

Beneath the Lady's Shadow

Session 1: Near at Hand¹

Rural Darkon, September 15, 752

The weather was turning cold. The sun was on its way to setting but was hidden by grey clouds. The wind was picking up as, in the east, storm clouds approached. Three riders had just crested a small rise in the east. The three were bundled up against the approaching cold. From the rise the silent figures could see a roadside inn down below and quickened their pace to reach it before the night and the coming storm.

The lead figure was a tall man who held himself upright in the saddle. He wore a dark greatcoat with a fur hat, and rode a large warhorse. The second figure was the smallest. If her small frame did not mark her as a woman, the long black locks of her hair that escaped from her hood certainly did. She was wrapped in a heavy outer robe for warmth, though one could see at her sleeves the emerald green of vestments that marked her as an anchorite of Ezra. The final rider was leading a fourth horse for baggage. He was smaller of build and sat huddled in the saddle for warmth. He wore a second-hand greatcoat with a flimsy hat which was more of a cap.

The group reached the inn just as the sun began to dip below the horizon. The inn was a sturdy rural inn of two stories with a good-size stable for horses. A sign proclaimed it the *Horseman's Rest*.

The lead rider, one Petyr Lyonskaya, dismounted. Tossing the reins to the other man, he asked, "Nicolae can you take care of the horses?" and moved quickly to the side of the female rider. Nicolae responded with only a grunt.

"Lady," Petyr said holding out his hand to help the woman dismount.

Tatyana, with a small toss of her head, ignored the proffered hand, dismounted by herself, and wordlessly started towards the inn's door. Frustration showed on Petyr's face, but he quickly tried to suppress it. When he heard Nicolae grumble, "what a bitch," Petyr gave him a very disapproving glare.

Nicolae stoically shrugged his shoulders and gathered the reins of the horses to lead them to the barn. Lightning flared in the distance, as the storm clouds grew closer. Petyr hurried along to follow Tatyana into the inn, with a slight limp in his right leg.

As Tatyana entered the inn's large common room, the innkeeper approached her hurriedly.

"Welcome. Welcome my friends. Come in. Come in, please, and have a seat. A horrible night to be out traveling, but don't you worry. The Horseman's Rest is very comfortable. I am Pugh, the innkeeper. How may I be of service to you, my lady?"

Pugh was a friendly looking, middle-age man with a receding hairline and a growing paunch. Tatyana smiled at the man, but before she could answer, Petyr spoke up.

"We need two rooms for the night, my friend. And warm meals, too."

Annoyed that Petyr had answered over her, Tatyana looked away. After they had removed their outer garments and hung them on pegs by the door, Pugh led the two to a table by the fire, making friendly conversation all the way. Petyr responded jovially and by the time they were seated, Petyr and Pugh were exchanging jokes that set each other laughing. Tatyana meanwhile did not join in but instead scanned the room.

There were few other occupants in the room. An elderly woman sat near the fire knitting. She glanced up at Tatyana and smiled a toothless grin. They quickly learned that the woman was Mabli, Pugh's widowed mother.

The only other occupants were three dwarves seated at the table furthest from the door. The dwarves stared blankly back at Tatyana and did not offer a greeting beyond a small nod. Tatyana recognized their uniforms as that of the city guard of Corvia.

Meanwhile, while Nicolae had been stabling the horses the rain began. He had to run through the raindrops to the front door of the inn. He entered the common room a little upset that he was the only one to get wet, but his mood quickly lightened when Petyr offered him the mug of warm ale, which he had already ordered for Nicolae.

Nicolae and Petyr went on to boisterously enjoy dinner while talking with the friendly Pugh.

"So where are you gentlemen headed?"

"Right now we are making for Karg. Our final destination is much farther though. "

¹ Based on the excellent adventure by John Mangrum in The Forgotten Children netbook.

“Oh and where is that?”

“Mordents, actually,” when the innkeepers face showed a lack of understanding, Petyr went on, “It’s far to the south of Darkon. On the other side of Falkovnia. We are escorting Warden Tchurnova back to her church.”

“Oh, so darling, you’re one of those Ezraiters followers, eh?”

“She is not the only one,” Petyr said and removed the symbol of Ezra from underneath the heavy leather jerkin he wore.

“Oh, no offence. I meant no offence,” Pugh said embarrassed.

“None taken, my friend.” Petyr said with a hearty laugh and patted the man on the back.

As they enjoyed the warm meal, Tatyana ate in silence. Nicolae noticed that oddly Tatyana had not removed her heavy gloves when she had come in and wore them throughout dinner. He just chalked it up as another of the woman’s many eccentricities.

She was a hard woman to get to know. She was icy towards Petyr and had resisted his attempts at conversation along the journey. With Nicolae she was slightly more open, but not communicable. She answered all his questions with one or two word answers.

Nicolae had given up on trying to befriend her and taken a dislike of her. However, Petyr still attempted to be friendly, hoping she would lighten up. He probably is just hoping to bed her, Nicolae thought with a small laugh.

“You gentlemen will excuse me now,” Pugh was saying, “but I have to get the inn settled for the night. Enjoy your meal and I’ll be back later to show you upstairs.”

“Certainly. Don’t let us keep you. But hurry back or you will miss one of my favorite stories.”

After the innkeeper left, dinner was quieter for a time. Petyr tried to get the dwarves to join his group, but they refused. He was barely able to get them to introduce themselves. Eisen was quiet, with thick braids woven into his beard. Stahl was the only one who talked, though he was brusque. He had a thick grey moustache and a heavy crossbow slung over his shoulder. The third dwarf was sickly. Stahl said his name was Dunkel, and he looked as if he had fallen into a lake for he sat shivering under blankets.

Their rude refusal did not spoil Petyr’s mood and he went on to tell a story about his cousin. In the middle of winter, she had wandered into a snow bank and become trapped in the snow. She could have gotten out quickly, until she started laughing at herself, which only caused her to sink deeper into the snow. When her family could not find her they began searching desperately for her. By the time they found her, she had laughed herself so far down into the snow only her head still peeked out.

Both Petyr, who was telling the story, and Nicolae laughed heartily at the story, though Tatyana did not find it amusing. When Pugh returned from securing the inn, Tatyana asked him to show her up to her room. The smiling Pugh helped her with her belongings and, holding a small oil lamp to light the way, led her upstairs to her room, the second one on the left.

The room was small and simple. Still fuming at Petyr, Tatyana sat on the bed staring at the flame of the oil lamp. She thought, “Damn him. He treats me like a child. Answers for me, ignores me at dinner, as if I am just to be seen and not heard!”

After a while she tried to calm herself. “Calm down. Come on girl. You do not need to be this mad. Are you really mad at him? Yes, he is a brute, but so are most men, so why is that bothering you. I had better pray to the lady for tranquility tonight. I think I need her help to calm my mind.”

From there, Tatyana proceeded to prepare herself for bed. Before she turned in she knelt in front of her holy symbol and prayed to Ezra. When finished she went to sleep, leaving the oil lamp’s flame burning low.

Downstairs, Petyr and Nicolae enjoyed each others’ company. Shortly after, when the three dwarves retired to their rooms, Pugh joined the two men. The innkeeper offered them a second round of drinks, but both refused, saying they needed to be fresh for the next day’s travel. The three traded news of the area for a time as the storm outside continued to rage. Eventually, Nicolae and Petyr were ready to retire. Pugh lead the two upstairs and settled them in the first room on the left.

As they entered Petyr asked, “Which room did you put Warden Tchurnova in?”

“She is settled in right next door to you.”

“What about the dwarves?” asked Nicolae on a hunch.

“The dwarves? Well, they’re in the large room. That one there,” Pugh responded pointing at a door that was across from Tatyana’s room. “Why do you ask?”

Nicolae put on an innocent look. “Oh, nothing. Just curious. I...uh... heard that dwarves snore loudly. I’m just glad we are not next door to them. That’s all.”

With that the innkeeper got them settled in their room, which the two were sharing. He left them with a couple of candles to light the room and departed downstairs.

The room had two small cots and little other room. Nicolae settled on the cot farthest from the door and quickly got ready for bed. Petyr, after his nightly devotions, did the same.

Downstairs, Pugh made one last walk around the inn to make sure it was secure before he turned in himself.

Something awoke Petyr. The room was pitch black and silent.

"The storm must have stopped," he mumbled. So what woke me?

Then he heard it again. There was a loud commotion downstairs. He sat up in bed and tried to light the candle. When he finally got it alight, he saw Nicolae was already up. His sword in hand, Nicolae had moved to stand behind the room's one door. He had done it so quickly and quietly Petyr had not noticed.

Petyr grabbed his sword belt and led them out into the hallway. There they noticed Tatyana's door was ajar. She was peeking out of the door with a small lamp.

"What is going on?" She asked when she saw them.

"There is some altercation downstairs. We are going to investigate."

"Wait a second. I'll come too," She said and disappeared back into her room. But Petyr was too impatient. Worried that someone could be in trouble he told Nicolae to wait for Tatyana while he rushed downstairs.

Moments later, Tatyana emerged from her room, still in her nightclothes, wearing her holy symbol around her neck and armed with her mace. No one noticed that she also was wearing a thin pair of leather gloves. Together she and Nicolae went down the steps after Petyr.

By the time Petyr had reached the common room the noises had stopped. He found the room quiet and dark. His small candle shed little illumination throughout the room. He called out, "Anyone there?" but received no answer. He started to slowly walk to the center of the room.

"Pugh is that you?" Petyr called out tentatively. It was then that he saw someone lying on the floor on the other side of a table. Before he could circle around the table for a better look, Nicolae and Tatyana came down the stairs followed closely by two of the dwarves, Stahl and Eisen.

"What was it? What is going on?" Tatyana asked.

"Over here. There is someone over here," Petyr motioned for them to join him. As the others joined him, the additional light sources illuminated the contorted body of Pugh. His face was gruesomely contorted and bloated, with his tongue sticking out of his mouth.

The five figures stood staring at the body in silence. A sudden shriek of horror caused them all to jump and whirl around. Mabli, Pugh's mother, had entered the room and seen her son. She rushed forward continuing to scream hysterically. Tatyana reacted first. She went quickly to the old woman and put an arm around her shoulders. She began whispering her condolences as she attempted to pull the old lady away from the gruesome sight. Slowly she was able to and she led the old woman back out through the kitchen to her room.

That left Petyr and Nicolae with the two dwarves to examine the body. Nicolae bent over the body and confirmed that Pugh was dead. Petyr checked the front door and found that it was still bolted from the inside.

"That must mean the killer is still inside," Nicolae was the first to say. Nicolae and Petyr began to search the room for an attacker hidden in the shadows of the room, while the two dwarves stood in consolation with each other over the body. They occasionally made furtive glances in Petyr's directions.

Their search turned up no one, but Petyr did discover a small hole in one of the inn's windows. The hole was too big for anything larger than a rock to get through. The two decided to expand their search to the kitchen, and when that proved fruitless, they entered the innkeeper's room. There they found Tatyana and the still grieving Mabli. Not wanting to disturb the grieving mother, and seeing no signs of an attacker Petyr and Nicolae withdrew and went back to the main room.

"The attacker could not have been in there anyway," Nicolae mused. "Otherwise, the old woman would have seen him when she came out that way the first time."

"That leaves upstairs," Petyr concluded.

“But we would have seen him if the guy had gone upstairs. He would have had to pass us on the stairs,” Nicolae said and gave Petyr a perturbed look.²

“Yes, you were in the hallway with the woman. That leaves only one person who could have been downstairs at the time,” Stahl said and stared directly at Petyr. “Him”

“Me?! I did not kill anyone!” Petyr protested. This led to a violent argument between the man and Stahl. Most of the time, Nicolae stayed quiet.

Tatyana could hear the argument in the other room and came to investigate. When she entered the room, she asked what the argument was about, but had to repeat the question a second time shouting it.

“All I am saying now is you are a suspect in this crime. You, none of you, can leave the inn until this matter is cleared up. In the morning, Eisen will hurry to the nearest town for help and we will get to the bottom of this. Until then, I suggest that everyone bolt their doors for the rest of the night. Come on Eisen, let’s go check on Dunkel,” Stahl said and then, he and Eisen went back upstairs.

After the dwarves had left the three companions gathered around and exchanged what they had learned so far. Tatyana told the others that Mabli had said she was awakened by the noise but frightened at first. Only when the noise had stopped did she come out to see what happened. The group consulted for a time.³ Finally, someone said they had better determine how the man died, before they continued their investigation.

“Before we continue, we should think of Mrs. Mabli,” Petyr stated. “Let’s make sure she is settled and secured in her room before we continue much farther. I would not want anything to happen to her.”

The others agreed and went to the old woman’s room. After consoling her and settling her back in bed, the group left her making sure she bolted her door. That task concluded the group made its way back to the common room to examine the body of Pugh.

“It looks like he was strangled,” Petyr said.

“Yep,” Nicolae agreed. “Look here. You can see red bruises on his neck. But, it looks like the marks were made by only one hand. A left hand.”

“Someone was able to strangle this man with only one hand?” Petyr asked dubious.

“Are either of you left handed?” Tatyana asked.

“No, and even if I were I am not strong enough to kill a man with only one hand,” Petyr answered, “and I would say the same for Nicolae too.”

“I am not left handed,” Nicolae said simple. In truth, he had recently discovered that he equally proficient with either hand, but he did not want to muddy the investigation by telling his companions so. Besides, he reasoned, just like Petyr said, I do not have the strength to have done this.

“So he was strangled to death by a strong, left-handed attacker. What about the broken window? Could someone have reached through the window and strangled him without even entering the inn?” Tatyana suggested. But Pugh’s body lay halfway across the room from the broken window. Nicolae suggested that the window was broken during the struggle, but Petyr thought the window looked like it had been broken from the outside. He suggested that someone outside the inn had broken the window to get a message to the killer inside the inn. Pugh had heard the window break and come to investigate, and the killer had murdered him.

“But then who is the killer. Everyone is accounted for. So who else is there?” Tatyana mused.

“Wait a second. We do not know where everyone was,” Nicolae said with a realization. “We have seen only two of the dwarves. There is still that other one, the sickly looking one.”

“He was a miserable looking fellow. He looked like he could not harm anyone,” Petyr said.

“It could have been a disguise. He could have been hiding in the common room when he heard us come down the stairs. Then when all of our attention was focused on Pugh and his screaming mother, he could have easily snuck back up the stairs behind us. We would have never noticed him in the darkness what with all the excitement,” Nicolae said with a satisfied look on his face.

“I guess so...” Petyr began to said, but Nicolae cut him off suggesting they go confront the dwarf immediately. The other two did not share Nicolae’s confidence in the matter, but they agreed more to disprove the dwarf’s guilt.

² Actually, he gave that look to me. From past experiences with previous adventures I have run, both my creation and published ones, the players have found holes in the logic. Here that lead them to suspect a problem with this adventure, instead of seeing it as a clue to the murderer.

³ The group really began to throw out wild theories, from the attacker had struck Pugh through the hole in the window to Pugh’s mother was the killer.

Upstairs they found Stahl on patrol in the hallway, his crossbow loaded and held at the ready. He eyed the companions suspiciously as they approached. Petyr said they wanted to talk with the third dwarf, to see what he may know of the murder. When Stahl refused and an argument began. The dwarf claimed that Dunkel was too ill to be disturbed, while the companions blurted out the evidence they had gathered so far and demanded to confront Dunkel with it. Finally, Stahl agreed, saying they could see Dunkel for just a moment to prove that he was not the killer.

They all tramped into the dwarves' room, where Stahl approached his friend and asked Dunkel to show the companions his left arm. With a little hesitation the sickly Dunkel removed his left arm from under the many blankets.

"Wha...What..." Nicolae tried to speak but could not find the words as the companions stared at Dunkel's left arm that ended in a scarred stump just below his elbow.

"See, that settles it. It was not Dunkel. Now come on out of here," Stahl said as he grabbed Petyr by the arm and began pulling him towards the door.

Tatyana resisted him for a moment and bent forward, whispering her condolences to Dunkel. After she did so, the ailing dwarf turned his head to lock eyes with her. In a strained voice he croaked, "I told them... I told them!"

Tatyana backed away in surprise. Stahl lost all patience with the group and threw them out of the room before they even realized what was happening.

Outside in the hallway, the group discussed what they had just seen. At first they were excited, talking loudly until Petyr pointed out they were standing just outside the dwarves' door, and that the dwarves could probably hear everything they said. So their conversation turned to whispering and the group moved down the hallway towards the men's room.

At that moment a piercing, horrified scream erupted. It came from downstairs. The companions rushed for the stairs. Petyr with his bad leg soon fell behind as they started down the stairs. Tatyana hesitated, unsure if she should leave him behind or help him. She could not think of how to help him since she did not want to touch him and trigger her visions. Petyr waved her on telling her to hurry after Nicolae.

Nicolae had sprinted down the stairs and through the kitchen. He came up short at the door to Mabli's room. He tried the door but it was locked, so he put in shoulder into the door trying to force his way in. He struck the door but it would not budge. He tried again as Tatyana came running up, but to no avail. Together they beat on the door with their fists shouting to Mabli to unlock the door.

Seconds later, Petyr reached them and he tried his greater strength against the door, just as the two dwarves Eisen and Stahl entered the kitchen. With a mighty heave Petyr smashed the door inwards and the three of them poured into the room.

There they found Mabli sprawled on the floor beside her bed, her lower half tangled up in her bed sheets, her knitting materials scattered across the floor. White with fear, she clutched a quivering hand to her heart. She was whispering something. As Petyr rushed towards, he could make out, "The spider..."

Petyr moved quickly to untangle Mabli from her sheets and dragged her away from the bed, while Nicolae hunted for the spider in the tangled bed sheets. When he could not find anything he searched under the bed. As the search went on, Tatyana sat down on the floor next to the old woman and tried to calm her fears. By the time Nicolae had expanded his search to the area around the bed, Mabli had calmed down enough to answer Tatyana's questions.

"I awoke 'cause I felt...I felt *something* creeping up... up my body," she said and quivered. "It was a horrible black sp... spider. Crawling up the sheets towards me. When it leapt at my face!"

"Are you alright? Are you hurt?" Tatyana asked her.

"I think so."

"Where did the spider go?" Petyr asked, standing behind Tatyana.

"It ah... It... I don't know. I don't remember what happen. Just screaming."

At this point Stahl says the old woman will be all right and orders Eisen to watch over her, while he goes back upstairs to check on Dunkel. Nicolae's search proves fruitless as he finds no spider amongst the scattered bed sheets and the old woman's knitting materials.

Tatyana continues to soothe the frightened woman. Now that the bed proved empty, Petyr helps Mabli back into it. With Tatyana continuing to comfort the woman, Petyr collects the tangled bed sheets and puts them back on the bed, while Nicolae watches making no move to help. When he is done, Mabli thanks Petyr, and then asks if he would pick up her knitting as well.

"Of course, Madame. It is my pleasure to serve," he said with a small bow and bent down to collect the knitting tools. As he did so, Nicolae spotted some movement near the fireplace.

“Look over there,” he called out in warning.

“What is that?” asked Eisen as he struggled to make it out from across the room. The other companions turned to look where Nicolae pointed and see only a small ball of yarn lying near the hearth. Tatyana let out a small sigh, when she saw it was nothing malign. Suddenly the ball twitched a bit, and then did so again. The ball was being tugged at, slowly being unraveled. Nicolae and Petyr rushed over to the hearth where they discovered the coarse thread disappear up the fireplace. Something was slowly unspooling the yarn into the fireplace up a flute no wider than an arm.

Nicolae reached out and grabbed onto the yarn. Petyr called out, “wait,” but was too late to stop him. For a second whatever was on the other end of the yarn tugged strongly at it, before the thread snapped and fell slack. The heroes stared dumbfounded at the slack end of the yarn in Nicolae’s hand.

Across the room, Eisen began to stammer, “No... it can’t be. Stahl said... he said it was impossible...”

The three companions rushed across the room to confront the dwarf.

“What are you talking about?” Tatyana asked.

“What did Stahl say?” Nicolae demanded.

“It’s Dunkel. He said... he make all sorts of outrageous claims that... that his amputated hand was coming ... coming to find him!” When Petyr pressed him for an explanation, the dwarf went on, terror increasing as he spoke. He went on to explain the encounter Dunkel had with the shroud over Il Aluk, and how his afflicted hand began to behave strangely. When the hand started to decompose the chiurgeon called for the hand to be amputated. Dunkel had pleaded feverishly with them not to do so; ranting that as long as it was attached to him he could keep it under control. But even after the amputation, Dunkel’s health continued to deteriorate, so Eisen and Stahl were taking him to Nevuchar Springs for treatment. He finished by saying, “Dunkel’s hand must still be alive! It must have followed him all this way! By the gods, it’s going -”

Eisen was interrupted by a loud crash from upstairs. The heroes all glanced at each other, and then rushed back for the stairs. Tatyana led the way with Nicolae close on her heels. Petyr again lagged behind while the short-legged Eisen brought up the rear.

As Tatyana and Nicolae reached the top of the stairs they could see the door to the dwarves’ room slightly ajar. Before they could rush forward, a bloody left hand jutted out of the gap and clutched onto the door. The hand pulled the door farther open and the rest of the arm came out. It was the dwarf, Stahl, staggering out into the hall. His face and neck were wet with blood. As he turned slowly towards Tatyana and Nicolae they could see why. A crossbow bolt, apparently fired from directly beneath him, jutted out of his neck. Stahl made one feeble attempt to gurgle something before collapsing to the floor.

Tatyana and Nicolae swallowed their shock at the scene and rushed towards the door. Before they could reach it, they saw Dunkel Kralle standing in the doorway. His face had transformed into a mask of madness, and he held Stahl’s battle axe in his hand.

“I told them!” he screamed, and then slammed the door shut and bolted it.

Petyr and Eisen had reached the top of the stairs just before this and together the four of them tried to open the door, though none could. Together they started to beat the door down, with Eisen’s axe helping greatly.

When the door crashed in, the four raced into the room to find Dunkel on the edge of his bed, with his back towards them.

“I *told* them,” he shouted. As he turned to face them, he yelled, “I warned them, but would they listen? No!”

When he turned, they could see his mangled arm. Where it previously had ended in a stump now a decomposed, blackened hand writhed. With his other hand, Dunkel frantically worked a knitting needle and yarn to anchor the monstrous hand to his arm.

