well with Flossy. Thank you, and I wish you luck with your troubles." Garnuss sighs and says that a gathering of the tribes will be required, it has been some time but the Hdour is something they need to come together to resolve. Soren says if he is ever back in their corner of the plains he should stop by and they can share a drink and swap stories. Garnuss says that would be very nice, then they say their goodbyes with Lowik giving and awkward half wave. Soren spends the rest of his time distilling a new back of whiskey, Esme's remarks about how Soren makes the second best whiskey in the village has him motivated to tweak his recipe and outdo himself. Additionally, whenever he is with Rua or Kiva, he drops subtle hints or comments about Willem, trying to draw out more of his story since he is fairly sure they know more than what Esme had told him. They are both evasive, not giving him any more details.

Outside of helping the village in the day-to-day Rua decides to go the Treasa and Willem to ask them to train him to fight. Whenever he has a day to himself he hikes the couple hours to where Willem is staying and trains with him. Willem's style is very blunt, using a large two-handed club as his chosen weapon. One day he is meets Betta away from her family and goes to talk to her. They go to a storehouse by the watchtowers to talk in private. Betta sits on the floor and apologizes to Rua for being so distant. Her mother is very concerned about who she is to marry, and Rua is not one of the candidates that she is considering. When asked why, and if its because he and his family are outsiders, she replies that is part of it, but its also the scene he made against the village elders last winter, as well as the fact that he doesn't have a trade. He offers to talk to her mother, maybe he can convince her and Betta chuckles at this and says that is not likely. He then offers to learn a trade, but she says that she doesn't want him to do anything that he doesn't want to just for her. She goes on to say that she knows he will do amazingly at anything he decides to do.

End of Session!

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