A stranger in our midst

As we approach the sledge we see signs of a struggle and and see that there is fresh blood and drag marks in the snow. We see one set of adult tracks in the area and another set of tracks that vanish under the snow. Aethlwynn suggests we follow the tracks, and we follow the obviously recent set that seem to vanish. We start to hear a weak cough in the forest silence which seems to come from under the sled. We see a man half covered by the sled; he looks very cold. One hand grips an axe, his clothes are ripped and he looks almost hypothermic. Guru puts his cloak over him. and he thanks us. Guru helps him up. and sees his shoulder is bleeding and badly injured. While Salus stops the bleedong. Aethlwynn asks him his name - Riteable is the answer. Guru asks where he is headed, Riteable replies that he was sent out to look for Tala last night as folk know he was in the army and now sells his sword.

Aethlwynn points out the other footprints and ask if Riteable knows who the footprints belong to, he thinks he saw Tala but heard her screaming a name like "arlan". Then there were blue lights, the earth shook and he lost his footing. He thought he saw something but passed out and the next thing he knows is seeing us. We agree we have the same goal and Sebastian suggests we follow the footprints. Riteable asks if we should back go to the village but we agree to press on as little girl is lost . The other footprints seem to vanish, but seem to be wearing some short of shoes. Salus realises the blood is recent and can see that they were dragged under ground seemingly alive, but can't be seen. The other prints leading away look like a small barefoot child. Aethlwynn wants to try to help who or whatever was dragged underground but we can't see a way underground. There are roots which look like a mix of tree roots and the corrupted black roots. We can't see the blue lights but can sense a general pulse. Aethlwynn says to the forest "You have one of ours if you let him go there is no need to set a fire". There is no response, but soon after the birds fall silent and the wind has drops It feels as though like something is listening. The forest does not feel hostile or kind, and it doesn't feel like the forest itself doing the listening. Aethlwynn also has a strange sense of smoke within the general forest scents. As the scent seems to be coming from the direction of Tala's footprints we follow Tala's them.

We head north until we see one of the old camps. There is neither smoke rising nor voices in the distance. The watch tower has collapsed, and we can make out pale blue pulses from the ground.

Guru scouts ahead. Aethswold notices faint ripples beneath the snow which he thinks there are potentially weak areas. He also thinks he can see faint movements in the hut. He feels the safest way in is through a gap in the fence rather than through the main gate He sees a small fire and lanterns outside the hut which the roots seem to avoid. Salus notices bare footprints leading into the shed she also sees drag marks and blood in the main courtyard as well as frozen black sap in the snow. Aethlwynn sees that the roots seem to be feeding on the warmth in the area and that the nearby plant growth seem to be corrupted. Aethswold thinks the watch tower collapse is recent and has been caused by the roots. Aethswold sees a long stick with a metalic blade leading againt the shed. It's a scythe.

Riteable moves to the shed and kicks the door in. The door collapses and he hears a gasp, but he can't see anyone. He lights a torch and looks deeper into the shed. It looks full of old dusty items including an overturned cot in the corner where the gasp came from. He moves the cot and sees a panicing young girl. She looks in severe shock and points outside muttering "Roots are moving". She says Harlan told her to keep running -then she says something under the camp was talking. Aethswold asks what it sounded like, but she can't get her words out. She says she can't hear the voices any more. She tries to explain a blue light came from under the tower and that Harlan told her to stay in the shed. He tried to set the roots on fire but then he was gone.

Aethlwynn suggests we investigate the watch tower and Salus suggests we leave Tala in the shed. Before we can move Aethswold hears a faint cry of "Tala" coming from under the snow. The blue glow starts to intesify, the ground vibrates, the lanterns start to dim and glow blue pulsing in time with the blue glow. Sebastian and Aethswold realise the roots are now responding to the pulses. Aethswold senses something under the ground is coordinating the roots' movements. Suddenly the camp floor collapses as roots start to attack us.

Combat starts

One root uses a Root Glide Ability but we can't see what that does yet

Another vanishes underground

Sebastian casts Haunting Hymn which destabilises the tendrils which take full sonic damage

Riteable proves to be resourceful in a fight, using a buring torch to attack the roots

As we beat back the roots the last of the tendrils convulses violently. The roots all then collapse and turn in on themselves. We see the body of a young man over by the collapsed Watch Tower. His chest is covered in blood and he is very weak, but alive. It's Harlan, still holding on.

To Be Continued....

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