“I told them to bury it deep!” he shrieked, a crazed light in his eyes, and he charged the party. A frantic battle ensued. Eisen tried to restrain his friend but Dunkel’s decayed hand clawed him badly. Tatyana tried to focus her attacks on the left hand, telling her companions it must be the source of corruption, but they did not listen to her. Instead Nicolae and Petyr battled the demented Dunkel head on. In the end, though Petyr was badly mauled by Dunkel’s axe, they managed to slay the dwarf.⁴

⁴ In a strange bit of fate, Petyr struck Dunkel the killing blow on the same round that Tatyana struck the hand its killing blow.

In the battle's aftermath, Eisen was devastated at his friend's end. Tatyana was upset with her companions for attacking the dwarf instead of focusing on the undead hand as she did. Nicolae did not agree with her and claimed Dunkel had controlled the hand the entire time. No one agreed with him. Petyr said that Dunkel was claimed by the Legions of the Night and could not have been redeemed. Tatyana disagreed but did not continue the argument.

The next morning the companions set about trying to restore normalcy to the inn. Nicolae rode into Karg and returned with members of the city guard. They took charge of the scene and would see to the burial of the three bodies. As for elderly Mabli, Petyr suggested that she sell the inn since she could not run it herself and use the funds to live on. Eisen, who was staying in town to see to the burial of his friends, agreed to help Mabli sell the inn and find a place in town to settle.

Once everything was arranged it was too late for the companions to continue that day, and they had to wait for the morning before continuing their journey.

Session 2: On the Road to Nartok

Rural Darkon, September 29, 752

The three companions were on a small track of a road surrounded by a sparse wood.

“You are the worst person I have ever seen at following directions!” Tatyana was speaking to Petyr and she turned in her saddle so she could look back at him accusingly. Petyr did not know what to say.

“We have been lost on this short cut of yours for hours now. We are never going to make it to Nartok, let alone find a place to sleep tonight! If you had let me talk to those peasants in the last hamlet I could have found us a better way to go that would not leave us stranded out in the middle of nowhere!”

Tatyana was getting herself all worked up. What made her frustration grow even more was that a brisk wind was blowing her hair into her face, while Petyr rode on, apparently facing into the wind because despite his long hair it was being blow back out of his face.

Ahh! How I hate that man. His poor sense of direction probably means we will be sleeping outdoors tonight, Tatyana thought.

“Humph,” went Petyr, “this is the way he said to go.”

“Oh yes, your friend. Met him in a tavern did you. The perfect person to trust with our safe travel, some guy you meet while drinking. Honestly, when are you going to start thinking? You cannot just go about trusting our lives to drunken sods you met in dingy taverns. By Ezra!”

“Listen Warden Tchurnova,” Petyr began, struggling to maintain the respect for a priestess of Ezra that was drilled into him during his studies, “I have everything under control. We had to come this way. The other travelers at the last inn had all said the main road had been washed out. We needed to find another way otherwise we would have been stuck for at least a week. My friend, Ivan, from the tavern happens to be a woodsman. He said that he comes trapping in these woods all the time and knows them very well. His directions are valid.”

“Now, if you would spend some more time with us in the –” Petyr began but was interrupted by Tatyana.

“Don’t you take that condescending tone with me again. You listen to me. I-”

“Will you two be quite and look!” Nicolae said, raising his voice to be heard over his two companions. The shorter man had been riding in the rear of the group leading the baggage horse. He had kept his head down for most of the trip because of the brisk wind and to avoid the argument that had been going on. He had happened to glance up to the overcast sky in exasperation at his two companions when he noticed something ahead.

Both arguing companions stopped and looked in the direction Nicolae had pointed. A thick column of black smoke rose into the sky ahead. Though the forest was not heavy, the trees were still too thick to see what caused the smoke ahead.

“This looks serious. Let us go and see what it is,” Petyr said and spurred his horse to take the lead. As the companions rode on the forest thinned and then gave way to open farmland. The fields were partially full of growing crops as they were in the process of being harvested. In the distance the party could see a group of farmhouses. It was one of these houses that was burning. From their position they could see no signs of life.

The group started forward with Petyr in the lead, his hand on his sword hilt. Before they reached the hamlet, they heard sobbing. Upon investigating the nearby fields, they found a boy crying over the bodies of two dead dogs. The boy heard them ride up and turned fearfully towards them. He tensed as if ready to bolt, but upon seeing the party did not immediately run off.

“Hey, there son. What happen here?” Petyr asked in a soft voice.

“Bad men killed my dogs,” the boy said simply.

“Where did these bad men go?” asked Nicolae. The boy responded by pointing in the generally direction of west.

⁵ I started this session by telling the characters they had been traveling for a couple of weeks, were on the road to Nartok, and that Petyr and Tatyana were arguing. Then I sat back and let them begin. Lori, who plays Tatyana, was the first to start and she created the whole – “we’re lost” argument. Poor Billy, Petyr’s player, did not know what to do during her opening barrage, but he finally got started himself. Thus they created the fact that they were lost on a side track through the woods to Nartok because the road had been washed out.

“Don’t worry. We will deal with these men,” Petyr stated and motioned to his companions to move on. When they reached the first house, they could see it had been ransacked. Debris littered the ground around the building, and a dead horse was still tied to the fence. The companions could see no one.

Petyr called out, “Is anyone there?” He received no answer. They moved on to the next house, where he tried again. At first there was no answer.

“We are here to help,” Tatyana called out, “we want to know what happen here.”

They heard murmured voices and then a young man, barely fifteen years old, appeared around the house’s corner.

“Falknovians did this. They are invading again,” the man said. “They came in last night and took what they wanted from us.”

“Svet, hush,” a middle-aged woman appeared from around the corner. “Sorry, your honor, but da’ boy don’t know wha’s he’s saying. Pleaz don’t pay ‘im any mind.”

“No mother! It was the Falknovians again. Just like last year only this time they have made it all the way to here.” At this the boy and the mother began arguing over who the attackers were. The one thing they could agree on was when Nicolae asked where the attackers had gone. They pointed to the woods to the west.

Petyr was trying to stop the mother and son from arguing when Tatyana spotted something in the road farther along. The three went to investigate, leaving the arguing family behind. It was a body lying in the road near a farm house. The area looked deserted, but Nicolae could feel eyes watching them.

Petyr reigned in before the body and dismounted. The body was that of a middle-aged man. He had a number of sword wounds. A broken pitch fork lay in the road nearby. Petyr told the others what he had seen.

“Here use this to cover him,” Tatyana said handing Petyr a thin white cloak. Nicolae dismounted and helped Petyr arrange the body and place the white cloth on top. As they finished, Tatyana heard a soft, “Thank you,” whispered behind her.

She turned to see a middle-aged woman standing in the doorway of a nearby house. She glanced about as if making sure it was safe before taking a step towards Tatyana and speaking, “Thank you for what you have done for Yuri. I hated to see him like that, but we all feared they would come back.”

Tatyana, remaining on her horse, spoke down to the woman, “I am sorry for your loss. My name is Warden Tatyana Tchurnova of -,” Tatyana hesitated for only a moment, “of Ezra.” She was going to say of Mordentshire, but decided she would better gain the woman’s trust by letting her assume she was a native Darkonese with her accent.

“What is your name?”

“Imogen. Yuri was my husband.” As the woman spoke, Nicolae and Petyr had noticed her and walked over to join the conversation, standing next to Tatyana’s horse.

Tatyana made the introductions, “These are my traveling companions, Lord Petyr Lyonskaya and his squire, Nicolae.” She glared at Petyr to see if he was going to speak up. She felt as if she was forming a bond with the woman and did not want Petyr butting in and taking charge of the conversation. When he remained silent, Tatyana went on. “May I ask what happen here?”

“Bandits. They came in the night. It was bad.”

Tatyana asked her to explain what happened. Imogen did not know much. They were awakened by shouts in the night. Yuri had rushed outside to see men stealing their flock of sheep. He had rushed at them waving his pitchfork, and the men killed him. Later the men ransacked the house taking whatever they felt like. Imogen had hidden in fear from them. As the men left, one of them shouted that no one was to touch Yuri, but his body should be left to rot where he fell. Imogen had hidden in her house all day, fearful to even leave until now.

The companions could see a few more inhabitants emerging from their houses. The building on fire had collapsed and was burning itself out. Here and there the fields were scattered with dead livestock.

The group went on to interview other villagers but learned little. Someone had raided the village, though whether it was common bandits or Falkovnian Talons was unclear. There were between ten and fifteen of them, though Petyr could not get an exact number from the villagers. They had disappeared into the woods to the west.

When he finished speaking with the villagers, Petyr stared intently at the woods in the west. Nicolae, seeing the paladin’s fierce gaze, guessed what he was thinking. “If they took livestock with them into the woods, their trail should be easy to follow. We should be able to find their camp.”

“Aye, that is true,” Petyr agreed.

“But we would be outnumbered, maybe five to one. I don’t know,” Nicolae said.

“Wait a minute,” Tatyana said surprised, “you want to go after this army of cutthroats?”

“Yes,” Petyr said gravely. “Their actions here call out for retribution. I cannot ignore that.”

Tatyana just stared at him amazed. Petyr turned to her and told her, “You do not have to come if you do not want to. Nicolae and I can handle this, but we would miss your assistance, especially if one of us is injured.”

There was little discussion after that. They all agreed to go, and went to prepare themselves for the battle ahead. Petyr unpacked his heavy armor, a polished suit of splint mail that would protect him from most enemy blows. Tatyana had a suit of leather armor, while Nicolae had none. Instead he changed his clothes, putting on shades of browns which he hoped would help conceal him in the forest better.

When they felt as if they were prepared, the companions rode out to the western forest. It was easy to find the bandits’ trail. Unfortunately the woods proved to make traveling on horseback difficult and they had to reluctantly leave their mounts behind. With Petyr’s limp, this forced them to travel slowly.

The trees were bright with the colors of fall. A few of the leaves had begun to fall but not most. The companions barely noticed this as they followed the trail deeper into the woods.

After an hour they took a short break. Nicolae suggested that he scout ahead of the group and the others let him go. The short man disappeared into the trees hardly making a sound. He returned with only the news that the trail was still visible ahead. With grim determination the companions continued. Now Nicolae ranged ahead of the other two scouting out the trail ahead. After more than an hour, Nicolae returned to the others saying he believed they were almost there.

“Up ahead, I can hear them. We must be getting close. Stay quiet,” the small man reported. And soon the others could hear the sound of men’s voices too. The group stopped and let Nicolae scout the approach to the bandit’s camp.

He returned reporting there were two sentries watching the path ahead and beyond them was the camp. The party discussed a plan. They decided to leave the path and circle around the bandit camp. From there they would prepare to attack with bows and arrows. Before they would, Petyr would call out a warning and offer the bandits a chance to surrender. That agreed the group proceeded.

Once in place, Petyr and Nicolae prepared their bows and arrows. Tatyana neither owned a bow nor knew how to use one. Instead she waited to see if her magic would be needed. The camp, the party could see, was a ramshackle affair, with crude shelters made from haphazard materials. Much of the stolen livestock roamed freely about the camp, though a few had been slaughtered and been roasted over the fire. The group could count eight men in view and all appeared to be armed.

When the other two signaled their readiness, Petyr took a deep breath and shouted in his powerful voice, “Villains, your crimes are known. Lay down your arms and surrender. If you do not your guilt will condemn yourselves to death.”

The reaction from the camp was chaotic and confused, with more men rushed out of the shelters to see what was going on but none of the men offered to surrender. And so the battle was joined. The battle went the companions’ way, as the bandits showed little fighting ability. During the fight, Petyr waded in with his sword beating the bandits down. After seven of them had fallen, the rest of the bandits began to back away. One or two managed to flee into the forest, but Petyr would not let the others escape and pressed the attack.

Tatyana shouted to Petyr to stop the fight and let the men surrender. At first he would not, claiming the men deserved death for their crimes. Tatyana protested that the men appeared desperate and that could explain their crimes. If so they could still be redeemed. Petyr was not going to listen, until Tatyana reminded him of his Ezra given ability to detect evil in others and suggested he use it on the surviving bandits.

Petyr was taken aback by the results. He could detect no evil in the men⁶. Shocked he sheathed his sword and accepted their surrender. The bandits looked half starved. Their shrunken eyes and hollowed looks made them indeed look like men at the last of their rope, as Tatyana had suggested. Each of them did have a falcon branded on their foreheads marking them as Falkovnians, but none were in military dress and most had been armed with cast off weapons. In surrender they all acted meekly quickly obeying any of the companions’ orders.

⁶ See the introduction for a full explanation of Petyr’s detect chaos ability. In this case the bandits are actually evil, neutral evil. However since Petyr can only really detect chaos he is left to believe the men are not evil.

“They look like refugees. Probably fled Falkovnia looking for a better life here,” Tatyana said.⁷
“Yes, but they will still have to recompense the villagers for their crimes,” Petyr mumbled, still lost in thought.

“How?” Tatyana asked.

“I don’t know,” Petyr responded listlessly. However, someone did have an idea. As they led the captives and surviving livestock back to the village, Nicolae spoke.

“I know what to do with them.” When the others asked about his idea Nicolae went on, “Its harvest time. We saw that the fields were not half finished with the harvest yet. These men could help the villagers finish the harvest.”

“And,” he added, “they could help repair the buildings they damaged and rebuild the farm that was burned. Maybe we can make arrangements with the guards in Nartok. They could be sentenced to this for a year or two to serve their crimes.”

The others agreed it sounded like a good idea and decided to bring it up with the authorities in Nartok. However, first they had to deal with the villagers, who wanted to exact their own revenge on the surviving bandits. Some of the villagers hurled rocks and mud onto the bandits and Petyr had to force them away.

Imogen charged forward with a butcher knife trying to carve her revenge for Yuri’s death. Nicolae was able to disarm her while only suffering a minor cut. Petyr explained to the sobbing woman that he had repaid the bandits for Yuri’s death by having killed seven of them.

Once everything was settled down, the party explained Nicolae’s suggestion to a few of the villagers. They grudgingly agreed, thought the party could tell they were not satisfied.

In the morning the party rode into Nartok to make the arrangements.

⁷ Partially true. The men were all criminals sentenced to death in Falkovnia and that is why they fled to Darkon.

Session 3: Nartok⁸

Nartok, October 3, 752

The party had a problem. They were in an inn in Nartok. Petyr had led the group here based on the maps he had of Darkon, but here his maps ended. All three were leery of entering Falkovnia to the south, and Petyr had no idea how to lead the group through Lamordia to the west. So here they sat in Nartok waiting for some better idea to come along.

That evening during dinner, the group ate in silence until Tatyana made a surprise exclamation. She stood up and went across the room and began talking to a young, handsome-looking man. Petyr and Nicolae had never seen him before. Tatyana asked the man to join them for dinner. When they returned to the table she introduced the man as Tomas of Mordentshire. He was a devout follower of Ezra as well and worked for the church as an official courier.

Dinner went on as Tatyana and Tomas caught up with the latest news from home. Nicolae and Petyr remained for the most part out of the conversation. They were surprised to see the change in Tatyana. She was talkative with this Tomas. She even laughed at one of his jests, something they had never seen her do.

Both Nicolae and Petyr had the same thought, “She is attracted to him.” Petyr came to think that the attraction was related to Tomas’s position in the church and began to ask him questions about becoming an official courier. Tomas let on that it was a position that earned respect from many in the church and the couriers provided valuable communication between the missionaries and the main churches. Petyr was considering his own future and if he should become a church courier. Nicolae had another thought.

“So I guess being an official courier makes you pretty popular with the ladies,” Nicolae said, causing Tatyana to blush and look away.

“Well it is a respected position,” Tomas responded gruffly, “but if you are impeding my honor by implying that I would take advantage of –”

“No, no, no. Nothing of the sort,” Nicolae said with an ironic grin. At that the conversation lapsed into an uncomfortable silence, until Tatyana had an idea.

“Tomas it is actually perfect that we ran into you here. We are heading back to Mordent but are in need of a guide. Now that we ran into you we can travel together.”

Tomas frowned. “I am sorry Tatyana. I would love to help you, but I am not bound for Mordent but have come from there. I am on my way north to Ludendorf where a small band of our faithful is trying to establish a congregation. By the time I return it will be winter and from what I hear of Lamordian winters I most probably will be stuck there until spring. Sorry.”⁹

Tatyana was saddened. Petyr left the table and went to the bar. He asked the bartender about guides who could take them through southern Lamordia. The bartender suggested he try an inn called Cedarsplint Inn, as many wilderness guides frequented the place.

Petyr went back to the table and told the others that he wanted to look for a guide that evening. Nicolae quickly agreed to go. Tatyana was reluctant to go, but she thought if she said no the others would think she wanted to be alone with Tomas, so she agreed.

She soon learned to regret the decision. The Cedarsplint Inn was a dive of a place on the edge of town. Tatyana did not think it looked at all like a reputable establishment and told the others so, but the two men reassured her all would be fine.

Inside the place was crowded. The party was forced to take a small table against the wall where only two of them could sit at a time. The crowd was loud and raucous, drinking and singing lustfully. An arm wrestling contest was taking place as well to shouts and cheers.

Nicolae and Petyr were soon enjoying themselves over pints of beer, while Tatyana huddled in her chair in misery. Petyr was soon engrossed in the arm wrestling contest. He admired competitions of strength. Petyr noticed one contestant, a huge bear of a man, who was barely a man, as he seemed to be only twenty years old. The man beat his competitor and then slammed the table and demanded another round of ale.

⁸ A slight spoiler warning for the adventure Near at Hand from The Forgotten Children netbook, for some of this session reflects back to that adventure from session 1.

⁹ The players thought that Tomas was just a plot device to get them out of Nartok. But the lesson tonight was plot devices are not everywhere.

Judging from the man's clothes, which looked like they were stitched by himself, Petyr had an idea that the man was a wilderness guide. So when the man had finished chugging down this tankard of ale, Petyr went over and offered him another. The man accepted and the two talked for awhile.

"I am Petyr Lyonskaya. It's great to meet you, friend."

"Aye and you too. I am called Günther," the young man responded.

Petyr soon learned the man was a guide, and Petyr offered to hire him. Günther agreed and Petyr took him over to meet the others.

"Everyone, I want you to meet Günther. He is going to be our guide the rest of the way. Günther, this is Warden Tatyana Tchernova and Nicolae."

Günther stared at Tatyana a moment as he stumbled out, "Günther, Günther Wallenheim, ma'am. It's a pleasure to meet you. To meet you both."

Nicolae welcomed Günther enthusiastically, but Tatyana hardly acknowledged him. The new larger group past the time getting to know each other for a couple of hours and then made plans for their journey. They would leave the morning of the fifth, and planned to meet the next afternoon to make more thorough plans.

October 4, 752

The next day the group gathered for lunch to discuss the upcoming journey. On the way, the group noticed some posters for a carnival that was set up outside of town.¹⁰ However, none of them were interested in going, but wanted to spend the day buying supplies for the coming journey.¹¹ The rest of the day was filled with such mundane tasks.

That night, dinner at the party's inn lasted late as the group discussed their departure. Nicolae and Petyr walked Günther out while Tatyana headed upstairs to bed. The streets were nearly deserted as the two men bid Günther a good night. Nicolae and Petyr lingered outside the inn's door as Günther headed off for his room at the Cedarsplint.

Suddenly a scream pierced the night air. "Murder! Murder!"

Günther turned and ran back to his new companions and together the three raced towards an alleyway where the shouts came from. Tatyana had also heard the call from inside the inn and raced out. She just reached the door to the inn as the three men disappeared down the alley.

As the three men raced towards the alley Günther outdistanced the other two, Petyr's limp slowing him down. Günther raced down the alley and into another. As he rounded a corner he came skidding to a stop. In the dim light, he could just barely make out a form standing over the body of a man just down this new alley from him. The humanoid form turned towards him and Günther saw the flash of what looked to him to be reptilian eyes. Then the figure turned and fled down the alley in the opposite direction. And as it did so Günther could have sworn the figure had a tail. Bravely he raced down the alleyway, with the shouts of his companions and others converged behind him.

Petyr and Nicolae reached the body in the alley just in time to see Günther reach the far end and race into the street beyond.

"Go after him," Petyr ordered, "I'll stay here and see if he is alright."

So Nicolae raced after Günther, and Petyr bent over the prone form. He could not tell much in the dim light. He tried to feel for a pulse but his hand came away drenched in blood. A short time later, Tatyana found him. She had taken a lantern from the inn and with its light the two were able to view the scene in the alleyway.

There was blood. A lot of it. The body of a young man lay in the alley with his throat ripped out. Saddened that she could offer no help, Tatyana bent over the man and said a prayer for him. As she finished she noticed something around the man's neck.

"Look there. He is a follower of our lady Ezra," she exclaimed with surprise, and true enough a holy symbol of Ezra dangled from a small chain around the man's neck. Petyr gently removed the holy symbol and said, "I wonder who he was? Do you recognize him?"

"No. I guess he is not from Nevuchar Springs either if you do not know him," Tatyana responded.

¹⁰ This was not The Carnival. It was just one of the traveling carnivals from Darkon which are mentioned in Gazetteer 2.

¹¹ I did have an encounter planned for the carnival, but the characters showed no interest in going. Maybe I will be able to work it in later in the campaign.

Petyr decided to search the man for clues as to his identity. The man wore a short sword around his waist, which was made of silver. He found some coins in one pocket and letters in another. He ignored the coins¹² and instead looked at the letters.

There were two letters, both addressed to the same person, Mikhail Varabaldi. The seals of both letters were broken. Petyr pocketed both letters and went on searching but found nothing else of interest. A short time later members of the city watch arrived.

“You there halt,” one of the two guardsmen said as they leveled their weapons at Petyr and Tatyana.

“Gentlemen, please. We are not the ones you want,” Petyr said while rising slowly.

“Who are you?”

“I am Lord Lyonskaya of Markle¹³ and this lady is Tatyana Tchurnova.”

The guards immediately lowered their weapons and said, “Sorry lord. We just heard the shouts and came running.”

“That is quite alright. You are just doing your duty,” Petyr said affably. The two guards relaxed at Petyr’s good-natured demeanor and soon were joined by a half-dozen more guards. The first two explained what they knew to the others and then all the guards just stood around doing nothing.

