From The Ice To The Trees

Guru examins the body of the zombie, but there is nothing to be found. We decide it would not be a good idea to take the zombie back to town so Guru burns the body using fire from his hands while Aethswold prays over the remains of the zombie. Seb is impressed with the fire and tries to do the same. He cannot. Aethlwynn examines the ash, but can see nothing other than ash. We head back to town.

The return is quite quiet apart from a growing storm which feels wrong like it is watching and waiting. As we retunr Moonrest is shutting down for the night and the gates are only just open. The guards are surprised that we are still alive.

In the night there is a the cry of a great horn, which could have been mistaken for the storm.

The town is quiet in the morning, but rumours of what happened on the ice are circulating. Elder Saelin wants to see us immediatly, but we go via the fishhouse and the body has gone.

We head to the longhouse and see the Elder. She tells us that Yselle Marr says an unexpected thaw near the Whispering Woods may have exposed plants that can be gathered. As we head towards Yselle's with Elder Saelin she warns us not to touch anything! Yselle looks tired, but invites us in. She exlpains she'd normally send gatherers, but they are wary due to the recent unexplained happenings. On the table are lots of labelled samples and also a think black root which looks to be alive. Yselle puts a cloth over the root then unrolls a map and shows us where to go. She gives us a list of things she wants and tells us to bring back a sample of anything growing where it shouldn't.

Yselle gives Salus a healers' toolkit and Aethlwynn

- a gathering satchel
- a herb knife
- waxed sample jars
- cloth gloves and chalk markers

We can still see the odd, thick black root so Guru asks what it is. Yselle says she doesn't know and the she doesn't like it due to not knowing what it is. Guru decribes the symbol on the messengers ring and asks if Yselle knows what it is. She thinks she has seen it on crates from the mainland.

Guru asks if there's anything to look out for in the woods and Aethswold asks what people have reported seeing. Yselle tells us not to go too deep into the Whispering Woods, if we find ourselves in an area od Old Growth Forest then we should leave immediatly. She's sure ancient things lurk there and sometimes noises can be headd from there.

She says to follow the hunter trail until the marker tree. She advises that if the woods beome too quiet then leave immediatly.

As we leave Yselle's house Salus looks back and for a brief moment she thinks she sees the black root move by itself. As no one else saw it Salus assumes it was a trick of the light.

As we head out to the woods it is cold and snow is falling lightly. We find the old huntertrail and follow it. We hear creaks of the branches, the wind, the caws of ravens. Noting unusual. We see prayer ribbons, old animal traps and axe marks on the trees.

Aethlwynn sees one of the trees is marked with old symbols and sees another where some of the marks have been deliberatly scrubbed out The path does not seem to have been used recently. Salus feels the air is subtley heavier here. As we press on the trail narrows but we find the split marker trees as Yselle described. We heard a sudden crashing sound then the cry of a lone animal. The sound is ahead of us and sounds like an animal in distress. Guru scouts ahead and finds a young elk caught in an old hunter trap. One rear leg is caught in the trap but black roots twist towrds the creature. Aethlwynn tries to identify the roots but cannot. Aethswold hits it with a vitality lash. The roots react violently and immediatly spasming and violently thrashing around on the forest floor. We see a black ooze erupting from the tendrils. and a pale steam rises into air. Somehwere deeper in the woods something pulses. Aethswold casts light onto Guru's staff but the roots do not react. The elk is able to pull free itself from the tendrils but not from the hunter trap. Guru casts Ignition on the root which violently from the flames. Black sap bubbles on the surface of the roots but they grab the elk again. Aethswold kills the elk out of mercy and the roots let go of it.

The thrashing of the roots subsides and for a brief moment we see a blue light flicker deeper in the forest. As Aethlywynn fills one of the containers with the black sap Aethswold noticedsthe tendrils seem to be paying more attention to the blood flowing from the elk. Aethswold channels the blood and the roots follow it. Aethswold releases the elk from the trap and asks if Salus can examine the elk and see if the body has been corrupted. She can't see much but thinks it's probably safe to harvest. Sebastian is able to harvest meat, elk hide and antler material.

We head on into the woods trying to find items on the list Aethlwyn finds five measures of Blood Moss and a measure of Resin Sap. We follow the path further looking for plants when Aethswold suddley feels the ground shift under his feet as the snow collapses. He sees an opening area under the roots; near the edge of the collapse he sees an old hunters' lantern which he recognises as being from Moonrest Haven. However we're not aware of anyone going missing. He prods the earth around the opening and finds that the roots are old and break apart easily. The area smells of old rotted wood and a cold wind blows from the opening. He picks up the lantern, it's rusted and beyond use but Guru takes it as metal is valuable. The woods are quieter than they have been, but not deadly silent. The path seems to have run out at this point and it's just us between the trees. We see a black root vanish back into the earth and we recognise that these are the same sort of roots that grabbed the elk. We carry on deeper into the forest where the trees look older. Aethlwynn finds more Resin Sap and some Pale Fern. We start to head back the way we came then hear wet, cracking noises as one of the black roots appears to be dragging something that looks like a dead rabbit. We head back to where we found the elk and Aethlywynn finds Frost Mint. Aethswold collect a couple of bundles of twigs to take back to town.

As we leave the woods Aethlwynn looks back; all looks fine and normal as snow continus to fall.

We head to Yselle's and give her the herbs we found. She gives Aethlwynn the blood moss. Yselle looks worried when she sees the black sap then clears most of the table asks us to show her where we found it . Aethswold explains how we found the elk and says the roots are invasive. He explains it didn't like the vitality lash and he mentions the blue light like a beating heart. Yselle puts on leather gloves before opening the glass container. We see thin dark veins shifting beneath the surface. Yselle says old stories spoke of things like this in the first winter after The Shrouding. She is worried that the vitality magic worked as living things shouldn't react badly to it. As the sap moves in the container she hurridly seals the container back up. She says not to leave the container by food or herbs or sleeping places. Aethswold casts Vitality Lash on the black root on the table which causes the entire root to convulse. Thick black tendrils erupt out of the root, the lantern flames dim and several herbs are blackened. The root beats like a heart as Yselle hits it with a heavy iron tool. Thin rootlets head out of it and shrivel. The black sap bubbles and the room smells of wet rot and blood. The severed root drags itself towards a bunch of fresh herbs before collapsing again. Yselle is now in a panic.

Aethlwynn asks Yselle where she found the root while Yselle shoves a large metal bowl over the rest of the root. She found it near the outer perimiter of the pine forest a few days ago. That's where she first noticed the thaw in the snow, at first she thought it was rot, then it moved. She starts to compare the samples. Her's is smaller and less active than the sap we had collected but both are spreading in the same way. She thinks whatever we brought back is growing stonger. The tendrils spreading from the root starts to wither and the root looks like it has died. The lantern flickers blue for a second then returns to normal. The sap in the jar did not react.

Aethlwynn asks Yselle if the metal killed it or was it the vitality lash? Y says the bowl only contained it and suggests vitality hurt it. She asks is we tried any thing else? Guru says it didn't like fire and that it blistered, burned, boiled with black oil and was quite agressive. He also told Yselle that it was more interested in the blood than the rest of the elk and suggests trying a drop of blood in the jar. Yselle says to wait until we are all somewhere safer.

As night falls a pale blue light pulses in the darkness of the woods, faster than before.

To Be Continued...

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