Meanwhile, Günther had continued his chase. The fleeing figure raced down the street and into another alley. As he did so he passed near the light coming from a window. For a brief second, Günther saw something that was a cross between a reptile and a man, and then the man was in shadows again.

Günther followed into the other alleyway but could see no sign of the fugitive. The alley was short and ended at a wooded fence. Günther pulled himself up to see over it. On the other side was an inn. Climbing over he raced into the inn. The common room was not crowded but there were still a few people having a drink. Günther asked if they had seen the lizard man but no one had seen any such creature enter the inn.

Thinking he must have been mistaken in the direction the fugitive fled he rushed back to the alley way. There he met Nicolae and told him what had happened. They searched for another way out of the alley but could find nothing. Still, they had no light source and thought they may be missing something. So, Günther lit a makeshift torch from some discarded crates. The light revealed no other exits.

At first the two were discouraged until Günther had an idea. He was a skilled tracker, and so he tried to find the fugitive’s tracks. At the front of the alley he found the disturbing print of a lizard-like foot. This confirmed what he had seen, which Nicolae had not believed at first.

The alley was not the ideal place to find tracks, but Günther did find some more tracks further down the alleyway, but these were different. They were bare human feet. Puzzled the two retraced their steps and went down the alleyway again, only to find the same thing again, lizard feet at one end and human feet at the other.

“He became human?” Günther wondered out loud. Nicolae looked at him dubiously, thinking such a feat was not possible.

“Well, let’s see where these human feet lead,” Nicolae suggested. The two followed the human footprints as best they could and found they ended at the wooden fence. On the other side of the fence Günther found more signs of the human feet but nothing more of the reptilian. The footprints led around the inn to the road, but there were lost. The two searched up and down the street without finding anything. Disappointed they returned to the murder scene.

Günther and Nicolae arrived and explained to the city watchmen what they had seen. The guardsmen were skeptical of their story, and expressed disbelief at the description of a man lizard. The guards tried to dismiss the characters, but Petyr insisted that they remain to see what could be learned of the man and his death. The guard responded that they were going to do nothing more than dispose of the body.

“A man was murdered and you will do nothing?” Petyr almost shouted.

“He’s just a foreigner. Someone robbed and killed him. It is nothing that need concern a lord such as yourself. We will see the body is disposed of in a pauper’s grave and that will be the end of it.” The other guards nodded in agreement, anxious to get the deed over with so they could return home early.

¹² That was a mistake. The coins were from various lands of the core and could have helped a little if they had looked more closely at them.

¹³ This is a lie! Because he was disavowed by his father, Petyr is no longer a noble and can no longer claim the title Lord. I pointed this out, but Billy, Petyr’s player, said Petyr spoke out of habit. I let that go this time, but warned him that if he continued to do so it would be considered lying.

When Tatyana pointed out to the guards that the dead man was a member of their church and that it was their responsibility to send the man's belongings to his kin, the guards relented and let them stay and collect the man's belongings.

As the characters searched the dead man's belongings, they noticed the money was missing. Petyr looked at some of the guards but they would not meet his gaze. The characters gathered what they could and returned to their inn to review what they had received. There was little. They were not given the man's clothes but did get his short sword and scabbard, the holy symbol of Ezra, the two letters, a signet ring, and a small book. The coins were missing.

The book, written in Mordentish, was a scientific look at lycanthropes and discussed types of lycanthropes as well as means to hunt them. The author was one Rudolph van Ritchen, who none of the characters had heard of.

The letters proved more enlightening. They were addressed to Mikhail Varabaldi, which the characters took to be the dead man's name. Both had been sent from Lekarvest, Borca. Both letters were from the same person, Lucrezia, who from reading the letters appeared to be the man's mother. The letters were straight forward letters expressing concern for the son's welfare and news that his siblings were well. The letters were peppered with praise of Ezra and made reference to the man's 'good work for Ezra's cause.'

Tatyana decided it was their duty to return the man's possessions to his family. She suggested they take the items with them to Mordentshire and see what the church authorities could do to return the items to the Varabaldi family.

Petyr agreed and suggested, "Since it is so late tonight and we cannot get a good night sleep before leaving in the morning let's postpone for one more day. I also want to try to find out more about this man's killer."¹⁴ The others agreed and they turned in for the night.

That night Petyr had a vivid dream.

'He was a dwarf leading a group of guardsmen through the countryside. They stopped at a place where it looked as if everything had died ahead. The grass and plants in front of them were all dead but in the distance a city could be seen.

The guards discussed the situation in fearful whispers. They experimented and discovered a clear border between the living and the dead area around the city. Finally one of the dwarves stepped forward saying someone would have to brave the border themselves and went to step across. Petyr found himself yelling, "Drangen no!" and rushing forward to stop the man. Petyr reached the dwarf just as he crossed the border. Petyr placed a hand on the dwarf's shoulder to stop him but it was too late. Pain exploded down his arm, the left one which had been on the other dwarf's shoulder and hurled Petyr backwards.

Petyr the dwarf writhed in pain on the ground, but another Petyr hovered over the scene and watched. The other guardsmen rushed to Petyr-dwarf and tried to help him, calling him Dunkel Kralle. Petyr could also see Drangen lying dead just inside the border of death. He watched as Drangen's body rose to its feet and walked off into the dead city, ignoring his friends calling to him. Then Petyr blacked out.

Petyr experienced a quick succession of images. Petyr-dwarf being carried away from the dead land. Seeing his hand begin to cramp and then become painful. Next the hand seemed to twitch on its own.

Petyr-dwarf's health began to deteriorate and he was overcome with pain from his left arm. The hand itself seemed dead and decomposition set in, while Petyr-dwarf began to fear the hand. He would babble madly about it to anyone who came to care for him, until one night he awoke to find the left hand trying to choke him to death. From then on, the arm had to be lashed to the bed headboard to keep it from lashing out at Petyr-dwarf or others.

As the decomposition of the hand became worse the doctors decided it had to be removed to save Petyr-dwarf's life. He struggled against them, pleading feverishly with them not to do so. He jabbered that as long as the hand was attached to him he could keep it under control, but no one would listen and the hand was removed. After the surgery Petyr made one feeble request, "Bury it deep" he said and blacked out again.

¹⁴ This is the beginning of a major story arch for the campaign. They will not be solving it tonight or in the near future.

Next Petyr was over a small mound of earth at night. He watched as the severed hand clawed its way free from the small grave and scampered off into the night.

Now he watched from the hand's perspective. The hand traveled through a storm to a small inn. It leapt through a glass window into a darkened common room. A large man must have heard the noise and came to investigate, so Petyr-hand hid under a table. There he waited until the man was close enough to strike. Out of the darkness he came leaping at the man's throat.

Next he fled from the dead man and into the kitchen. A woman came in and he snuck past her into her room. From there he saw himself as the hand creep across the darkened room towards the woman's knitting as she slept. She awoke and screamed.

The next scene he saw was a chaotic one through a blood red haze. It was a battle scene, but hectic and disjointed. He saw images of Tatyana and Nicolae and someone that looked like himself. Finally he blacked out again, fallen in battle.

The last image of the dream was of a grave. The headstone read his name, Dunkel Kralle. As the light began to fade out, Petyr saw something disturbing the soil of the grave. Suddenly, a left hand burst from the grave, and pulled itself out, the partially decomposed body of Dunkel Kralle following. Just before the light went out the dark shape glanced at Petyr and he felt its hatred.'

Petyr awoke the next morning in a cold sweat.

Session 4: Leaving Nartok

Nartok, October 5, 752

That morning, the companions had a late breakfast together with Tomas. Petyr related to the others the dream he had. Nicolae was concerned as he knew of Petyr's "gift," but the others just dismissed it. When Nicolae persisted that it was real and that the undead Dunkel would be coming after them, Günther spoke up, "First murdering lycanthropes then undead dwarves, if all your foes are such as this, you are going to need silver weapons to face them." At this the party began to discuss how to obtain silver weapons.

Surprisingly, Tomas said, "This is what you need, eh." He pulled his rapier from its scabbard to show it was bladed in silver.

"I know an expert in Lamordia who made it for me. Great weapon smiths they have there. He lives in Neufurchtenburg, and does excellent work."

"We should visit this contact of yours when we pass through Neufurchtenburg, and ask him for weapons of silver," Petyr said.

"Ha, you should do that, but you will not be able to wait for them. It is a very long process. By the time he has finished one or two weapons it will be the middle of winter and you will be stuck in Neufurchtenburg until next year," Tomas said.

"You would do better to just place an order with him and he can have the weapons shipped to you in Mordentshire as they are completed. Here, I will write an introduction for you to Niklaus. That should help speed things along, and since he will know you are with the church he will be assured of being paid when the commission is done."

The others agreed, and after breakfast they received Tomas's introduction to the smith Niklaus. Petyr went to the guard house to see if he could learn any news on the murderer of Mikhail, but they could tell him nothing. He tried to do his own investigation by asking around town. When that too proved to be a dead end he returned to the inn that evening dejected.

They turned in early that night and were ready the next morning before dawn. As the sun rose over the city, Tatyana said goodbye to Tomas. Nicolae stared intently at the two waiting to see if Tatyana would kiss Tomas goodbye or not. Günther also took an interest. But she did not.

As the group left the city, the party was unsettled by a large flock of birds. The birds were perched all along the gatehouse and down the wall. They covered every inch of the wall as well as filled many trees nearby. Their loud squawking almost drowned out any other sounds. Tatyana thought this was unnatural and an ill omen to start their journey. She put her hands over her ears against the noise.

Günther was the only one not unsettled. He explained that it was a natural behavior of the birds. As winter was coming the birds were gathering together for warmth and would soon migrate southward for slightly warmer climates. Petyr did not believe him. He felt there was something unholy about the flock, and turned in his saddle so he could keep an eye on them until they were out of sight of the city.¹⁵

The travelers made Neufurchtenburg in two days. There they meet with Niklaus, and Nicolae, Petyr, and Tatyana ordered silver weapons to be charged through the church and delivered to Mordentshire. After giving the horses a day of rest and refreshing their provisions the party continue south into Dementlieu.

As the party traveled Nicolae and Günther spent a lot of time talking. Since Günther walked at the lead of the group and had no horse, Nicolae dismounted and often walked along side. Günther told him about his background and how he was raised by his aunt after his parents were killed. Nicolae felt empathy for him and shared with Günther his own story.¹⁶ Normally, Nicolae avoided telling anyone his story, for instance, he had not confided it to Tatyana. But he felt some sort of bond with Günther and was comfortable telling him. Because the two spoke in Balok which Günther was more comfortable with, and which only the two of them understood, Tatyana still did not know Nicolae's background.

¹⁵ This is just a random event from a list I made of unusual occurrences. It was to add tension, which it did, but also to show, when the birds proved harmless that not all the animals in the world are against them. So later on when they do face animals controlled by a vampire or other creature it will seem more unnatural. As for Günther's explanation, I just told him he thought it was natural. The explanation he made up and is all his own. I do not know if it is true.

¹⁶ See Nicolae's background in the introduction.

Tatyana road silently and stayed to herself. Günther often glanced surreptitiously at her. Nicolae noticed this a couple of times but said nothing about it. He was not sure if he was right, but if Günther was attracted to Tatyana he thought about warning him about her cold nature. He decided to wait until he was sure.¹⁷

Petyr road silently for most of the journey as well. Occasionally he would pass the time speaking with Günther and getting to know him better, but often he was lost in thought. He was worried about his future, and unsure what he would do at the end of the journey. He was giving some thought to a position as a church courier, but every time he thought about it, he was reminded of Tomas. That would bring out feelings of jealousy, which Petyr would quickly suppress. He was confused by these feelings, unsure of where they stemmed from and that made him unsure of himself.

Günther proved to be a capable guide. Once he was able to recognize and avoid a potential frightening encounter with a bear. He kept them on track and they made good time. Soon the group left Lamordia behind, crossing the Musade River at Carlion-le-duc.

Instead of stopping at the town, Günther had them press on. Since it was only mid-day there was still plenty of time to travel before dark, he reasoned and the others agreed. What he failed to mention was that they would have to camp outside because there were no other settlements between Carlion-le-duc and Port-a-Lucine. When Tatyana heard this she was upset.

“You mean we have to sleep outside? In the dirt?” she asked angrily. Before this they had always found an inn or at least a farm house willing to take them in.

“It a’int so bad,” Günther replied simply. “It’s just one night. And tomorrow we will be in Port-a-Lucine.”

“But it is freezing,” Tatyana said pulling her outer robe closer.

“Well it’s cold, but there is no snow.” Despite Tatyana’s raised voice, Günther remained soft spoken and tried to be respectful.

“But, but we have no tents, no equipment to sleep outside,” Tatyana persisted. By this point the other two men had dismounted and started to set up the campsite, leaving Günther to explain everything to Tatyana.

“Don’t worry, ma’am¹⁸,” unnoticed by Günther, Tatyana’s eyes flared at being called ma’am. “It will be alright. Here let me help you down...” Günther reached out and took Tatyana’s hand before she could react.

“No don’t’ –” she started to say and tried to pull her hand back. As their hands touched Tatyana let out a stifled scream and swooned.

As they touched Tatyana’s vision was filled with horrible scenes of a family being torn apart by some hairy wild animal. The scenes were chaotic and horrifying, with blood everywhere. Unprepared for the horrific scenes she blacked out.

If Günther had not been standing next to her horse, Tatyana would have fallen from it. Günther was able to catch her, pulled her free of the saddle, and settled her gently on the ground. Petyr and Nicolae came running up asking what had happen. Günther replied that he did not know. The three men waited anxiously for a few minutes until Tatyana came out of her faint.

“Ma’am, are you alright?” Günther asked.

“What? Huh? Stay away from me. Don’t touch me,” Tatyana said pulling her robes closer around herself as she backed away from the others.

Nicolae held up his hands to show he had no intentions of touching her. Petyr said, “Tatyana we just want to know if you are alright. What happen?”

“I didn’t mean to hurt you,” Günther added.

“It is nothing. Just leave me be,” Tatyana hissed. The others tried to press her, but gave up when she proved unwilling to discuss it. The men left her alone and went about setting up the camp.

After settling in, the group decided to set a watch and Günther volunteered for the first watch. His watch went smoothly and so did Nicolae’s watch. Petyr had the last watch, because the men did not want

¹⁷ Günther’s attraction to Tatyana is an agreement between his player and me. We needed some reason that Günther would stay around after their journey is complete, as he is an outsider to the rest of the group and from the church all the others serve. It was decided that Günther does not have much experience with women and is attracted to any good-looking woman he meets, but because of his inexperience he is shy around women.

¹⁸ And thus Günther ruins any chance he ever had with Tatyana.

to ask Tatyana to take a watch after her incident. It was still a few hours before dawn, when Petyr thought he heard something. He could not make it out, but it sounded like a voice or voices in the night. He strained to see outside the camp, but could make out nothing in the darkness.

“Nicolae are you awake,” Petyr whispered, but too quiet to wake the sleeping man.

“Petyr, what is it?” Tatyana half rose from her blankets. She had been having trouble sleeping and heard the strange note in Petyr’s voice.

“I hear something. Out there. Do you hear it?” Petyr whispered. Tatyana listened for a moment before responding.

“I think so, but I do not know what it is.”

As quietly as he could, Petyr made his way over to Günther and woke the guide. Petyr informed Günther of the noise. The woodsman was unsure about the noise. His first suggestion was to throw some more wood on the fire, since the fire was so low. This they did and in doing so also woke up Nicolae.

With the fire flaring up, Tatyana explained to Nicolae what was going on, while Petyr lit a stout tree branch on fire to use as a make-shift torch. Holding the torch up high he took a few tentative steps away from the firelight, trying to see what was out there. Nicolae listened to the noise and said he thought it sounded like voices but thought he could only hear one person’s voice. He told this to the group as Günther lit a torch of his own and joined Petyr.

With the added light from the strengthened fire and the two torches, the area the group could see increased but they still could not find the source of the voices. As Petyr and Günther took a few more steps away from the fire they thought they heard the sounds moving away. For a moment Günther thought he saw a dark figure moving away from the camp, but in an instant it was gone. The sound soon faded from their hearing and the group relaxed.

“What was it?” Tatyana asked.

“I don’t know. I have heard nothing like it,” Günther responded.

“What ever it was, it was not nature. It felt wrong,” Petyr said. The rest of the group fell silent at that. Eventually, Petyr suggested the others get some sleep and he would continue the watch, but the others were too unnerved to get any more sleep, and so the whole group waited through the rest of the night.

The group was ready to move on early the next morning. Günther set a brisk pace aiming to reach Port-a-Lucine by mid-afternoon. Unfortunately a rainstorm swept in from the sea forcing the group to seek shelter in the barn of a small farm.¹⁹

There they waited for hours worrying that if the rain did not end soon enough they would not make it to Port-a-Lucine that day. When most of the storm had past, the group decided to press on through the light showers that persisted in order to reach Port-a-Lucine. Pulling their greatcoats tighter against the chill and rain the group set out.

Just after nightfall, the group arrived in Port-a-Lucine, cold and wet, and with no place to stay. The group had discussed this while on the road and Tatyana had suggested they seek sanctuary at the Cathedral of Ste. Mere des Larmes. The others had no other suggestions, and since they knew the city to be an expensive one and their funds were running low, they decided a free room with the Ezra monks at the cathedral would be their best option.

Under a light rain shower, the four travelers made their way through the empty streets of the city towards the cathedral. The area of the city they past through was very poor. As they traveled through it, the characters could feel menacing eyes staring at them from the shadows. They readied themselves in case of trouble and pressed on, making it to the crumbling cathedral without incident.

At first their knocking on the door brought no response. Only after persisting did their knocking bring someone to the door. A young monk answered the door, invited them in out of the rain, and asked in Mordentish who they were.

“I am Warden Tatyana of Mordent. This is Lord Petyr Lyonskaya, a knight of our lady, and his squire, Nicolae. The last is our guide, Günther. We are travelers in need of a place to stay and have come seeking shelter,” Tatyana said in Mordentish.

“Oh, ah. Please wait here while I summon Brother Laurant. I’ll see that the fire is lit so you can warm yourselves,” the young monk said and hurried out. A short time later another young monk entered

¹⁹ This is another of my ordinary random events. It’s just a rain storm. The simple farmer has no problems that a band of heroes can solve. This is all so that the next time they are forced to seek shelter from the rain it will seem more normal but it may not be.

the room. After bowing to the travelers he went to the fireplace and started a fire. When he was done he retreated. As he did so, the companions could hear others approaching.

The young monk entered the room with a middle-aged monk who stepped forward, bowed, and introduced himself as Brother Laurant.

“I wish we had had advanced knowledge of your coming, lord. Unfortunately we do not have suitable accommodations for one such as yourself,” Brother Laurant said speaking to Petyr. The paladin looked a little embarrassed.²⁰

“No, no. No special considerations need be made. I ask to be treated just as the humble traveler that I am,” he said to the monk. Brother Laurant looked a little puzzled but continued.

“Ah, yes, well. I have sent a runner to the Comte Tomas d’Aloure²¹. He is an honorable gentleman with ties to the church. We believe that he will be able to provide you and your entourage with the proper accommodations during your stay.”

Petyr tried to put him off and insist that a simple cot would do, but Brother Laurant said it would all be for the best to accept the Comte’s invitation if it was extended.

Brother Laurant and the party made small talk while they waited for the runner to return with news from the Comte d’Aloure. The group told Brother Laurant about their travels, and they learned that Brother Laurant was a fount of knowledge, though his knowledge seemed to be limited mostly to esoteric pursuits. It seemed Brother Laurant had little understanding of geography outside of Dementlieu as he had trouble understanding where Petyr was from.

Eventually the runner returned with an invitation from the Comte d’Aloure. The companions wished Brother Laurant and Brother Jean, the younger one who answered the door, well and thanked them for setting up their accommodations.

The Comte had sent his carriage to pick up the group, saving them from another trip through the rain. Petyr and Tatyana tried to make themselves look presentable during the carriage ride to the Comte’s estate outside the city.

Comte Tomas d’Aloure proved to be a pleasant host.²² He and his wife Sara greeted the travelers at the door and had a late dinner prepared for them. The two nobles were open and kind. Tatyana noticed that they said please and thank you to their servants. The companions discussed their journey so far with the Comte and his wife, as they ate their dinner, though most of the talking was done by Petyr with Tatyana adding in details where she could. Günther and Nicolae did not speak Mordentish, forcing them to ask for translations of everything often. They quickly became frustrated and backed out of the conversation, speaking little.

As the meal was over Petyr, feeling uncomfortable about all of the fuss, said, “Thank you again Comte d’Aloure. Your generosity on this unpleasant evening was without bounds. Is there... err... anything that we can do for you to make up for this hospitality.”

“No, no, it is nothing. It is the duty of the host to provide for his guests. You need not trouble yourselves,” the Comte replied and asked what the group’s plans were. The group discussed their situation and decided to spend one day resting and use the next day to re-supply before leaving for Mordent. D’Aloure seemed surprised by their short stay and pressed them to stay longer, suggesting many of the city’s fine attractions. The group politely declined and with that everyone turned in.

²⁰ Of course he is nervous. I already warned him about claiming to be Lord Lyonskaya in session 3. He is trying to appease me while not admitting to Tatyana and the others that he is no longer his father’s heir.

²¹ From the Book of Secrets article, Lights in the Fog.

²² The unpleasantness has yet to happen to the d’Aloures. I hope to play that out as part my campaign, but the party will have to be much higher level first.

Session 5: Port-a-Lucine

Port-a-Lucine, October 14, 752

The next morning was a Friday.²³ That being a day of worship for followers of Ezra, Petyr and Tatyana were going to attend the noon service at the cathedral. Günther suggested that the priests may know something about Mikhail Varabaldi, who they had found murdered in Nartok, and he and Nicolae tagged along as well.

After the service, which both Petyr and Tatyana found somewhat lacking in what they expected, the group sought out Brother Laurant to ask him about Mr. Varabaldi. The name meant nothing to him, but he did offer to introduce the characters to other church members who may have known the young man.

The group met Brothers Alphonse and Jacques, as well as Sisters Celeste and Dominique, and though all were pleasant, none had ever met someone named Varabaldi. Sister Dominique recognized the name as Borcan, leading the travelers to conclude that they would have to visit the home cathedral to learn more about Mr. Mikhail Varabaldi.

It was late in the afternoon when the party finally left the cathedral. They were walking through a poor neighborhood on their way back to the d'Aloure estate when they hear a shout.

“Get your hands off me! I say! Help! Someone help me!”

The party rushed through an alley to the next street to see a richly dressed middle-aged nobleman struggling with a shabbily dressed thug while two other such thugs looked on.

“Hey, let him go!” Petyr yelled. The thugs turned on the party. They drew knives and made threatening gestures at the party, telling them to go away. The party ignored the threats and charged.

In the battle that ensued, the party was hampered by their lack of weapons. Since they had just gone to church, most were not armed. Only Nicolae and Günther had daggers to confront the knife-wielding thugs. In the end none of the party was seriously injured and two of the thieves were captured, though one did get away.

The nobleman introduced himself as Marquis Gerard Chantelle²⁴ and thanked his rescuers.

“Those nasty peasants tried to rob *me*,” Marquis Chantelle said. “Thank you for coming to my rescue when you did, otherwise those scoundrels would have gotten away.”

Petyr introduced himself and the others, and asked why the Marquis was out in this neighborhood alone. Sieur Chantelle replied that he had been conducting business in a building nearby. When he finished, he and his manservant came out to find his carriage and driver were gone. The manservant went to look for it. After a time, Chantelle became impatient and set off to find the carriage himself, got lost, and was accosted by the thugs. The party agreed to help Chantelle find his missing carriage.

A short time later the carriage was found. Remy, the manservant, had found the carriage driver in a gin shop and had been looking for the lost Marquis. Seeing that the party had no carriage of their own, Chantelle offered to give them a ride to their lodging, which the characters accepted.

There was not room enough for all the travelers to fit inside the carriage, and in any case Chantelle suggested to Petyr that his servants, referring to Nicolae and Günther, could ride up top. Trying to be diplomatic Petyr did not translate that to the two but instead suggested that Nicolae and Günther ride up top to allow himself and Tatyana to ride with the Marquis since they both spoke his language.

One the way, Sieur Chantelle inquired more into Petyr's background, and they also discussed how they came to be staying with the Comte d'Aloure. Chantelle was so grateful for their help that he offered to take them to the opera. Tatyana tried to refuse, claiming their group was traveling lightly and did not have the proper clothes to attend the opera, however, when Chantelle realized they had not attended the opera before he would not take no for an answer.

“But mademoiselle and monsieur, you cannot pass through Port-a-Lucine without visiting the Grand Opera Nationale. It is simply the pinnacle of culture, and I would be delighted to introduce you to it as a show of my appreciation for saving me. Let us say the day after tomorrow. They are performing *Il Sogno di Scipione* and it will be perfect. That will also give you some time to acquire the proper attire, no.”

So the characters had found themselves with an invitation to the opera which they could not find a way to refuse. After arriving at the d'Aloure estate, they told the story to their hosts. Madame d'Aloure recommended that they extend their stay an extra day to attend the opera. Tomas d'Aloure was quiet at

²³ For ease, instead of making every fifth day a time for church service, we use Friday, the 5th day of the week, for the day of worship of Ezra.

²⁴ From the Francois de Penible entry in *Children of the Night: Demons*.

first. When his wife asked him what he thought, Tomas replied, “The Marquis Chantelle could be a valuable friend. His family is in banking and is very influential throughout Dementlieu. I am not sure what advantage an acquaintancy with Chantelle would have for you though since you are passing on to Mordent but...”

“But what?” Petyr asked when Tomas had paused.

“I was just reminded of our earlier discussion. How you were asking if there was some way you could repay my hospitality. It is just that, if I could get a formal introduction to the Marquis... I have a business venture that may be rather profitable, but I will need some financial backers. Chantelle could certainly be able to provide a loan. I am sorry. I am just thinking out loud, that is all.”

“What is it you wish us to do?” Tatyana asked.

“Nothing, nothing. Forget what I was saying. Go to the opera and enjoy, if you wish,” the Comte replied.

“We could introduce you to Chantelle if you wish,” Tatyana offered.

“No, no it would not be proper. You have only barely met him. It is too soon to be presenting potential business contacts to him. It would seem improper. No, I appreciate your offer. Maybe in the future, on your next visit to Port-a-Lucine something can be arranged, but not now. Thank you,” Tomas replied.

Port-a-Lucine, October 15, 752

The next day the group went out to purchase suits for the opera. Madame d’Aloure recommended a merchant for them, who the group found to be very nice and professional. After purchasing the clothes the party also purchased other supplies they will need to continue their journey. They returned to the d’Aloure estate by evening and spent sometime with Tomas and Sara. They learned more about the couple and were impressed by their good nature and their obvious love for each other.

Port-a-Lucine, October 16, 752

The next evening²⁵, the four prepared for their night out at the opera. Marquis Chantelle sent a carriage with an invitation for Petyr and “his lady.” Tatyana silently fumed when she heard the message, and Petyr embarrassedly tried to apologize to her for the misunderstanding. The trip through town was awkward with Petyr trying to appease Tatyana and her ignoring his attempts.

When they arrived at the Grand Opera Nationale all were impressed by the building’s grandeur. A liveried servant waited to usher them inside and brought them to the Marquis who welcomed them warmly.

“I am so glad that you could make it. You are in for a truly incredible experience. Allow me to introduce my daughter, Louise. Louise, this is Sir Petyr who bravely came to my aid the other day.”

Louise was a slightly plump, young woman of about eighteen, with long blond hair that was currently piled up atop her head in an elaborate hair style. Shyly, she did not meet Petyr’s eyes as she extended a hand and thanked him for saving her father.

“It is a pleasure, my lady. Let me introduce, Warden Tchurnova. As well, this is my noble squire, Nicolae. And finally this is our brave guide, Günther ...”

It was clear that whatever Petyr said after that Louise did not hear as her eyes fell on Günther and gazed with admiration at him.

“It is a pleasure to meet you all,” she said staring directly at Günther, who seemed as equally infatuated with her as he stared back at her. Günther quickly asked Petyr what she had said.

“Excuse me, miss, but Günther does not speak Mordentish, only Balok and a little Darkonese,” Petyr told her.

“Oh, my,” Louise said. “Well, I shall try using my poor grasp of Balok to express my thanks.”

She turned to Günther and told him in broken Balok that she admired his bravery in the face of the thugs who threatened her father. Günther blushed and looked away. He managed to mumble out that it was nothing.

Marquis Chantelle, slightly alarmed by his daughter’s behavior, interrupted the conversation and ushered the group to his box, where he arranged the seating so that Louise and Günther were on opposite

²⁵ I skipped over the earlier part of the day. Not much happened. The characters got a tour of the city from Sara, most of which came straight out of the Gazetteer. No point in me repeating all of that here.

sides of the box. Tatyana was seated on Chantelle's right, with Petyr next to her. During the show, the Marquis whispered to the two often.

"That is Maria Diosa," he said when the diva first came on stage. "This is her first season with the opera, but already she has impressed many. Her father is the owner of the Grand Opera Nationale, and at first some were critical of her being cast; however, now that those critics have heard her sing, no one thinks she is unworthy of the starring role."

"Ah, and that is the apple of my daughter's eye. Is it not Louise?" Chantelle said teasingly, when the male lead entered the stage. "That is Jean Pierre Cambier and he has captured many the hearts of the young ladies who attend the opera. Fine voice." Louise blushed at her father's words and told him to hush.

Later during an intermission, Chantelle asked how they were enjoying the opera. It was clear that while Tatyana was fascinated and Petyr entertained, Nicolae and Günther were bored, though they tried not to show it. Slightly offended by their attitudes, Marquis remarked that they would probably find it more entertaining to visit the Maison de Cire wax museum. Missing the implied insult, Nicolae replied that the wax museum did sound interesting. Louise tried to interject some excitement by telling Günther that the Opera Nationale was supposed to be haunted.

"Maybe we will see the ghost tonight. I would be scared. But that should not scare a brave man like yourself," she told Günther in her broken Balok. The opportunity to see a ghost brought some excitement to the evening for Nicolae and Günther, but alas the ghost did not make an appearance and the evening passed without incident.

Günther also learned of the charity work Louise did at the hospice of the church of Hala. Tatyana wondered why she did her charity work there and not with the priests of Ezra, to which Louise replied that the anchorites did not do any charity work in the city.

"They just remain in their crumbling cathedral mostly and refuse to go out into the degenerating neighborhoods that surrounded it to help the people," Louise told her.

Tatyana was surprised but also realized that she did not know much about the Ste. Meres de Larmes sect of Ezra. In any case, she disapproved of their lack of charity and made a mental promise to tell her superiors when she reached Mordentshire.

The group lapsed into an awkward silence before Louise shyly spoke out, "um... Mr. Wallenheim, I...ah... was wondering if I could write to you. And if so where should I send the letters to. And if you would write back to me. I would enjoy corresponding with you." The last part was said in a nervous rush.

Günther turned bright red at her words. He tried to stumble out a reply but could not make anything coherent come out. Petyr came to his rescue.

"My Lady Louise, if you wish, you can send the letters to the chapel of Ezra in Mordentshire. 'Master' Günther will always be welcome there and the priests will see that your letters reach him."

Louise clasped her hands in delight and breathed a sigh of relief. Günther managed to whisper a thank you to Petyr before Marquis Chantelle, clearly embarrassed by the scene began to usher the group out to the carriages. Petyr noticed the man's discomfort and pulled him aside for a moment to talk.

"Marquis, do not worry over your daughter. She is very young and impressionable. I am sure she sees Günther as an adventurous figure out of one of these operas, when you and I know the life of a highway guide is not romantic or heroic but tedious. I am sure once we leave tomorrow she will soon tire of these notions. It will all be harmless in the end and is really nothing to fret over."

The Marquis seemed on the verge of arguing, but instead relented and agreed with Petyr. Thus the group was able to depart on good terms with the Marquis and his daughter. They returned to the d'Aloure estate and turned in.

Port-a-Lucine, October 17, 752

The next morning the companions awoke and made ready to continue their journey. They bid a pleasant farewell to the Comte and his wife, who had arranged a large breakfast feast to feed the group before they left. The Comte made them promise they would contact him whenever they returned to Port-a-Lucine before wishing them a safe journey.

The group left the city and headed south for Chateaufaux. The sky was clear, but there was a cold wind at their backs. That reminded them all that winter was coming soon. But for now, wrapped in their thick clothing the day was a pleasant, quiet one allowing the group to relax and make good time on the road. During the journey Günther decided to talk quietly to Nicolae about Tatyana's fainting episode a few nights ago.

“Nicolae, I wanted to ask you about ah . . . , Ms. Tchurnova, aah Warden Tatyana.”
“Oh, what about her?” Nicolae asked with a sly grin on his face.
“Remember that day when I tried to help her from the horse. She screamed and fainted. Has anything like that ever happened before?”
“No, never. But she has always refused help in the past, not just yours. Petyr’s and mine. Every time either of us has offered, she always refused coldly.” Nicolae paused to think about it before continuing.
“I just thought that she hated us. That she was so repulsed by us that she did not want to be touched by us. In truth, I thought she was a bitch. Sorry.”
“Well maybe she does not like me either.”
“I am not so sure. Now that I think about it she did not hug or shake hands with the d’Aloures before we left. She had already mounted her horse by the time the rest of us came out to leave. And then the other night at the opera. It seemed like that Marquis guy wanted to escort her on his arm. You know have his daughter on one arm and Tatyana on the other to make a grand entrance. But she tried to keep someone between her and him as much as possible. Mostly it was Petyr since he was in all the conversations with the Marquis.”
“So she does not like anyone to touch her?” Günther wondered out loud.
“Well there was that guy back in Nartok. You meet him before we left. What was his name?”
“Tomas, I think,” Günther supplied.
“Yeah, she was sitting close to him, but I cannot remember if they touched.”
Nicolae wanted to ask Petyr but could not think of a way to bring him into the conversation without letting Tatyana know they were talking about her. So they let the topic drop for now.
That evening they reached the small hamlet of Edrigan and found a small inn for the night before continuing on in the morning.

Edrigan, October 18, 752

They had traveled through most of the morning and expected to reach Chateauxfaux by mid afternoon when they spotted a group of gendarmes in the road ahead. The gendarmes were blocking the road and a small group of travelers were clustered in front of the soldiers.

Concerned for trouble, Petyr rode up and asked one of the gendarmes what was wrong.
“Sir, by order of his Lord-Governor and the Council of Brilliance, the road has been closed. The town of Chateauxfaux has been placed under quarantine due to an outbreak of plague and all roads to and from the town are closed until the disease is contained. Sorry sir. You will have to turn back.”

The four rode a short distance away to discuss the situation.
“Should we offer our help to treat the sick?” Tatyana suggested. Günther and Nicolae looked horrified by the suggestions.

“Do you think there is anything we can really do to help these people,” Nicolae offered.
“I too feel a desire to help ease the suffering of the citizens of Chateauxfaux. However, I do not wish to put all of you at risk,” Petyr stated before continuing, “besides I promised to escort you back to Mordentshire before winter. If we stayed here, we would be stuck until the quarantine is lifted, and we have no idea how long that would be. Still if you wish to do so, I will stay with you Warden.”

Tatyana was going to reply when she noticed a group of people staring at them. They were a group of brightly dress travelers standing around a large wagon where it had been stopped by the soldiers. The travelers were a mixed group of men and women, but all were staring intently at Tatyana and her friends.

“Look there,” she said pointing. “Aren’t those Vistani? They are staring at us.”
The others turned and Günther confirmed that the other travelers were Vistani gypsies. Petyr rode forward and asked one of the men, “Is there something you want of us?”

“No, limpy,” was the blunt guttural response. Petyr was taken aback by the insult, while the man and some of the others started to laugh.

“That was uncalled for you swine²⁶. What have we done to you?”
“Gustav, stop pestering the peg-legged giorgio. He has enough problems as it is. I beg your pardon, Sir Lyonskaya, he did not mean anything by it.” The one who spoke was a small elderly lady who

²⁶ Billy’s insult was a little more colorful, but I am trying to keep this as clean as possible

sat on the wagon. After she spoke, Gustav stopped laughing and bowed his head. He turned and walked quietly away.

Petyr was even more surprised and confused than before. He did not even register that the woman had called him by name, or how the gypsies would have known about his limp since he was still on horseback. He managed only a mumbled thank you to the woman.

When he had turned his back to rejoin his companions, Tatyana saw the old woman look from Petyr back the way they had come. She then quickly made a hand gesture and turned away.

“What was that?” Tatyana asked. “Nicolae, did you see that woman? She made some sort of gesture. Do you know what it was?”

Nicolae had not seen and shook his head, but Günther answered.

“The evil eye. She made the sign against the evil eye.”

“Why would she do that? It looked like she glanced back in the direction of Port-a-Lucine, from where we came from.”

“I don’t know,” Günther replied. “Maybe it means there is something evil coming that way.”

“Maybe it means something evil is following us,” Nicolae offered. After that the companions fell silent.

“If so, we should not stay here and bring more evil on these people,” Petyr spoke up. “I say we continue our journey by going cross-country. It is mostly farmlands and plains around here. We should be able to head south for the Mordent border. Günther, can you lead us?”

“Yeah, it should not be a problem. If that is what you want.”

Eventually the others agreed and the four companions left the road heading south. They traveled the rest of the day, but the going was much slower than on the road. As the sun began to set, the group started looking for a place to stay for the night. Günther suggested simply stopping and making camp, but Tatyana disagreed and wanted to look for at least a farm house where they could find shelter in a barn or spare room. Petyr agreed with her, so they pressed on.

In the last of the sun’s light they could just make out a farmstead in the distance. When they reached it, however they were disappointed. It appeared that a fire had ravaged the house sometime in the recent past. The house was a burnt-out shell that looked dangerously unstable. They found better luck with the barn. Thought some of the roof was gone and one wall had fallen down, they could nestle in the remaining portion and be protected from the cold wind.

They felt eerie camping in the remains of a family’s home, but made the most of it. Günther soon had a roaring fire going and they prepared their evening meal. While he and Petyr settled the horses for the night, Nicolae mentioned his and Günther’s conversation about Tatyana to Petyr. Petyr promised to think about it and they would talk about it more later.

The group settled in as best they could, with the barn providing some shelter from the cold. They took turns standing watch. All was quiet during the first couple of watches until Günther’s watch in the dead of night. He began to hear a faint noise, but was not sure what it was. After a few minutes when the noise seemed to have gotten closer, he thought it sounded like one or more persons talking. Günther decided to wake up Petyr and tell him about the noise.

“The voices are back. Remember? From the night before we arrived in Port-a-Lucine,”

“Yeah, I remember. I can hear it now too. But I cannot make it out. Can you hear what they are saying?” Petyr asked.

“No, I cannot make it out,” Günther replied.

“I think we better wake the others,” Petyr suggested. The paladin went about waking the others, as Günther strained to make out what the whisperings were saying. After the others were awakened, Tatyana asked, “Can anyone make out what they are saying?”

“I think...,” Günther began, “I think I can. It’s saying, ‘I told them. I told them.’”²⁷

The eyes of Petyr, Nicolae, and Tatyana grew wide in surprise as they remembered the last place they had heard those words. Seconds later, a dark, short figure entered the fire light. It was Dunkel Kralle, though the companions could hardly recognize the dwarf from the last time they saw him.

²⁷ This scene played out perfectly. Jason, Günther’s player, was the only one who had not been apart of the game during the first session, so he did not know the story. When he made the roll, I just handed him a note with ‘I told them. I told them.’ written on it. He just read it out in a puzzled voice, but the others remembered. Eyes were wide and jaws dropped. It was great. Definitely one of the memorable moments in the campaign so far.

His skin had blackened and decomposed, so that he now had the same appearance as his undead hand that had stalked them in Darkon. His eyes glowed with a sickly yellow light, and he continued to mumble over and over again, "I told them. I told them to bury it deep!"

Dunkel paused for a second on the edge of the camp, eyes flickering over the group, then rushed forward to attack. In the ensuing battle the companions were hard-pressed. Their weapons seemed to have little to no affect on the undead Dunkel. Tatyana tried to invoke Ezra to turn away the undead monster, but she could not summon enough power to do so.

The battle looked bleak until Günther remembered Mikhail Varabaldi's silver sword which they were carrying back to his family. Günther dug the sword out of their supplies and turned it on Dunkel. The silver of the sword seemed to have a power over the creature, as it caused the monster much pain. By the time Günther landed a killing blow on the undead Dunkel, he had severely wounded most of the companions.

Petyr said they were lucky to have survived the battle and everyone thanked Günther for his quick thinking. Tatyana and Petyr healed some of the group's wounds and they rested after the battle. Nicolae suggested that they cremate Dunkel's remains this time and the others agreed.

At dawn, after a short prayer service by Tatyana, the group set alight Dunkel's pyre. After the flames died out, the group continued on their journey to Mordent.

Session 6: Wandering Hands²⁸
Idlethorp, November 2, 752

The party was cold, wet, and tired. They had been traveling for hours through a light rainfall, which threatened to progress into a bad thunder storm. Günther warned that in the current conditions the storm would bring sleet and possibly hail. So it was with some relief when they spotted a sign for the hamlet of Idlethorp ahead.

Tatyana recognized the name and this was the companions' first indication that they had reached Mordent after traveling for days across the countryside of Dementlieu. The party increased their pace.

The miserable group tramped into the small village nestled between hills along side a small pond, less than an hour before nightfall. With the storm's intensity growing, they searched for an inn. Though the town was small, it did have one tavern.

Petyr entered the tavern's common room to find it crowded. He had difficulty finding a table. A rude old woman behind the bar was no help, though a giddy bar wench did finally point the dripping wet paladin to a small table in the back. The companions rested and ordered a meal as they tried to warm themselves even though they were across the entire room from the fire.

The barmaids were busy and it took a long time before their food was ready. Petyr tried to ask the barmaid if they had any free rooms for the night. The harassed woman simply pointed across the room and said, "Talk to Terry. He's the tavern keeper." Then she rushed off to serve another table.

After eating, Petyr approached Terry and asked him about a room.

"No, got no room," was the blunt response.

"What? How about a place in the common room? Anything?"

"No. I said, we got no room. Full booked. Got nothing for ya' here." The man's tone was rude and brisk. Petyr did not take offence but returned to his group and reported his failure to get them rooms.

"Maybe it's you," Tatyana said. "Mordent folk do not like outsiders much. Let me try and ask around to see if I can find another place to stay in town."

The three men agreed to let her try, so Tatyana tried to strike up conversations with various people at other tables. All were rude to her and watched her suspiciously. None would offer her any advice. They spoke in short answers and never elaborated on anything they said. All she learned was that there was no other inn in town. She returned to the table offended by the locals' attitudes.

They sat wondering what to do next. Günther was angry at the locals and made some vague threats about violence if they would not help, but Petyr calmed him. When the bar wench returned to collect their payment, Petyr put on his best smile and explained to her their need for rooms.

"Well, people around here don't much like strangers. If we are booked up, don't think no one in town would offer you a place in their home. Uhm. You may try Punchinel's place. He is not from here originally. Maybe he will take you in."

Left with little alternative the party got directions to the Punchinel manor. Setting out into the night, the storm was increasing, with an occasional lightning flash illuminating the sky. The party hurried through the falling rain and up the hill towards Punchinel's home.

The companions arrived at a tall stone wall that surrounded the manor. The gate was easily spotted. Above the gate were carved two stone imps, which held in their mouths orbs that shown with bright, magical light.

"This Punchinel must be some kind of wizard," Petyr shouted over the storm. "Look there. Hurry Nicolae. Pull the string."

Petyr had pointed to a small sign that told visitors to ring the bell. Nicolae was too concerned with how wet he was to complain about being ordered around. He quickly dismounted and ran to the bell cord. The bell's noise could barely be heard above the storm, so Nicolae continued to pull the cord, ringing the bell non-stop. No one came to answer. Nicolae stopped ring the bell to listen for the sound of anyone coming to the gate. When he heard nothing, he continued ringing the bell.

After minutes of standing out in the rain with no answer, the disappointed travelers decided to give up. Petyr told Nicolae to stop ringing the bell and suggested they return to the village. The others had turned their horses around and Nicolae was remounting when the gate opened. A figure stood in the gateway with a cloak thrown over his head and a lantern held in one hand.

²⁸ Spoiler. This session is taken from the entry for Min'kins in the Children of the Night: The Created.

“Yes? What do you want?”

“We are looking for a place to stay for the night,” Petyr answered.

“The villagers suggested that Punchinel would take us in. Is this the Punchinel manor?” Tatyana added.

“Are you Mr. Punchinel?” Petyr asked.

“Yes, yes. I am Lian de Loranche Punchinel. Who are you?” the man in the gateway asked. Petyr introduced everyone, and politely asked if they could have shelter for the night. After a moment’s pause, Lian answered.

“Yes, alright. Come inside out of the rain.” He held the gate open for them and allowed them into the courtyard. After securing the horses in a small stable, he led the party down a flagstone pathway to the three story manor house.

The bottom floor was made of stone, while the top two floors were made of wood. A pair of gables gave the impression of a pair of eyes with raised eyebrows. The effect was slightly disturbing, viewed in the light of a lightning flash. So much so that Nicolae stopped, having second thoughts about entering the house. Günther shouted to him to ask what he was doing. When he could not think of an answer, Nicolae just shrugged and hurried to catch up with the others.

Lian, as their host asked them to call him, led the party through a small entrance hall into a cloak room. There the party hung their greatcoats and cloaks on the wall and were able to get a good view of their host.

Lian was a small man. His back was bent by the weight of time and his spine twisted raising his shoulders and bowing his head forward. He had long, wiry, graying hair that looked like an old broom. His skin was mottled and leathery. He had large eyes that were sunken into his face and small spectacles balanced on a hawkish nose. Lian’s hands were long and his thin fingers were in constant motion as he talked.

He led them from the cloak room down a large hallway to a den. A fire was already lit in the fireplace and Lian suggested they warm themselves by the fire while he went to fetch tea.

The companions huddled around the fireplace for warmth. Nicolae was nervous. Something about the house did not seem right to him and he was suspicious of their host. His eyes searched the room.

The den had wood-paneled walls that were decorated with numerous stuffed animals. After a moment, Nicolae realized that many of the animals looked bizarre. Something was not right about any of them. Animals had a third eye, or their nose removed, or had hair when they should not have. Nicolae was about to point this out to the others, when he began to have the feeling they were being watched. Before he could tell Petyr, Lian returned with the tea.

“Here you are. That should help warm you up. Here, please sit down. I will serve you.”

Each character took a seat near the fire and accepted a cup of tea. Lian then excused himself.

“I am sorry, but it has been a long time since I have had visitors. I must look to the guest rooms and see that they are prepared. Alas, I have no servants and will have to do this myself. Please enjoy the fire and the tea and I will return momentarily.”

Once their elderly host had left, Nicolae waited for the sounds of his footsteps going upstairs before he turned to Petyr.

“Petyr, we are being watched. I can feel it.”

“What are you talking about?” Günther asked. “You are probably just spooked by the stuffed heads.”

“Of course I am. Have you looked closely at those heads? Look there that wolf’s head is not right. It has only one ear and it looks like there is a third eye where its nose should be,” Nicolae said.

After looking closer at the stuffed animals, Günther began to share Nicolae’s concern. Tatyana too was unsettled by them.

“Maybe taxidermy is his hobby. Maybe that is why no one in town seemed to like him,” Petyr offered.

“It’s creepy,” Tatyana concluded.

“Hey, everyone is missing my point. I think we are being watched. It’s not the stuffed heads creeping me out. Someone else is here. I can feel it,” Nicolae said. The others were silent, but make darting glances around the room.

“Did you hear that?” Nicolae stood up as he spoke. “Did that chair move?” Nicolae said pointing to a large stuffed chair against the back wall. None of the others said they heard anything over the noise of the storm.

“I thought I heard it move,” Nicolae said and started moving towards the chair, one hand on his sword. The chair was in the far corner of the room from the fireplace, so was in shadows. From where the characters sat, no one appeared to be near the chair. Günther stood and followed Nicolae over towards the chair, also with his hand on his sword.

Nicolae reached the chair and looking around and under it but could see nothing. He motioned to Günther that he was going to move the chair and for Günther to be ready in case anything jumped out from behind it. Nicolae grabbed the heavy chair and pulled it out of the way. Günther stood ready for anything, but there was no one there.

“There is nothing,” Günther told everyone and shrugged. Some of the others that had been holding their breaths let them out relieved.

“You are getting paranoid, Nicolae,” Petyr chided him. “And it’s making the rest of us jumpy.”

“I know I heard it. And I still feel like-” Nicolae was interrupted by a bang. They all heard it and turned to the wall near the fireplace. Petyr lept to his feet at the sound, while Tatyana cautiously peered around the high back of her chair.

They all stared across the room at the source of the noise. One of the smaller stuffed animal heads had fallen off the wall. It now lay on the floor.

“Could it have fallen off the wall?” Petyr said walking over towards it. Günther followed him, but Nicolae maintained his distance.

“No way. Someone or something must have knocked it over,” Nicolae insisted from his position across the room. Petyr picked up the fallen head and examined it, while Günther was searching the surrounding area.

Suddenly there was a scurrying noise, as if a small animal was moving across the floor to Günther’s right.

“What is that?” Nicolae shouted out. Tatyana made a short squeal and pulled her legs up onto her chair. Petyr dropped the stuffed head he was examining and along with Günther rushed towards the sound. It moved away from them, towards the windows. As Petyr and Günther followed after the noise, it stopped. Because of the shadows thrown about the room by the fireplace, they could not see the animal making the noise. They thought they had it cornered and so moved towards it from different directions.

There was a small side table near the window where the animal must be hiding. Petyr told Günther that he would lift it up and for Günther to try to catch the animal. When Petyr did lift the table up, Günther could only report, “There is nothing there.”

“Where did it go?”

“You all hear it this time, right? Something was there,”

“But how could it have disappeared? Where did it go?”

Petyr was about to suggest they make a complete search of the room when the door opened. The sound made them all jump, but they quickly covered their surprise when they saw it was only Lian returning.

“Your rooms are ready. This way, if you please,” the stooped man said. The elderly man led the party down the hall and up a set of stairs to the next floor. As they climbed the stairs, Petyr asked Lian if he lived alone.

“Yes, I do. The villagers in town do not open up to outsiders. Ever since my loyal servant Eam past I have not been able to hire anyone in town to take his place.”

Günther whispered in Balok to Nicolae that whatever they had chased in the den was probably just a pet, since it was so small. That suggestion did not ease his mind.

Once at the top of the stairs, Lian led them to the end of a long hallway. He opened the door to a corner room.

“This is the lady’s room,” he said with a small wave of his hands. Tatyana surveyed the room and thanked Lian again.

“And where will the gentlemen be staying? In that room there?” Tatyana pointed to a closed door across the hallway.

“No, that is the music room. The other guest rooms are on the second floor,” Lian replied.

“Oh,” was all Tatyana said, and put a hand to her mouth.²⁹ Petyr could see the concern on Tatyana’s face and tried to think of some excuse to change the arrangements so she would not be separated from them. The only thing that came to mind was to announce that Tatyana was his wife and that they

²⁹ Actually, the response of Tatyana’s player to the sleeping arrangement was more like, “Oh, hell no.”

should sleep together. But he remembered her angry response back in Port-a-Lucine when she was mistaken for his lady. So, he did not speak up. Instead he watched wordlessly as Lian shut the door to Tatyana's room with her standing equally helplessly gazing back at them.

"This way gentlemen," Lian said and led the male members of the party back down the hallway. Tatyana opened the door to her room and stepped out into the hallway watching to see where the men went. Lian opened a door at the far end of the hall that led to the set of stairs to the second story and led the men up.

After seeing which door led upstairs Tatyana, feeling worried and alone, closed and locked her door. She took the lighted lamp that Lian had arranged in the room and searched her room extensively. She found nothing out of the ordinary except for more unusual stuffed animals. The only other door in the room led to a small empty closet.

Meanwhile, the men reached the next floor, where Lian led Petyr into the first door at the top of the stairs. The guest room was large and spacious. Lian opened a door to an adjoining room that was a small lounge. On the far side of the lounge was another guest room for Nicolae and Günther to use. Petyr thanked Lian again for his hospitality. The older gentleman wished them a good night and said he would see them in the morning.

Once left alone, Nicolae and Günther immediately began searching their room thoroughly. Petyr made a cursory review of his room. Finding nothing he prepared himself for bed. Nicolae's and Günther's search went on far longer, as they lifted beds up and moved furniture around looking for anything dangerous.

There was one other door that led out into the hallway which they locked. The two debated whether to also lock the door to the lounge that connected their room to Petyr's. In the end they decided not to. After searching for hidden exits from the room and finding none, they finally decided they were safe and settled in for the night.

Just before they went to sleep, Nicolae suggested they take turns on guard. At first Günther thought it unnecessary but eventually Nicolae convinced him. So Nicolae would watch for a couple of hours and then wake Günther for his turn.

Downstairs, Tatyana sat on her bed nervously glancing around the room at every noise. She had gotten dressed for bed, but her holy symbol of Ezra remained around her neck. One of her hands clutched hold of the symbol. Her hair was still very damp and clung to the back of her neck. She left the lamp lit on her bedside table so she could see if anyone came into the room. A boom of thunder outside made her jump.

Tatyana felt as if she was being watched. Just like the den downstairs there were a number of stuffed animals decorating the room. On the bedside table was a stuffed cat with its mouth open in a hiss. Looking closer at it, Tatyana realized the cat had an eye peering out from inside its mouth. Disgusted with it, Tatyana picked up the stuffed statue and put it in the closet. She wanted to lock the closet door but there was no lock on it.

As she was looking around for a chair to move in front of the door, she thought she heard the crash of something falling over above the noise of the storm. The sound did not come from within her room, but from outside it, perhaps in the hallway. Tatyana glanced at the door to see if any light was coming in from the hall but saw nothing.

Quickly she retrieved her lamp from the bed table and went to her door. Pressing an ear to it Tatyana listened. She heard the creak of a door being opened. It was faint but for her to have heard it over the raging storm outside it must have been close by. She waited listening for anything else but did not hear anything.

Taking a deep breath Tatyana summoned up her courage. Slowly she unlocked the door trying to be quiet and opened it a crack. She could see that the door across the hall, the one which Lian said led to a music room, was now open. She was sure it had been closed when she had last closed her door. There was no light in the hall or the music room, other than that made by her oil lamp.

Tatyana opened the door all the way and took a step out into the hallway. She held her lamp up high to shed more light into the music room. From what she could see it did appear to be a music room, with a number of musical instruments arranged around the room. From where she stood she could see a music stand that had fallen over in the middle of the floor.

The pattering of feet caused Tatyana to turn quickly. Her lamp cast strange shadows down the hallway. Something was hurrying down the hallway away from her. At first the shadows made it appear to

be huge, twice the height of a man. When Tatyana spotted the shape of the fleeing form, she could see it was smaller than half the size of a man. It walked on two feet and waved its hands above its head as it ran around the corner at the far end of the hallway.

Tatyana ran back into her room and bolted the door.

“That was not a cat!” Tatyana said breathlessly. “And it was not Lian. I am not staying here!”

She quickly picked up her mace and readied herself to go back into the hallway. Her plan was to join the men on the third story. Again she opened the door a crack and peered out. She scanned the dark hallway for any sign of the shadowy form she had seen before.

Seeing nothing Tatyana cautiously opened the door and stepped out. The door to the stairs to the next floor was at the far end of the hallway, just shy of the corner the form had run around earlier. Slowly Tatyana started down the hallway, her eyes locked on the corner looking for any sign of movement. With each step closer to the door her heart seemed to beat louder until it was pounding in her ears. She reached out a hand for the doorknob long before she was close enough to open it. Tatyana noticed her hand was trembling. Throwing caution away, she rushed the last three steps to the door, flung it open, and rushed up the stairs.

Nicolae, still on watch, heard her coming and woke up Günther. Together they armed themselves and went through the door out into the hallway.

When she reached the top of the stairs Tatyana paused, unsure which of the rooms the others were sleeping in. She called out in a loud whisper.

“Petyr.”

“Tatyana is that you?” Nicolae asked from down the hallway.

“Yes, who is that?” Tatyana asked, because she could not see Nicolae. He and Günther had no light source with them.

“It’s Günther and Nicolae,” Günther responded. “What is wrong?”

“Where is Petyr?” Tatyana asked as she rushed down the hallway towards them. They ushered her into their room and shut the door.

“He is next door,” Nicolae said. “What is wrong?”

“There is something here. We need more light,” Tatyana said. She rushed about the room and used her lamp to light a number of candles around the room.

“What is here? Did something attack you? Are you alright?” Günther asked concerned.

“I saw something in the hallway downstairs. It was no animal. It walked on two feet. I saw its arms. It had arms and feet, not four legs.”

Nicolae decided to wake Petyr and the four gathered in the small lounge between their rooms. Petyr asked Tatyana to describe what she had seen.

“I am telling you it was no animal. I saw its arms. It was not four-legged. It was about this high,” Tatyana said indicating a height about three feet. “It had two legs and arms and walked upright. No animal does.”

Günther was all for tracking down the creature, but the others were against the idea. After some discussion, they decided they would be safe locked in their rooms for the night. Tatyana could stay in the lounge between the two rooms. After searching all of the rooms carefully and locking the doors to the hallway, the party went back to sleep. Günther took over the watch from Nicolae, while the others went to sleep.

Sometime later, a loud crash of thunder brought Petyr out of his sleep. Since he was awake he thought he would make sure everything was alright. He had kept a candle lit by the bed and, lifting it, went to check on Tatyana. She was sleeping fitfully but seemed fine. Petyr crossed through the lounge to the men’s room. There he found Günther still on guard. They both said everything was fine, and Petyr returned to his room.

When he entered his bedroom, he heard a scuffling noise from somewhere within the room. He raised his candle up high trying to spread its feeble light wider across the room but could not see the source of the noise. Petyr thought the sound was hear the window and rushed in that direction. He found nothing but realized he had made a mistake. The source of the noise seemed to have fled under his bed.

Petyr drew his sword from off the chest where he had laid it and approached the bed. Going down on to one knee, he used the tip of his sword to lift the bed skirt up and peered under the bed. The small candle revealed the dusting underside of the bed. There were strange marks in the dust, like footprints but

instead they were round. There was a flutter of the bed skirt on the far side of the bed and something scampered across the room. Petyr jumped to his feet in time to see a small shape darting through the open doorway to the lounge, where Tatyana lay sleeping.

Petyr called out a warning and rushed to the door. His call brought Tatyana out of her sleep. She looked up with alarm to see Petyr standing in the doorway with a drawn sword, followed a second later by Günther bursting into the room from the other door.

“What is it? What’s wrong?” Tatyana almost screamed as she spoke. Günther echoed her.

“Something was in my room and it ran into here,” Petyr answered, excitement causing him to raise the volume of his voice. Their eyes darting around the room, but did not see anything. Nicolae joined them and asked what was going on.

“I am not sure what it was. It was small, maybe a foot tall. It look like it ran on four legs,” Petyr told them all.

“Let’s spread out and find it. It has to still be in here,” Günther suggested. The others agreed. Each with their own light source began to spread out to search the room. Nicolae was the first to notice a movement in the curtains of the window. He shouted a warning and pointed. Tatyana was closest to the window, and she ran forward and jerked back the curtains. What she saw startled her.

A small creature clung to the windowsill. It was a grotesque monkey with a small head and large eyes and ears but no mouth, child-like hands with short stubby arms and short legs with no feet. Tatyana was filled with revulsion at the horrible sight of the creature and would have lashed out with her mace had she been carrying it. Instead she threatened it with her lamp, thrusting the flame towards the creature, as the others raced across the room towards her. The creature fell from its perch and hit the floor. There it covered its eyes with its hands and rolled into a ball.

Petyr, with sword raised high, had planned on striking at the creature, but when he saw it fall to the ground almost helpless he paused for a second and then lowered his sword. When Nicolae continued moving forward with his sword drawn, Petyr stopped him too.

The four did not know what to make of the helpless creature. They debated on what to do with it. Finally Tatyana said, “Let’s take it with us and confront Lian. He must know this thing was here.”

Günther placed the thing in a sack and the party went in search of Liam. They found him on the ground floor, and Günther thrust the sack at him as they demanded an explanation.

“Ah, I am sorry that they disturbed you. They are curious that is all,” he said and gently removed the creature from the sack. The strange monkey climbed up Lian’s arm, perched on his shoulder curling its legs around his neck.

“Come I will explain,” Lian continued and motioned for them to follow him to the library. After they were settled in the library Lian told them his story.

“You see I am not from Mordent. I come from Falkovnia originally. There I was a doctor and healer. I am sure you know the history of that land. It is one of countless wars. Because of my talents as a healer I was pressed into service with the army. I saw the horrors of the battlefield time and time again. I labored to fix those who had been maimed in battle, working endless hours to try to save as many as possible before they succumbed to their wounds. Often times I was too late. No matter how many I tried there were always many more whom perished. I became even more disillusioned when I noticed patients showing up again. I had healed them, only for them to return to war, to continue the death and destruction.

Eventually it was too much. I knew that I could not resign from Lord Darkov’s service, so I made plans to escape. It was during the Executioner’s Campaign into Dementlieu that I had my chance. During the confusion of that retreat it was easy for me to disappear. I escaped here to Mordent, and gave up my practice as a healer, for I had a new dream, a new desire. That was to create life instead of seeing it destroyed.

For years I have conducted my research, here in this small Mordentish town. Finally I have succeeded. This is Tug,” Lian said indicating the small, monkey-like creature around his neck.

“There are Armon and Fetch around here somewhere,” and Lian called out to them.

Two forms shuffled into the room. Armon was nothing more than a long arm with a hand at one end and a pair of eyes at the other end. Fetch had a pair of legs that ended at the hips with short arms attached above the hips. A thick mouth formed in the hips as well as a pair of ears and eyebrows but no eyes.

“Lastly, there was Domo. He disappeared a week ago though, and I have not seen him since.”

The party was distraught at the creatures' appearances, but Lian assured them that his creations were harmless and quite helpful to him as servants. Nicolae asked what he had made them out of as they appeared to have the limbs of humans.

"Sadly, they were created from the remains of my loyal servant Eam, who passed away last year. I was unable to save him, but I have been able to return life to some of his limbs."

Lian went on to explain how useful the handymen or min'kins, as he called them, have turned out to be. Nicolae remained skeptical, and Tatyana was still horrified that the creatures were the remains of a dead person. So the rest of the party was surprised when Petyr spoke up in support of Lian. The paladin said he could detect no evil in Lian and that the group should give him a chance.

What had changed Petyr's mind so quickly was that Lian's story reminded Petyr of a dream he had had a few nights before. In the dream he had witnessed Lian's past, the war, and his escape. Once he realized that part of the story was true he was no longer ready to condemn Lian.³⁰

The party soon came to agree with Lian, except for Nicolae, who remained suspicious of the elderly wizard. Once that was settled the group returned to bed for what little remained of the night.

Idlethorp, November 3

The next morning the companions slept late because of their late night. When they were all awake, they collected their belongings and thanked Lian for his hospitality. Before continuing on for Mordentshire, they needed to re-supply in the village. So they trooped down the hill, through the mud and melting sleet from the storm the previous night.

In town, the group split up. Petyr and Nicolae went to buy supplies for their journey, while Günther and Tatyana went looking for other accommodations for the party.

Petyr and Nicolae found the people just as rude as they had been the night before. They were having trouble shopping until a one-armed man named Stubbs offered his help. Stubbs introduced himself as the village butcher who, along with his assistant Ilias, was buying supplies at the same shop as the two travelers. Stubbs helped the group out, and it soon became apparent that Stubbs had at one time been a warrior, until he lost his arm in battle.

They also over heard the storeowner make a reference to a spirit that had stolen from him again. When Petyr asked Stubbs about this, he told them the villagers believed a spirit was harassing the village, stealing things and causing mischief. Stubbs did not seem to believe the stories, but later his assistant Ilias approached the two characters. He told them the stories were true about the spirit and that the spirit worked for the Lian, who was an evil wizard.

Meanwhile, Tatyana and Günther had found a boarding house, with no help from the locals who were still rude. At first they thought they would not be able to get any rooms at the boarding house when they meet a crotchety old lady named Mirrim. She was sending them away when the owner of the boarding house came out and stopped them. The owner's name was Kriss and she was in a wheelchair.

Kriss offered the group two rooms for the night, which Tatyana paid for. They learned that Mirrim was Kriss's assistant, since the lame Kriss could not look after the boarding house by herself. They also heard stories of an imp that was being a nuisance around the village from Kriss. Tatyana and Günther left to meet with Petyr and Nicolae to discuss what they had accomplished.³¹

³⁰ This was my fault. I had some problems running this part of the adventure. I was not convincing the party that Lian was a sympathetic person. So I told Petyr's player that he had the dream before, even though we had not played it out.

³¹ Sorry for the hard break at the end of this session. It was just too late to finish the adventure that night.

Session 7: Homecoming³²
Idlethorp, November 3, 752

The four companions regrouped and discussed what they had learned. They discussed the spirit and imp stories they had heard but were unsure of what to make of them. Petyr wanted to investigate the stories when he heard that some of the villagers thought it was an imp. Tatyana did not want to stay in Idlethorp for much longer. They were so close to Mordentshire now, and she was anxious to finish the journey.

Without making a decision they returned to the boarding house and settled in. They were downstairs discussing the imp stores with Kriss when a bell began ringing an alarm. The party rushed to see what was wrong. Petyr, feeling some connection to the lame Kriss, helped her out of the house and pushed her chair so that she could see for herself.

The party noticed a crowd beginning to form outside a large house and headed in that direction. Tatyana did not want to enter the crowd. She feared rubbing up against someone and so stayed back to look after Kriss along with Nicolae, while Petyr and Günther pressed their way through the crowd. Petyr recognized Ilias facing the crowd and speaking.

“You know what we must do! He is the source of all the evil that has befallen us!”

“Ilias, what has happened?” Petyr had to shout to get the boy’s attention.

“Petyr! I told you he was evil. Now one of his evil enchantments has killed. Come inside and see for yourself.”

Ilias led Petyr and Günther into the house, and a few of the townsfolk followed. Inside they found a man with his head bashed in. The citizens who entered with the companions became indignant and started making threats.

“Who is that?” Petyr asked Ilias.

“That’s Jules. He is the town’s money lender. I heard a cry for help and so I forced opened the door and found him just like that. And I even captured the murderer! Come over this way.”

Ilias led the group to an overturned chest.

“Here is what killed Jules,” Ilias said and lifted the chest up. What they saw appeared to be a creature made from two hands joined together at the wrist with a single large eye on top. As soon as the chest was lifted, it darted away on its finger tips. Squeals and shouts went up from the citizens. Ilias threw the chest at the creature, missing, and shouted, “STOP! You’re not gettin’ away.”

At that, the creature cowered against the wall. Ilias turned back to the crowd and began shouting threats against Lian, which the crowd joined in on.

Petyr and Günther went outside to inform the others of what they had seen.

“That is one of Lian’s creations. I do not recognize it. It was not one we saw last night,” Petyr said after describing what he saw.

“One of those things is a murderer,” Günther said shocked. “It is lucky we survived the night.”

“I do not know,” Petyr said puzzled.

While they had been talking the crowd had become more dangerous. There was some shouting that the beast was Lian’s creation and that they should march up to his manor, set fire to it to flush the old man out, and hang him. The party was alarmed by this talk, but before things got out of hand, Constable Helsing arrived and calmed the crowd. After reassuring the crowd that he would seek out the truth and see that justice was administered, the constable was able to disperse the crowd, most of whom went quietly on their way. A few, including Ilias, made some vague threats against Lian as they left.

Petyr went to the constable, introduced himself, and offered his group’s help in solving the crime. Constable Helsing replied that he needed no help from outsiders and dismissed him. The companions decided they would investigate anyway and Kriss volunteered to help them. They watched from across the street as Constable Helsing made a cursory examination of Jules’s house, secured the strange creature with a length of rope, and led it away.

With the house now unattended, the group entered to see what they could uncover. After a few minutes of searching the house, Günther started laughing.

³² This session finishes off Wandering Hands and continues until they reach their destination. Unfortunately, Nicolae’s player could not make it to this session, so he was just played as a henchmen and does not have much to say.

“That Ilias is a very bad liar,” he announced when asked to explain his laughter. Then he went on to explain his reasoning.

“There is no murder weapon. Look at the head. It was smashed in with a club or something similar. How could he have caught the creature murdering Jules but it still have time to hide the murder weapon. And look-” Günther was interrupted by Tatyana.

“Yeah, and about that fact that it was a head wound. How could that small creature have attacked Jules from the back and still reached so high up?”

“Yes that is truth. You both raise some interesting points,” Petyr conceded. “What were you about to say Günther?”

“I was about to point out the chest. Why was there a convenient empty chest lying around for Ilias to use to trap the beast? No one leaves an empty chest lying around to trap monsters in.”

“So Ilias did it?” Kriss asked from her chair.

“That is the way it appears,” Petyr said. “But where did the creature come from. Surely Ilias did not create it.”

“I would like a closer look at the creature,” Tatyana said, since she did not see it up-close.

“Ok, let us go see the constable. We can tell him our suspicions and ask his permission to see the creature.”

“You know the only thing you have proven is that Ilias is a liar. You have not proved that he murdered Jules,” Kriss said. “You will need some sort of evidence to show that Ilias did it, other than that he is a liar. But why would he want to kill Jules? I don’t know. Why would anyone want to kill him? Unless they were trying to rob him.”

“Of course,” Günther said hitting himself in the forehead. “That is what was in the chest. You said that Jules is a moneylender, right? He was robbed. His money must have been in the chest, which the killer stole.”

“It is a possibility,” Petyr allowed.

“We should go search Ilias’s house for the money. He must have stashed it somewhere, because he did not look like he had it on him when we saw him,” Günther suggested.

“Certainly not,” Petyr exclaimed. “We have no right to barge into someone’s home. We have no authority in this town to do so. No. We will have to take our suspicions to the constable and let him order a search if he has the authority to do so.”

Günther just shook his head. The others agreed to go see the constable. During their search they also discovered an empty birdcage hidden behind a chair. The party had no explanation for this but remembered it for later.

The party arrived at the constable’s and asked Helspont if they could see the creature. At first he refused, but when Tatyana claimed that they had seen similar creatures before and thought they might be able to identify it, he agreed.

The creature jittered about a small cage that constable Helspont had placed it in. Petyr saw the same stitched together flesh they had seen on the min’kins at Lian’s manor. It was Tatyana that noticed the creature had many freshly healed scars across its strange body. She thought the creature had been struck repeatedly with a belt or whip.

Petyr spoke for the party and told the constable what they had discovered so far. The constable thanked them for identifying the min’kin but dismissed their offers of assistance and angrily told them not to interfere in his investigation.

Out in the street the party talked about what to do next as they walked Kriss back to her boarding house.

“Remember Lian said last night one of his creatures was missing. I am pretty sure we found his missing min’kin,” Tatyana said.

“Ilias must have had the creature. If he did there would be evidence at his house,” Günther said.

“Either the murderer or the victim may have had the min’kin,” Petyr corrected. “It is possible the creature was in Jules’s home because he had found it. Besides we are not going to break into Ilias’s home. It is not just.”

“Should we go talk to Lian? See what he has to say about all of this,” Tatyana suggested.

“I want to talk to Ilias first. He has been acting very suspicious. I want to see what he has to say,” Petyr said and was able to get the others to agree.

“First we will escort Kriss back to her place and then we can find Ilias,” Petyr stated, but Günther spoke up and offered to take Kriss back so that the others could start looking for Ilias immediately. Günther said something to Nicolae in Balok and got him to agree to come with him.

When Petyr and Tatyana head off to search for Ilias, Günther and Nicolae began walking Kris back to the boarding house. Ever since leaving Port-a-Lucine, Günther had been taking lessons in Mordentish from Tatyana. He used his limited knowledge of the language to ask Kriss for directions to Ilias’s house. Sensing what the two had in mind, Kriss offered to show them, letting them know that she approved of their idea to search Ilias’s home, even if Petyr did not.

Kriss brought Günther and Nicolae to Stubbs’s house and directed them to a shed out back, where Ilias lived. Günther checked to see that Ilias was not home and then asked Nicolae to disable the lock on the shed’s door. Nicolae was easily able to gain entrance to the shed where they found an abused cat curled in one corner. After a quick search the two discovered two sacks of gold coins hidden under the cot in the small shed. Taking the evidence Günther, Nicolae, and Kriss went in search of the other two.

Petyr and Tatyana had been wandering the streets looking for Ilias. They found no one would help them except for a young boy. The boy was named Kildear, but it turned out he was deaf. He did not know where Ilias was, but offered to help the heroes when he learned they were trying to catch the murderer of Jules. However, the boy’s sister, Cally, came running up.

“Kildear, there you are! Mom wants us home, right now! Come on!” she said and dragged the boy away.

When Günther, Nicolae, and Kriss rejoined the others, they told them what they had discovered. Petyr was angry that they had broken into Ilias’s home, but Tatyana hushed him.

“It does not matter now. We now know Ilias is the murderer. We have to tell the constable and have him arrested.”

The others agreed.

Later at the constable’s, as they were telling their story, Kildear came running into the room. In his broken speech he told them that a mob had formed and was going to Lian’s house to kill him. Up all jumped and rushed for the door.

Night was falling as the companions and constable Hespont rushed up the hill towards Lian’s manor. They arrived to find an angry mob had broken through the manor gate. Inside most had gathered around a tree where a rope was being hung from a thick branch. The diminutive Lian was being dragged towards the tree by a few members of the mob. Petyr noticed Ilias was one of the leaders of the mob.

The paladin led the way through the crowd pushing and shoving to reach the front. Tatyana tried yelling over the crowd, but the noise of the mob drowned her out. Petyr reached the three just as the noose was being placed around the struggling Lian’s neck. He pushed away the two who were restraining Lian. The mob did not like this and started forward at Petyr. His companions arrived seconds later and formed a protective circle around Lian.

The mob continued forward, as if to attack. Günther drew his weapon and Nicolae followed suit. The mob checked at the sight of the naked weapons, but only for a couple of seconds before starting forward again.

“Put your weapons away,” Petyr shouted to his companions. “We do not want to hurt anyone.”

Tatyana thought fast and made a quick plea to Ezra for her favor. Suddenly a golden light enveloped the area around the companions. The light was brilliant in the fading light of dusk, and caused the mob to pause and shield their eyes. Petyr took the momentary pause and silence that followed to step forward and address the crowd.³³

“Stop this madness! Lian is not responsible for Jules’s death! He has not harmed anyone! Constable Hespont knows what really happened! Listen to him!” Petyr motioned for the constable to step

³³ This scene generated a lot of discussion at the table. I had been purposefully pushing the players by making the mob more and more dangerous to see if they would have the characters attack. Billy, who knew I had already warned him about his paladin lying, picked up on it pretty quickly and was determined not to attack the mob. So when Tatyana cast the light spell, at first I did not think such a simple spell would stop the mob, but the players argued that it would. In the end they did convince me and I enjoyed the results.

forward and explain the evidence. Almost as one, the mob turned their attention to constable Hespont and waited for him to speak.

As the constable was telling the crowd what had been discovered, Ilias shouted him down.

“Don’t listen to them! Lian’s a filthy evil wizard! He deserves to die!” Ilias shout and rushed forward striking Lian on the head with a club. Günther tackled Ilias before he could cause any more damage. The blow looked severe, as Lian lay in a collapsed heap on the ground.

Tatyana acted quickly. She rushed to his side and prayed to Ezra to heal the injury. When she touched Lian she had a brief vision of him working in his laboratory constructing one of the min’kins. The sight threatened to horrify her but the healing power of Ezra flooded into her and drowned out the image. She let the energy flow into Lian and the deadly head wound closed up. Minutes later, Lian was back on his feet and thanking the priestess for saving him.

The crowd was impressed by the sight and some questioned Tatyana about her powers, fearing they might be wizardly in nature. She explained to them about the goddess Ezra and how she received power from her goddess. There was no chapel to Ezra in Idlethorp, but many of the townsfolk expressed interest in the goddess. Tatyana promised to notify the superiors at the Chapel of Pure Hearts, and see if a priest could be sent to the village to preach to them.

Meanwhile Constable Hespont arrested Ilias. The crowd broke up, and Lian thanked the party again for saving him. He offered them dinner to thank them formally. The characters accepted and Kriss joined them. She was curious about Lian’s min’kins and was hoping to see them for herself.

At dinner, Lian thanked the heroes repeatedly and offered them a reward. He presented them with a magical potion that would heal wounds that he had brewed and a small, finely crafted, mahogany chest worth hundreds of gold coins.

Petyr tried to decline the reward, saying there was no need for one, but did not resist too hard, as the party’s funds were gone. The last of their money had been used that afternoon to pay a fine the constable levied on Günther and Nicolae for breaking into Ilias’s cabin. So the group made arrangements to bring the chest with them to Mordentshire where they expected to sell it. After dinner they returned with Kriss to the boarding house for rest as they planned to leave for Mordentshire in the morning.³⁴

Mordentshire, November 6

The companions rode into Mordentshire on a cold morning, a lite sea mist in the air. Despite the cold there was plenty of activity around the town.

“It must be good to be back home, Tatyana,” Petyr told her.

“Mordentshire is a nice town, but it is not home.” Her answer surprised the men.

“What? I thought we were taking you to your hometown.”

“Oh no. Mordentshire is the seat of the Bastion Sarlota Otrava, the head of our sect of Ezra.

Mordent is my home, but my hometown is a small community called Waterford.”

“Where is that?” asked Günther.

“It’s to the south. About a half day or so. It is not a very big place, but it is where I grew up and where I preach the praises of Ezra,” she responded. After a moment’s pause, Petyr spoke up.

“Well then, our journey is not quite over yet. We still have another day of travel. How long will you need to stay in Mordentshire before moving on?”

“No, no. That is not necessary. You must be anxious to prepare for your journey back to Darkon. You can do that better here in Mordentshire than in Waterford. After the winter is over it would be easier for you to make arrangements from here.”

³⁴ Overall, we enjoyed this adventure. I enjoyed tormenting the PCs with the spooky house in the beginning, and the final scene really stretched the players to come up with a different solution than combat. The players found the murder mystery to be easy to solve, but I did not mind. At this early point in the campaign I want them to have a few easy victories to boost their confidence. The biggest problem I had running this adventure was playing Lian when he tried to convince the characters that the handymen were not abominations. In the end I could not do it and railroaded it as I mentioned during session 6. The only other help I would have liked to see in the adventure is some descriptions of Lian’s bizarre taxidermy. There was nothing in the printed adventure, and I had some trouble coming up with a variety of such oddities on the fly. In the end, I still recommend the adventure for low level parties.

“We are not going back,” Petyr said in a soft voice. “There is nothing for me to go back to in Darkon. Now my life is for the service of Ezra, wherever that may take me.” Everyone looked at Petyr with surprise.

“What do you mean?” Tatyana asked, but Petyr did not want to talk about it more. Instead he forced his horse faster and led the party into the town.

Tatyana and Petyr reported their arrival at the Ezra chapel. Word was sent to Sentire Allistair, Tatyana’s superior who had sent her to Darkon. An audience was arranged for her immediately. Sentire Allistair also arranged to meet with Petyr, but later that day.

When Tatyana entered her meeting, the three men went out into the town to sell the mahogany chest they had received from Lian. As they went Nicolae pulled Petyr aside to talk.³⁵

“We are not going back to Darkon?” Nicolae asked.

“No. My father has disowned me and made my brother his heir. There is nothing for me there.”

“So where are we going to live?”

“I am not sure. Wherever Ezra decides? Besides if we are going to find out about your past, we would not do that in Darkon. You were a stranger there. I promised to help you find out who you were and I will. We have a better chance of doing that outside of Darkon than inside.”

“I guess you are right,” Nicolae agreed and the two went to rejoin Günther.

Back at the Chapel of Pure Hearts, Tatyana sat across from Sentire Allistair. Sentire Allistair was a middle-aged man with dark black hair. He was stout, but because of his tall height he wore the weight well. He had a deep resonating voice that was both commanding and soothing. Those meeting him for the first time can be disconcerted by his lazy left eye, which often is looking in a different direction than his right. Tatyana, however, was use to this and did not stare.

The young priestess told the Sentire of her visit to the anchorites of the Last Redoubt, and gave her opinion that their tenets were heresy. She went on to give an account of her return journey, including the murder in Nartok of Mikhail Varabaldi, who appeared to be a follower of Ezra.³⁶ She also discussed her short stay in Port-a-Lucine, and her disapproval of the monks of Ste. Mere des Larmes lack of charity work. Finally she mentioned the village of Idlethorp and recommended an anchorite be sent to the village to establish a chapel to Ezra.

Sentire Allistair promised to see that a chapel was established in Idlethorp and said he would look into the matter of Mikhail Varabaldi. In the meantime he asked Tatyana to continue to be the custodian of the man’s possessions.

“Now, tell me about this Sir Lyonskaya,” Sentire Allistair said when she had finished her report. Tatyana made a disgusted look for a second before she covered it.

“He is one of Bastion Raines’s followers. I told you what I think of them,” Tatyana responded.

“No, no. What is he like as a person? He is a knight of the Lady, a sworn paladin of Ezra. Is he virtuous?” Sentire Allistair asked.

“I have seen him show virtue. He is honest, I believe. He is courageous in the face of the hordes of darkness. I believe he is capable of being a shining example of virtue but he is partially tainted by the tenets of Bastion Raines. He is rash and judgmental. Unforgiving of those who have fallen and not ready to offer them redemption. However, if he could be taught the true path of Ezra I believe he could walk it. Did I mention he is not returning to Darkon? ”

“No, why is that?”

“I don’t know. He only said there is nothing left for him back there. If he stays in Mordentshire, perhaps a tutor could be assigned to help show him our tenets of faith,” Tatyana suggested.

“Perhaps. Let me see what I feel after I have talked with him personally this afternoon. But let me thank you again for making this quest. You have my thanks and the thanks of Bastion Otrava. Please rest up here for a few days before returning to Waterford,” Sentire Allistair said as he escorted her to the door. Sentire Allistair knew Tatyana well enough not to offer to take her hand.

“I appreciate that. However, I would like to return home as soon as possible. I am anxious to see how the community has fared in my absence, and will probably leave for Waterford tomorrow.”

³⁵ This scene was played out before the next session when Nicolae’s player returned. I thought it fits better here.

³⁶ See session 3.

“Do not worry. Warden Owen has filled you duties well in Waterford, but I can see you are eager to return. Go with Ezra’s blessing.”

Tatyana left and Sentire Allistair shut the door. He returned to his desk. Taking out fresh parchment he began to record Tatyana’s story from beginning to end. He had an incredible memory and was able to write down everything Tatyana had said, word for word. Sentire Allistair worked steadily for hours until he was interrupted by a knock on the door. A young acolyte had come to tell him that Petyr was there for his appointment. Sentire Allistair set aside his writing and prepared to meet the paladin.

After introductions were made, Sentire Allistair asked Petyr to give his own account of their journey from Darkon. His version matched with Tatyana’s until he came to the incident of her fainting outside of Port-a-Lucine.

“Sentire Allistair, I do not mean to pry into her private affairs, but what could have caused her to react like that?” Petyr asked.

“My son, I can see that you are concerned for the girl. However, I cannot tell you the cause. Only she can do that, if she wishes. I will tell you this. It is not unusual, for her. This has happened many times before to her, but you need not worry. We all have burdens to carry for Ezra, and Tatyana is learning to carry hers. Now, tell me, what are you plans now that you have arrived in Mordentshire?”

Petyr spoke of continuing his journey to Waterford to see Tatyana safely back to her home there. From there he was unsure, what to do next. He did not mention his promise to Nicolae, because he did not want to break the man’s trust. Instead he mentioned an interest in the couriers the church uses, and wondered if the future lay with them.

Sentire Allistair seemed to approve of that. He suggested that Petyr first learn more about the tenets of their sect of Ezra before he makes a decision. He suggested that Petyr spend some time in Waterford both with Tatyana and Toret Thaddeus, who runs the congregation there. Once he had learned the full tenets of the faith and made his decision he was welcome to apply for a position as a courier.

Before leaving, Sentire Allistair gave Petyr a letter that had arrived for Günther from Port-a-Lucine. After thanking Sentire Allistair for his advice, Petyr left to find the rest of the party. Petyr gave the letter to Günther, who would let no one else read it. The letter, as the others suspected was from Louise Chatelle. It was written in poor Balok, but Günther could make out her meaning. She missed him and wished him well on his journeys. Günther kept the letter and planned to write back to Louise later.

Having sold Lian’s chest they now had replenished their funds. They made arrangements to travel on to Waterford the next day.

When the two were alone, Günther asked Petyr if he had learned anything about Tatyana’s fainting spell, as he still felt guilty for having caused it. Petyr relayed what Sentire Allistair had told him and reassured Günther that it was not his fault.

Waterford, November 7

They arrived in Waterford early the next afternoon. Tatyana led them first to the chapel of Ezra. As they rode into the courtyard of the small chapel a band of children came running out to meet them with shouts of excitement. Many of the children stopped to stare in awe at Petyr’s weapons and regal bearing. He dismounted his horse with a flourish and bowed to the gathered children.

“Now what have we here? A band of mighty heroes?” Petyr asked in a loud, exaggerated voice.

“These children are from the orphanage. The chapel runs a small orphanage here, where we look after orphans that come from all over Mordent,” Tatyana replied.³⁷

“Hello, children, it is good to see you all again. Have you been keeping up with your lessons while I was away?” Tatyana said addressing the children.

“Yes, Warden *Thurnofa*,” all the children answered in the same monotone voice, lacking any enthusiasm.

“Who are you?” a young boy tugged on his sleeve and asked Petyr.

“I am Sir Petyr Lyonskaya.”

³⁷ The idea to include the orphanage came from the players. Billy wanted his paladin to have something he could do to show his virtue other than beating monsters over the head. I don’t remember who suggested he be good with children, but when the idea came up I decided to have the anchorites run an orphanage in Waterford where they send any orphans they find from across Mordent.

“Mister *Lionsky*, are you a knight?” another younger boy asked.
“They have trouble pronouncing Darkonian names, as you can see,” Tatyana said. To which Petyr nodded, and bent down on one knee to be face to face with the boys.
“I am a knight of the Blessed Ezra, yes.”
“Wow. Can you tell us a story?”
“You should be minding your lessons,” Tatyana put in, to a chorus of groans.
“What is this lack of enthusiasm for your lessons. Why I have just the story to tell you how important your lessons are!” Petyr exclaimed and playfully hosted the youngest boy on his shoulder.
“Follow me everyone!”
Petyr led the children to a large oak tree growing in the courtyard. After everyone was seated in a circle he began to tell a tale. Meanwhile, Tatyana, followed by Nicolae and Günther went inside the chapel.

Inside, Tatyana met with Toret Thaddeus and Warden Owen, introducing them to Nicolae and Günther. She pointed out a window at the children gathered around Petyr and told the two priests who he was. They all admitted that Petyr seemed to handle the children well.

Toret Thaddeus informed Tatyana that everything had been fine in her absence, telling her not to worry. The Sentiire told them that arrangements had been made for the men to stay at the local boarding house and offered to have Warden Owen show them the way. To Tatyana, he chided her for coming to the church first, and suggested she see her parents now. So the group split up, but Toret Thaddeus invited them all to dinner that night.

Petyr finished his story for the children and promised to return the next day to tell more. Then he and the other two men went with Warden Owen to the boarding house, to settle into their rooms.

While unpacking in his room, Petyr noticed someone watching him through the door. He saw a young woman, a girl really, with white hair, and extremely pale skin.

“Hello, child. Come in. My name is Petyr. What is yours?” Petyr asked, however, the girl did not respond. Instead she backed away and fled down the stairs.

Later he asked the innkeeper about the strange girl.

“Aye, that poor lass is Blasse. She was at the orphanage for years, but the priests thought she was old enough to start working on her own. My wife was the only one in town willing to give the poor girl a chance. Everyone else believes there is something wrong with her. But we look after her, and she works around the house as a maid. She don’t talk much and is shy, so don’t be insulted by her behavior. That is just her way.”

Tatyana spent the afternoon with her family. When she arrived at the farm, her parents were overjoyed to see her again, though no one rushed into each others arms. Everyone kept a respectable distance from her as Tatyana told them about her travels and described her companions. She spent the rest of the afternoon listening to her mother describe how little the village had changed in her absence.

That night everyone gathered for dinner with Toret Thaddeus. The toret was an elderly man in his late sixties. What remained of his hair was white and had receded well past the crown of his head. He was a tall man, but mild mannered. His voice was soft.

Most of the dinner was spent in small talk. Toret Thaddeus promised to give Günther lessons in Mordentish when the toret heard he was attempting to learn the language. Tatyana mentioned that Petyr could use a tutor in the teachings of their sect of Ezra, and the toret also volunteered his services.

After dinner was finished, but while they were still seated at the table, Toret Thaddeus asked each of the travelers what their plans and goals were now. Tatyana went first, and mentioned she wanted to get back to her work for the church in Waterford. Toret Thaddeus replied that Tatyana had earned herself a vacation and could take some time off after her long journey, because Warden Owen would still serve in Waterford until the end of the year.

“I intend to stay the winter in Waterford,” Petyr said. “Hopefully during that time I can learn more about your beliefs and teachings as they reflect on our Lady Ezra. I also must admit that I am quite taken with the children. Perhaps I can offer my services in helping them. After the winter, we will see whatever Ezra has in plans for me.”

“And what about you, master Günther,” Toret Thaddeus asked in Balok. The question surprised the young man. Before he answered his gaze darted to Tatyana, and then dropped to the table.

“I too will winter in Waterford. I need to learn the language. To...ah... help me in my journeys. After that, I, ah, do not know. Maybe I will see if there is any work in Mordentshire. Or elsewhere, maybe Dementileu.”

The last part was said in a soft voice, as if he hoped no one would notice what he said. Nicolae was last to answer. He simply replied that he would stay the winter with his master. As dinner was over, Toret Thaddeus wished them all welcome and good night.

Session 8: Little Things³⁸

Waterford, November 8, 752

The next morning, Petyr received an angry summons from Sentire Allistair to come back to Mordentshire immediately. So, early that morning, Petyr and Nicolae prepared to ride back to Mordentshire. Günther volunteered to come along because he wanted to send a reply to Louise's letter. Despite a steady rain the group set out for Mordentshire.

When Petyr arrived at Sentire Allistair's office, he found the Sentire in a foul mood.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the Sentire, unrolling a package to show a gleaming silver sword.

"I am not sure. Is this a delivery from Niklaus of Neufurchtenburg? It seems a little early."

"Yes, it is from the smith Niklaus, along with a large bill to the church. What makes you think you can make such a claim against the church?"

"I am sorry, Sentire. There must be some misunderstanding. In any case, we will repay the church for any costs the smith has billed," Petyr replied.

"Ha, the bill is for 1,000 gold solars. Do you have that much?" Sentire Allistair retorted.

"1,000? How could it be so much for one sword?"

"No, the 1,000 solars also includes other items that you have purchased from the smith. Apparently they are not finished yet and will be shipped later. However the smith is asking for full payment now."

When Petyr agreed that they did not have the money to pay the bill in full, Sentire Allistair told him of the church's solution. Petyr and his companions would have to work off the debt by performing services for the church. Their first task was to act as a courier and take a message to the small Ezra chapel in the village of Crawford, about a day east of Waterford. For this task the church would give them 10 gold solars towards paying off the debt. Petyr thanked the Sentire for his patience and Sentire Allistair allowed him to take the silver sword with him.

Outside, Petyr told Nicolae and Günther the situation. Nicolae was upset that the church would only give them 10 gold pieces for the current task.

"At this rate, we will never pay off the debt!"

Petyr counted how much money they all had on hand, and decided to take half of that, 100 gold solars, and return to the church to make it part of a down payment. He also promised another 100 solars after he had a chance to return to Waterford. That done, they purchased some supplies for the trip, and Günther posted his letter to Louise. In the morning the group rode out back towards Waterford on the way towards Crawford.

Merecreek, November 9

It rained off and on the whole day. By afternoon it was getting worse. Lightning flashes could be seen in the west, and Günther warned that during the night there could be sleet and ice with the cold temperature. It was with some relief that the miserable party saw a small village ahead by mid-afternoon. Pulling their greatcoats tighter, they quickened their pace.

There were very few people on the streets of the village as the party rode in. Petyr managed to stop one man, from whom they learned the name of the village was Merecreek, before he hurried off to get out of the rain. The paladin was able to stop another man and ask him if Merecreek had a place to stay.

"Trafton's place," was the answer and the man pointed out directions. Trafton's place was a large house only a short way up the road from where they were. As they tied up their horses, Günther could see some men further down the road struggling to set up a roadblock at the edge of town.

Upon entering the house, the party was greeted by a slightly plumb, middle-aged woman. She introduced herself as Mira Trafton.

"Come in. Come in. Let's get you out of those wet things. You can hang them here on the wall. There now, come in by the fire and warm yourselves."

³⁸ Based off the adventure from Children of the Night: Demons. This session was not planned and does not have anything to do with what was going on before it. Lori, who plays Tatyana, could not make it to this session, but I did not want to continue the current plot in Waterford without her. So I sent the other characters on this side trip.

When the party was seated by the fire and sipping on hot tea, Mira asked about them.

“I am Sir Petyr Lyonskaya and this is Nicolae and Günther. We are traveling from Mordentshire on the way to Crawford. Thank you for your hospitality.”

“Say nothing of it. This is no day to be out on the road. The storm is getting worse. And besides I hear Sheriff Millner has closed the roads out of town because of the storm. But nothing to worry about. I’ll have rooms prepared for you upstairs. No other travelers have come through today, so we are all open.”

As the party warmed themselves by the fire other people came by the house. They settled into the common room while Mira served them drinks. Petyr talked with a few of them. The first old man warned Petyr that he was lucky to have arrived in Merecreek before nightfall, as goblins haunt the woodlands during thunderstorms. No one on the road during a storm is ever heard from again. Mira told the old man to, “hush his nonsense,” but the man swore it was true. Petyr shrugged it off by saying he was not afraid of goblins and explained he was a paladin.

“Then you should meet Toret Healy. He would probably be overcome and faint, ha,” the old man said and started laughing.

More people came in and joined them. Mira served them all with a smile and a welcoming manor. They discussed the coming storm mostly, wondering if it would bring snow. Most agreed that it was still too early yet for snow, but that the storm would still be bad. Listening to this talk, the companions were worried that they may be delayed in Merecreek for days by the storm.

Petyr overheard two women gossiping about the town’s mayor. Apparently his wife died recently, and he has been distraught. Recently he looked like he might be getting better, but the past two days he seemed worse than before. When Mira noticed the two women gossiping, she hushed them, telling them not to discuss people’s problems like that in public. The two women protested that they were just concerned for the mayor and were not gossiping. Petyr asked the women to pass on his condolences to the mayor.

Later, a lad who had already had much ale to drink wanted Petyr, Nicolae, and Günther to be his drinking pals. None were really in the mood. Nicolae and Günther were depressed about the coming storm. Petyr, who was normally jovial and welcomed company, felt uneasy, though he was unsure why.³⁹ But the lad, Silas, insisted they join him. After a few more drinks, Silas confided that he was lonely. He had no one to drink with because his friend Cole Dwilleg has been acting strangely. He is no longer himself, these days. He no longer has any interest in drinking with his friend, and nobody seems to know why. The party was stuck listening to the drunken Silas until he passed out.

By that time, most everyone else had left. Mira offered to show the travelers to their rooms, saying she would let Silas sleep on the floor of the common room.

Each man had his own room. All were small, but cozy. Mira provided each with a sheltered candle to light their room. She pointed out her room at the end of the hall.

“If you need anything during the night, just let me know,” Mira said and wished them good night. All of them turned in for the night.

Later Petyr was awaked in the middle of the night by a noise. The storm was still raging outside but over the noise he heard a loud rapping sound. Looking around the room he saw nothing, and debated with himself whether to light a candle. He decided not to, when he identified the sound coming from his bedroom window. He rose slowly from the bed, and cautiously approached the window. He peered out through the window struggling to see through the falling rain.

At first he saw nothing in the darkness, but then noticed a faint movement. He strained his eyes trying to make out what it was through the driving rain. Suddenly there was a rush of movement just outside the window. Petyr stumbled back from the window in surprise.

“What? What is that?” he whispered.

It was a raven, rapidly flapping its wings against the winds. It did not seem that the raven could stay aloft in the storm, much less flutter so deliberately outside his window. The raven turned its head to the side so that one of its eyes stared at Petyr. The bird held his gaze for a moment, before turning its head again to rap its beak against the window. Then suddenly, it was gone. As if the raven had vanished into air rather than flown away.

³⁹ Quist is spying on the player characters. Petyr is picking up on the devil’s presence, but he is unfamiliar with the feeling to identify it.

Petyr jumped back to the window and looked for the raven. He saw nothing but driving rain. He pressed his face up against the window to try to see where the bird went, but saw nothing.⁴⁰

The paladin believed this was no natural occurrence, but was unsure what it was. He searched his knowledge of demon lore and thought it could be a sign of fiends, but also thought it could be witchcraft or other magic. Since he was not familiar with magic, other than that used by the priests of Ezra he could not be sure.

Grabbing a sword and lighting the candle, he went to check on his two companions. Both were ok, but wondered why he woke them up in the middle of the night. Petyr did not explain, but asked if they had seen anything strange or unusual during the night. Neither had. Without explaining further, Petyr went to check on Mira. The woman answered his knock and asked what he needed.

"I am sorry, I heard a noise and was just checking that everyone was ok," Petyr told her and wished her good night.

Nicolae wanted to know what was going on, so Petyr explained what he saw.

"I don't believe it," Günther said.

"You think I would make this up?" Petyr asked.

"No, not that. I am sure you saw something. I just don't think it was a raven. The way the storm is blowing outside no bird could say aloft like that."

"What do you want to do?" Nicolae asked, and Petyr suggested they try downstairs. They found Silas downstairs still asleep but nothing else.

"Could the raven have been a messenger from your goddess?" Günther asked.

"I do not know. If so I did not get what the message was."

After discussing it some more, they could come up with no other ideas. They returned to their rooms, searched them, and tried to sleep again.

Hours later, Günther's sleep was interrupted by the sting of cold wind in his room. He opened his eyes to see that the bedroom window was opened, letting in freezing wind and rain. The rain was drenching that corner of the room nearest the window.

Suddenly his attention was drawn to the foot of his bed, by the feeling of movement. There he saw a dark, sinuous shape. It gave a low hiss and rose on a long black tendril. His eyes better adjusted to the dark now could just make out the dull scales, yellow slitted eyes and gleaming white fangs.

Günther screamed. Desperately he flung himself off the bed, dragging the sheets with him. Together they tumbled to the floor. Günther always slept with his dagger under his pillow. He drew it and began desperately stabbing the sheets trying to kill the snake before it could sink its poisonous fangs into him.

The noise he made drew Petyr and Nicolae. Nicolae entered the room first, but he had not brought any light with him, so all he saw was the struggle pile on the floor. Seconds later Petyr arrived with a candle, its weak light illuminating the room only partially.

They could see Günther struggling with his dagger stabbing furiously into the bed sheets and trying to ask him what was going on. He could only reply, "Snake!"

Petyr lit the candle in the room with his own to get more light, but they could see no snake. Günther, however, would not give up, but continued striking the bed sheets with his dagger. It took a while for Petyr and Nicolae to calm Günther down. By that time the bed sheets were slashed to tatters, but no snake was found.

After he had been calmed down, Günther was able to tell the others what happened.⁴¹ By this time there were only a couple of hours left before dawn. Nicolae thought that since he had not been visited by anything yet he would be next. Günther did not want to be alone for the rest of the night, so he decided to sleep on the floor of Nicolae's room. The rest of the night passed uneventfully.

Merecreek, November 10

⁴⁰ I was surprised that he did that after what just happened. So while he was doing it I held some dice in my hand prepared to roll them. I was trying to give him the impression that something would come rushing at the window again to create tension.

⁴¹ I cut out some dialogue here as the players tried to figure out what was going on. They were throwing out wild ideas that had no support behind them, angry druids, strange lycanthropes, even the 'lizardman' they saw in session 3.

By morning the storm had lessened to a light shower. The three heroes gathered downstairs in the common room. All three were groggy having not slept well that night. Mira came in with some warm tea and a small breakfast. As she laid it out she asked Petyr how they had slept.

“Not well,” Petyr responded, “we kept having the strangest thing-” Petyr stopped speaking because Mira had dropped the tea cup she was offering to Nicolae. Her eyes were glazed over and she began to speak in a slow monotone voice.

“What you experienced last night was merely a warning. Leave Merecreek quickly, or prepare yourself for much worse.”

Nicolae was on his feet immediately demanding to know what was going on. Petyr, with a slight quiver in his voice, translated what Mira had said. Nicolae turned angrily on Mira demanding what she meant, while Mira appeared confused.

“Oh dear. How did that happen?” she said looking at the broken tea cup on the floor. Petyr calmed Nicolae, and then helped Mira collect the broken pieces of the cup from the floor.

“Mira, do you mean what you just said?”

“What do you mean? What are you talking about?” she replied disoriented.

“You warned us to leave Merecreek,” Petyr told her.

“I did what?” Mira asked in surprise, “I would do nothing of the sort.”

“We had some strange experiences in the night. When you spoke a second ago you referred to them, saying they were only a warning.”

“Strange things in the night?” Mira mumbled staring with widely opened eyes at Petyr.

“Yes, strange animals. A raven and a snake in one of the rooms,” Petyr explained.

“I don’t know. I have never... Oh, your breakfast. Let me finish getting it ready for you,” Mira said and hurriedly fled back into the kitchen.

Nicolae started to go after her, but Petyr stopped him.

“Wait. She does not know what she said. She was not in control of her actions when she did,” Petyr said.

“Then what is going on here?” Nicolae demanded.

“Whatever it is, I believe it is something fiendish in nature. We are not going on to Crawford until we find the source.”

“Then what do we do now?” Nicolae asked.

“The priest. Last night, someone mentioned a cleric of Ezra in town. We start there. See if he knows of anything strange going on in the town.”

It was easy for the group to find the chapel with the holy symbol of Ezra prominently displayed. Inside they met the young Toret Thomas Healey. He let them into the chapel and out of the light rain, which stung uncovered skin with its bitter cold.

After introductions were made, Petyr explained what had happened to the party since it entered Merecreek. Thomas was surprised by their story.

“Nothing like that has ever happened before. People here are very devoted to her blessed, Ezra. Good church going folk.”

“Has anything unusual been happening lately. Animals acting strangely?” Petyr asked.

“No, nothing like that at all. Merecreek is a small, sleepy, little town. If anything like that had happened everyone would know about it very quickly.”

Since Petyr was acting as an interpreter for the party, Nicolae suggested he ask the priest about the mayor’s wife.

“Last night, we heard the mayor’s wife passed away. Was there anything unusual about her death?”

“No. She died of the fever. There was nothing unusual about it. We often have such problems when the weather first turns cold. I treated her myself, but unfortunately could not save her,” Toret Thomas replied.

While they were talking to Toret Thomas, a boy stopped by the chapel to tell him that the sheriff had opened the roads again now that most of the storm had past. The party decided that the sheriff was their next stop.

The rain had just about stopped when they left the chapel. They found the sheriff directing some men to dismantle the roadblock. Sheriff Millner turned out to be a straightforward man. He listened as the

characters introduced themselves and was concerned when they suggested a fiendish presence was at work in Merecreek. He claimed to have seen no evidence of it so far, and asked Petyr why he suspected such.

Before Petyr could answer, Nicolae interrupted him. Speaking in Darkonese, he suggested to Petyr that they not tell everyone about their experiences, because they do not know who to trust. Petyr chided him for being distrustful, but in the end partially listened to Nicolae. Instead of telling the entire story, he only said they had witnessed animals behaving strangely. He asked the sheriff if he had seen anything similar.

“No, can’t say that I have. What about you, Dwilleg? Seen any strange animals?” the sheriff asked a large young man working on the road block.

“No sheriff. I ain’t seen nothin’ like that,” the young man replied.

Petyr thanked the sheriff for his time and walked a short distance away with his companions. When the sheriff had asked Dwilleg a question, it had reminded Petyr that the drunkard Silas had said he was behaving strangely lately. Petyr suggested to Nicolae and Günther that they wait around until Dwilleg was off duty and try to talk to him.

A half-hour later, the sheriff dismissed Cole for the day. Petyr approached him, mentioned they had met his friend, Silas, the night before, and asked Cole if he wanted to have a drink. Cole tried to beg off the offer, pointing out that it was only the middle of the morning, but Petyr persisted and Cole gave in.

They returned to Mira’s to have a drink. They found the common room empty and their dishes still not cleared from breakfast. Petyr called out for Mira, but she did not come into the room. Nicolae thought he heard the sound of the back door close. They went into the kitchen and found it deserted. With Mira not around, it was suggested they serve themselves.

A few hours of questioning Cole proved fruitless. At first Petyr and Nicolae thought the young man was hiding something, and seemed eager to leave. When they finally asked him about it, he started talking about a woman named Katherine who he was anxious to see. They soon realized Cole was in love with Katherine, which explained his behavior. With no more delay they let him go and thanked him for his time.

After reaching that dead-end, a new tact was decided. Günther suggested searching there rooms more carefully in the sunlight. He and Petyr went upstairs to do so. Nicolae said he had another idea, but would not tell his companions. He had decided to track down Mira and spy on her movements.

Günther and Petyr founded nothing in their search of the rooms. They decided to search the grounds outside the house for any unusual signs, but found nothing. Later they returned to the house, but Mira still had not returned, so they ate some of the rations in their packs for lunch.

Nicolae was able to find Mira after searching the village for her. He found her a short distance away from the boarding house, talking to a man he did not know. He maintained his distance so they would not see him, but could not hear what they were saying even if he could understand Mordentish. Later he followed them as they left.

They went first to a house. Nicolae waited outside until they left and went to the village’s only store. Nicolae again waited outside, but could spy through a large window. Inside he saw Mira and the man talking vigorously with the shop owner. After that the two stopped by the chapel and spoke with Toret Healey, and then went to see Sheriff Millner. Once they were finished with the sheriff the two split up. Nicolae decided to follow Mira, and followed her all the way back to the boarding house.

He waited outside for a few minutes before going into the boarding house himself. Upstairs he found Petyr and Günther packing their belongings. They explained that Mira had asked them to leave. She had seemed upset by something, but would not explain. So the three men packed their belongings and collected their horses. Out in the street they debated what to do next.

“Since, it is the middle of the afternoon, I do not know if we can make it to Crawford today,” Günther said.

“I do not want to leave until we discover what is going on here,” Petyr stated.

“What did you discover after searching the rooms?” Nicolae asked. When Petyr explained they found nothing, Nicolae related what he had observed. Since they had already met the Toret they decided the chapel was their next stop. During the discussion, Günther noticed a number of the townsfolk past by, giving them strange glances.

When they arrived at the anchorite chapel, Toret Healey asked why they were carrying all their belongings. When Petyr explained about being asked to leave the boarding house, Healey expressed his regret and offered to let them stay at the chapel.

Once the characters were settled, Petyr asked Toret Healey about the visit Nicolae had witnessed from Mira and the unknown man.

“Oh, yes that. That was Mira and Mayor Pollard. They are convinced that you have brought something evil with you to Merecreek. They want you to leave the village before something drastic happens. They went around to all of the town council it seems to explain their concerns. Now I know there are evil spirits in the world, but I am not sure that you and your companions are the source.

In any case, there does appear to be a sinister force at work in the town, and I would ask your help in defeating it.”

Petyr readily agreed and explained his suspicions of a demonic presence in the town. Toret Healey had no experience in such matters and could not add anything to Petyr’s concerns. Using Petyr as a translator, Nicolae asked the priest what the other town elders believed. Toret Healey replied he did not know, as he had only talked with Mayor Pallard and Mira. Nicolae suggested that he ask the other elders what they thought. Toret Healey agreed and set out shortly there after, leaving the three travelers to try to settle in at the chapel.

Toret Healey was gone until just before nightfall. He had been to visit the other three elders. He was sorry to report that William Kinard and Leonard Mackey were convinced that the three travelers were evil or had brought something evil with them into the town. Only Sheriff Millner did not believe.

With this disappointing news, they turned in for the night. Before they did so, the three companions agreed on a watch rotation, so that someone was always on watch during the night.

Mererecreek, November 11

The next day was a day of service for the faithful of Ezra. Petyr volunteered to help Toret Healey prepare for the chapel service. However, the service was a disappointment. Only a handful of the townsfolk showed up at the service. Toret Healey was concerned, because most of the townsfolk were good followers of Ezra.

One of the men that did attend the service was Sheriff Millner. When the service was concluded, Toret Healey asked the Sheriff about the lack of attendance, and Petyr came along.

“I am afraid it’s your new ‘guests,’ Toret. Apparently many of the townsfolk are beginning to feel the same way as Kinard, Trafton and the others. Some of them reported seeing one of them sneaking around town yesterday and are very suspicious of them. Most everyone in town has heard that they were thrown out of the Trafton place and that you have taken them in. Sorry Toret, but that is what I have heard.”

The three heroes discussed this latest news. They decided to approach the village elders to see what caused their suspicions. They decided on Leonard Mackey, since he ran the general store in town and would be the easiest to find. The few villagers Petyr and his companions saw on the way to the general store always crossed the street or turned down another street when they saw the three men coming.

Their arrival at the general store was no less strange. They entered the store, but hardly had Petyr had a chance to introduce himself when Leonard reacted badly. At first he just stared at them, fear filling his eyes, with his mouth opening and closing though no sound came out.

“Sir, are you alright?” Petyr asked and took a step closer to the store keeper. Leonard threw up a hand in front of his face as if to ward off a blow.

“Nooo! Stay back!” he shouted. Petyr stopped short, and confusion washed over his face as well as his two companions’ faces.

“But we just want to talk to you. We have some questions-” Petyr was interrupted by Leonard.

“No, no. Stay away,” Leonard shouted and waved his arms in front of him. Panic seemed to overtake him at this point and he turned and fled into the back of the store. Seconds later the party heard the back door slam shut as Leonard fled out the back.

Petyr looked at his companions in surprise, but they could only stare back equally puzzled. There were a few patrons in the store and all of them were looking at the heroes in horror. They decided to return to the chapel quickly and discuss their predicament with the priest.

Back at the chapel, after they had explained what had happened to Toret Healey, Nicolae paced up and down the chapel aisle.

“Someone is trying to frame us. That is certain. But what I do not understand is, there is no crime. People are acting like we are murderers, who kill anyone we catch, but no one has died,” he said.

“There is some fiendish presence at work here,” Petyr stated.

“How do you know that? We have not seen anything that supports that?” Nicolae challenged.

“Don’t you feel it, when we go out?”

“No,” Nicolae replied.

“Feel what? What does it feel like?” Günther asked.

“It feels like after you walk into a spider’s web. The strands stuck in your hair and face. You cannot see them, and they are difficult for you to grasp with your hands, but you feel them nonetheless,” Petyr explained.⁴²

“We should just leave. Go to Crawford and deliver our message,” Nicolae stated.

“No,” Petyr said emphatically. “I cannot leave until I have uncovered the source of this demonic taint.”

“Well should we continue with the town elders?” Günther asked. “There is still the mayor and Mr. Kinard.”

“That has gotten us nowhere so far,” Nicolae pointed out.

“What else is there to do?” Günther countered. So they decided to try to visit the other two elders. Mr. Kinard’s house was closest, so they went there first. They knocked on his door but received no answer. They tried shouting for Mr. Kinard to come to the door. Their shouts did not bring him to the door, but did bring a few other townsfolk to the area. These townsfolk glared at the characters with malice, while some muttered insults. Petyr decided they should leave before the people became belligerent.

They returned to the chapel, unsure what to do next. Günther suggested they secure the chapel for the night. The others agreed, and they spent the last couple of hours before nightfall making sure all the entrances except the main door were securely locked. Toret Healey would not let them bar the main door, in case any townsfolk needed to reach the chapel.

Petyr unpacked his heavy splint mail armor to wear throughout the coming night watch. Petyr’s first watch went without problems and he turned the watch over to Nicolae. Much of Nicolae’s watch was over by the time one of the main chapel doors opened. Nicolae walked down the aisle to see who opened it as Cole Dwilleg entered the chapel.

“Cole? What are you doing here?” Nicolae asked. Cole did not respond. Instead he turned on Nicolae with a blank expression on his face and lifted his sword. The blow was solid with all of Cole’s strength behind it. The sword caught Nicolae in the forehead and sliced into his skull. Nicolae barely had time to cry out in surprise before he fell into darkness.

Petyr had been sleeping lightly all night. Nicolae’s cry brought him out of sleep and he leapt to his feet and scanned the chapel. The sight his eyes focused on was of a shadowy figure with a sword raised high standing over the body of Nicolae. As he watched, the figure struck Nicolae again.

Shouting a warning to Günther and to try to distract the attacker, Petyr hurled himself down the aisle towards the figure. The figure had raised its sword to strike again at the downed Nicolae but when Petyr shouted the figure turned his attention towards the paladin. Günther heard the shout. He grabbed his weapons and rushed to help Petyr.

A battle ensued. During the battle Petyr shouted questions at Cole, trying to find out what he was doing, but the young man did not reply. He had a glassy look in his eyes that led Petyr to conclude that Cole was not acting under his own power, but controlled by an outside force.

Petyr told Günther that they needed to capture Cole alive; however, he was worried about Nicolae and wanted to break off combat to check on the man’s wounds. Günther shouted that he could handle Cole and told Petyr to check on Nicolae. The paladin broke off battle and rushed to the fallen man. He called out to Ezra for her blessing and laid his hands on the head wound. Ezra’s blessing flowed through the paladin’s hands and blood stopped flowing from the wound.

As Petyr tended to Nicolae, Günther rushed forward to tackle Cole. Despite a sword cut on his arm he managed to wrestle the young man to the ground and disarm him. He remained on top of Cole pinning him down, while Petyr continued to tend to Nicolae.

Toret Healey came running into the chapel from his room to see what was amiss. When he saw the fallen Nicolae he added his prayers to Ezra to heal the man’s injuries. Both his and Petyr’s blessing

⁴² Petyr is feeling the effects of Quist’s reality wrinkle, which is too weak for the other characters to feel. I decided as a paladin, Petyr could feel it no matter how weak it was.

seemed to have made a difference. Nicolae's breathing slowed to a steady deep pace and both his wounds stopped bleeding. With Toret Healey looking after Nicolae, Petyr left his side to go interrogate Cole.⁴³

Günther and Petyr tied Cole to a chair, and tried to question him again. At first the young man stared blankly back at them, until he suddenly became very confused.

"What? Where am I? Why am I tied to this chair? What is going on?" Cole asked deeply puzzled.

Petyr calmly explained what he had done. Reminded of Nicolae's grievous wounds, Günther threatened the young man, but Petyr stopped him. Cole stated he had no memory of the recent events and no idea why he was in the chapel. Günther did not believe him, but Petyr did.

"He was acting like one under the magical control of another. Fiends have been known to manifest such powers, seizing control of another's body against their will. I believe that is what happened to you, Cole."

"I did not do anything. Please believe me. I mean no harm to you. Please. Summon Sheriff Millner. I know he will sort this out," Cole pleaded. When Toret Healey agreed that it was right to summon the sheriff as Cole was one of his men, Petyr relented. Leaving Toret Healey to watch over Nicolae, Petyr and Günther marched Cole to the Sheriff's house.

Sheriff Millner was shocked by the story. He now agreed with Petyr that something was plaguing the village. He suggests that they speak with the village elders, and said that both Mackey and Kinard have been acting strangely lately. Petyr mentioned their encounters with the two men the day before. They decided on Kinard since he had not answered his door when they had visited him before.

It was still hours before dawn, but nonetheless they went to Kinard's home. The sheriff's knock eventually brought Kinard to the door. When he opened it and saw Petyr and Günther with the sheriff, he gasped in surprise and tried to shut the door. Sheriff Millner stopped him and forced the door open.

"Stay away from me, please. I will do whatever you want?" Kinard shouted as he backed away from them. Sheriff Millner demanded to know what the man was talking about and why he was so afraid of the two travelers.

"It's the winged demon. It.. it came in the night and tormented me," Kinard said as he held back sobs.

"It said that the other stranger was his master. That he wanted to take over the town. He demanded my compliance as one of the elders. Look. Look what it did to me." At this Kinard lifted his sleeping garments to show his chest. His torso was covered with small claw wounds and bite marks that were only starting to heal.

"You know this cannot be true," Petyr told Sheriff Millner. "Nicolae is no demon worshipper. You know he now lies near death because of the demon's actions."

The sheriff agreed with him, but was unsure as to what to do next.

"The chapel," Petyr said. "The demon will avoid the chapel. We should bring all of the town elders to the chapel."

The others agreed to the plan. First they escorted Kinard to the chapel, and then called on Mira. After explaining everything to her she was escorted to the Chapel. Mackey was next. When they visited him, they heard a similar story to Kinard's about being tormented in the night by the little demon. After escorting him to the chapel, the group headed to the mayor's house.

Merecreek, November 12

They arrived just as dawn was just breaking. Mayor Pollard would not open the door, despite their shouts and pleas. Eventually Petyr decided they needed to break down the door for the mayor's own good. Günther used his great strength to force the door open. Once they were inside, Pollard expressed his outrage at their breaking into his home. Petyr tried to calm the mayor, but he soon noticed that the mayor's anger masked fear.

"Do not worry. I know why you are afraid. The others have told us of their experiences. We want to take you to the chapel were it cannot harm you," Petyr said trying to reassure the mayor.

The mayor's angry shouts stopped and he slumped to his knees.

⁴³ The attack by Cole was not suppose to be deadly, but that first attack was a very lucky roll, and he ended up causing the maximum damage he could which was enough to reduce Nicolae to 0HP. Cole's second attack reduced him to -5. Luckily for Nicolae, Petyr healed him before he reached -10 HP.

“Please, please, you must protect me from it...it will kill me,” Pollard pleaded.

Suddenly, a small winged creature appeared in the air behind the mayor. It had sickly yellow skin, stretched tightly over its gangly limbs, and a pair of white horns on its forehead. A wickedly barbed tail curled over its shoulder which darted out and struck Mayor Pollard in the neck.

Pollard’s cries suddenly ceased as his eyes widen in surprise. Horrific gurgling noises came from his throat as he placed his hands around his throat, and he fell to the floor. The shock and horror stunned everyone in the room. Before anyone could recover the creature disappeared.

Petyr reacted first. He drew his silver-bladed sword and threw himself in front of the door.

“It is still here. Don’t let it get away! I don’t know if your normal weapons will work so try the silver ones,” he shouted.

The creature appeared near Petyr and hurled a lamp at him while cursing him. Petyr lept past the lamp and charged the creature. A running battle raged through the house, as Petyr and Günther chased the flying demon. Often it would disappear, but they would quickly move to block the doors when it did so. Eventually the creature fled by flying through a window shattering the glass and disappearing.

They tried to pursue but the creature had become invisible again. Since it flew, the fiend left no tracks for Günther to find. Minutes later, Petyr announced that the creature had been driven off. He could no longer feel its taint over the village.

Back in the mayor’s house, Pollard lay unmoving on the floor. After examining him, Petyr said he believed the demon had poisoned the mayor. Later Sheriff Millner had Mr. Kinard confirmed this.

The other elders called a town meeting in the chapel to explain to the townsfolk what had occurred and announce the death of Mayor Pollard. The heroes were praised for their work and a small collection was made and presented to them. Petyr tried to refuse it, but the town elders insisted and Günther reminded him of their debt to the church.

Nicolae survived his wounds but spent the next three days recovering in Merecreek. Petyr rode on alone to Crawford and delivered the message. He was back in time for mayor Pollard’s funeral, where he and all those gathered had the surprise of seeing mayor Pollard revive and sit up in his coffin as Toret Healey was giving his eulogy. After the clamor died down, it was learned that the demon’s poison had only put the mayor into a death-like state and had not been fatal.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ My comments on the adventure: This was a memorable adventure, but I think that was mostly to do with the players. The adventure itself has a good beginning that really hooked the players and a decent ending, but there is very little in the middle. Almost 2 days between anything happening. In our case the adventure still worked, mostly because of Petyr’s background and his hatred of fiends. Without that I think we would have been very bored during the middle part of the adventure. If I had had more time to prepare for this session, I would have tried to come up with some additional encounters to keep the party occupied, but since I did not plan ahead on this adventure I did not have the chance. I would still recommend the adventure but would suggest the DM make some adjustments to the middle.

Session 9: The Night People⁴⁵

Waterford, November 17, 752

Petyr, Nicolae, and Günther rode into Waterford on a cold, misty morning, looking for Tatyana to tell her about their experiences in Merecreek. At the same time, Tatyana was waiting for them, also with something to tell them. She was at her parent's farm and had been watching the road for them for a couple of days. Upon seeing them emerge from the fog, she rushed out into the road calling to them.

"Thank Ezra, you are back. I need your help," she said. Petyr had been about to tell her about the demon in Merecreek, but stopped himself upon seeing Tatyana's look of concern.

"What is it? What is wrong?" he asked.

"It's the Night People. They are back this year," she responded, which confused the others. Tatyana went on to explain. Almost every year, the night people raid the farms outside of Waterford. For a week at the most they steal animals and food from farms and then disappear. They are called the night people because their raids happen at night when no one can see them. Their raids started again this year four days ago. For the first couple of nights, the raids were like they always were. However, the last two nights things have turned nastier. They killed most of the animals at one farm, only taking a few of the carcasses with them. At another farm, they broke holes in the grain silos, spilling much of it on the ground. Finally, last night, they poisoned the well at the Tchurnova farm. Many of their animals became ill and a few died before Tatyana's father figured out what was wrong.

"Something is wrong. They have never been this sinister. Will you help me stop the raids?" Tatyana asked after finishing her explanation. All three men agreed to help. However, Petyr wanted to ride into town to tell the story of the demon in Merecreek to Toret Thaddeus. He was overruled by the others when Günther suggested they first search Tchurnova farm for signs of the night people.

Günther has able to find some tracks near the well but they were confused and obscured by the farm animals. He could not tell the number of night people or which direction they went in, but he thought the tracks showed that they were short of stature.

Without finding anything else useful, and after a small lunch at the farm, the four rode into town. Their first stop was to be the chapel, but they were stopped along the way by a villager. Sarah, a middle-aged woman, held out a piece of paper to Tatyana.

"Warden Tatyana, have you seen this?"

"No what is it Sarah?" Tatyana said taking the paper.

"We don't know. It was nailed to the wall of our house this morning. Other people in the village found similar ones."

Tatyana examined the paper. It was a flyer of some kind. On its face were bright colors of surreal images. Tatyana seemed to lose herself staring at the image. She remained doing so for so long that Petyr became worried and moved his horse along side her. Careful not to touch her hand, Petyr took the flyer from her hand and glanced at it. The same glazed look came into his eyes as he stared at the flyer.

Günther and Nicolae were concerned. Nicolae rode close to Petyr, and without looking towards the flyer, shook him. Slowly as if coming out of a deep sleep, Petyr seemed to awaken to his surroundings.

"What happened? What is that?" Nicolae asked him.

"It's a flyer for a carnival. It does not say anything else."

About this time, Tatyana also came out of her trance.

"You said others have found similar flyers. Did anyone see who put them up?"

"No. People are saying they are the mark of the night people. I don't know what to do. Karl says to be brave and not worry about it, but I... Why would they want to mark us?"

Tatyana assured Sarah that they were looking into it, and the group rode on to the chapel. There they found Toret Thaddeus. Petyr related their encounter with the demon in Merecreek and Tatyana informed the toret of the latest news of the night people. Toret Thaddeus said that the report of the demon was very concerning and that it should be reported to the church superiors in Mordentshire. He was also worried by the latest actions of the night people and the flyers. He had not seen one of the flyers before, so Tatyana showed him the one Sarah had given her. The heroes watched as Toret Thaddeus seemed to fall under the same effect as Petyr and Tatyana had. After a minute of silence the toret finally stopped staring at the flyer.

"Interesting," was all he said.

⁴⁵ Based on the adventure from Carnival.

The party discussed what they should do next. Petyr wanted to ride to Mordentshire but it was too late in the day. Nicolae suggested they interview the other people who had been raided by the night people.

As they were leaving some of the children saw them and rushed out to meet Petyr. They asked him to stay and tell them a story. He promised to come back later in the afternoon if they finished their lessons first. The boys did not like this but went grudgingly back to their lessons.

The interviews did not prove very helpful. At the first farm, the family did not hear anything while their sheep were being slaughtered. They only discovered it when they came out the next morning. It was the same at the other farm.

With no leads the characters went back to the boarding house to drop off their possessions. They decided that night to stay at the Tchurnova farm and keep a watch for the night people.

As the others made plans for the night, Petyr went back to the chapel to keep his promise to the children. In the late afternoon sun, he gathered them under the same tree as before and told them stories. He chided one large boy who used a stick as a sword hitting other kids at random. He lectured the boy about responsibility and how those who are bigger have more responsibility than the smaller children.

“Mr. *Lionsky-a*, you stayin’ at the inn right? Have you seen the ghost girl?”

“Yes, son, I am staying at Mr. Bernard’s place. But it is not right for you to call Blasse that. She is just a girl like everyone, and is deserving of respect,” Petyr chided the young boy.

“I hear she is one of the night people,” a young girl said.

“Why do you say that, Trish? That is not nice,” Petyr replied.

“But that is what my friend Nicolette said. She said her dad saw the night people two years back, and they look just like the ghost girl, all white,” the little girl said defensively. Petyr pondered this and asked about Nicolette’s family so that he could question them.

Later Petyr joined the others and they rode out to the Tchurnova farm. The group decided to put Tatyana and Petyr inside the house to watch, while Nicolae and Günther would spend the night in the barn.

As the night wore on Günther started to complain to Nicolae about the other two being placed inside, saying they treated Nicolae and him as lowly servants. Nicolae saw right through him and told him he did not have to worry about Petyr hitting on Tatyana, as he was a paladin of Ezra.

Inside the house, Petyr and Tatyana sat in silence for a long time. To break the silence, Petyr decided to tell Tatyana why he would not be going back to Markle, and so told her the story of being disowned by his father. Tatyana looked at him in a different light after that. She asked him if he missed his family as well as his former fiancé. Petyr replied that he did miss many of his family members, but felt his service to Ezra was more important. Regarding his former fiancé, Svetlana Volokov, he explained that the marriage was an arranged marriage between the two families. He hardly knew her, and did not miss her.

Waterford, November 18

The night passed with no sign of the night people. However in the morning a carnival flyer was found on the front porch of the house. No one had seen who had placed it there, though a heavy mist had risen during the early morning.

That morning there was a service at the chapel. When the group rode into town through the thinning fog, Warden Owen saw them and mentioned that a carnival flyer had been found nailed to the gate to the chapel courtyard that morning, as well as other places around town. After the service the tired heroes split up and went to get some sleep.

Later in his room, Nicolae found one of the carnival flyers. As he stared at it lost in a revelry, he thought he saw in the swirling colors of the flyer images of himself and a house, something to do with his background. But he had the feeling there was something bad that had happened in the house and felt that he did not want to know what happened in his past. After coming out of the trance, Nicolae felt that there may be answers to his past in the coming carnival.⁴⁶ He was not sure he wanted to know them.

The companions regrouped in the early afternoon. Tatyana had heard from her parents that the night people had been at one of the neighboring farms that night. Petyr learned from Bernard that some

⁴⁶ I decided I wanted to use Isolde to reveal some of Nicolae’s background. That was what this image was to foreshadow, but I do not plan on doing this for sometime yet.

others reported the night people had been in the village last night. Apparently they had broken a few windows and set fire to a wood pile near a home.

First the group went to check on the reports of the night people in the village. Searching for tracks, Günther found similar tracks to the ones at the Tchurnova farm, but they were confused with no discernable path. Acting on a hunch, Günther went from the house to the nearest tree line and searched again for tracks. He found some more tracks at the tree line, but these were different from the others. The person who made them was taller than the others. He appeared to have watched for a time from the tree line then returned deeper into the woods that surrounded the village. They followed the trail for a short way before losing it in the moors.

Next Petyr wanted to look into what the children had told him the day before. They talked to a number of people in the village and learned that over the years a couple of people had caught glimpses of the night people. They were described as short, three to four feet tall, with very white skin. Some said the night people had no hair on their heads, and others that they had large pointed ears.

After learning this, the group wondered if there was a connection between Blasse and the night people. They went to the chapel to review the records of the orphanage. Petyr realized that he would not be able to report to Mordentshire, so he dictated a report to Warden Owen and had it forwarded to the Ezra chapel there.

When they were still at the chapel at nightfall, the heroes gave up their search of the records for the night and made their plans. Tatyana would stay the night at the orphanage along with Günther to watch over the children. Petyr and Nicolae would return to the boarding house. They wanted to keep an eye on Blasse and to see if the night people came into the village again.

At the boarding house, Nicolae and Petyr watched the road from the window of Petyr's room. Nicolae told Petyr of finding the flyer in his room and the feelings it had given him.

In the middle of the night, Petyr went downstairs to watch from the front room of the boarding house, while Nicolae remained upstairs.

Nicolae saw it first, a flash of white in the dark night. He rushed quickly down the stairs but by that time Petyr saw it too. Petyr rushed out into the night towards the movement. It was two houses down the street on the other side but turned the corner as Petyr came out. He saw a little figure, clearly white skinned and only about three feet tall.

He started towards it, but with his limp Nicolae was faster. Nicolae rushed quietly to the corner the creature had turned. As he peered cautiously around the corner he saw three more of the figures gathered. There was a noise and the creatures turned to their right, before quickly glancing towards Nicolae. It was clear why they turned towards him because of the loud noise Petyr made as he hurried towards him.

The creatures scattered as Nicolae led Petyr around the corner. The pair rushed after one creature that hid behind a barrel, but when they reached it they could not find any sign of it. Nicolae turned quickly and rushed after another of the creatures. As Petyr turned to follow he saw another figure to his right. It was taller than the night people, about the size of a man, though he could not be sure because the figure wore a cloak with the hood up.

"Hey, who are you," Petyr shouted. The figure did not answer but turned and ran. Petyr gave pursuit but he was not fast enough to catch the fleet-footed figure. The cloaked figure turned a corner around the last house in the village. By the time Petyr rounded the corner the figure was gone.

He returned from his failed chase to find that Nicolae had also been unable to catch his prey. Petyr told Nicolae of the cloaked figure and they returned to the house. The rest of the night past without incident.

Waterford, November 19

The party planned to meet over breakfast at the boarding house. As Petyr was going downstairs, Susa, the innkeeper's wife, pulled him aside to speak to him. With her hand shaking slightly she showed Petyr a carnival flyer, which she said she found in Blasse's room. She was very concerned. Petyr consoled her that he was looking into the flyers and the night people.

Over breakfast the group discussed the events of the night before. Their first task was to return to the chapel to finish their search of the orphanage's records for information about Blasse. Despite their exhaustion they went to the chapel and dug into the search. A few hours later they finally found what they

were looking for. The record showed that Blasse was left at the boarding house by her parents. There was no information about her parents, which the group found suspicious. Their search finished they went to get some sleep.

Warden Owen hastily awoke Tatyana some time later. He told her that he heard some of the frightened townsfolk making plans to lynch Blasse. They had decided that Blasse is one of the night people. Also word had gotten out that Susa had found a carnival flyer in her room. It has made everyone anxious and some of the desperate ones were talking about lynching the poor girl at dawn.

Tatyana rushed to the boarding house and awoke the others. After Tatyana had told them what Warden Owen had said, the heroes went to talk to Susa, Bernard, and Blasse.

"If a mob comes there will be nothing we can do," said Bernard, while his wife stood nearby nervously wringing her hands and almost on the verge of tears.

"We will be here, and we will not let anyone take her," Petyr said emphatically.

"But what can you do? If the mob comes, we cannot fight our neighbors. And there are only four of you. How could you stop them?"

"He is right," Tatyana said. "Some of the people in the mob I may know. Maybe my friends. I cannot fight against them. We have to find another way. What if we get her sanctuary in the chapel?"

So the group went to the chapel to ask Toret Thaddeus. His response was not helpful.

"I am an old man. There is only so much I can do. I cannot stop a mob of people from entering the chapel if that is their intention.

I have already had this conversation with many of them. I had tried to dissuade them from this mad path, but they will not listen to me. I am afraid there is no help I can offer the girl.

It is up to someone much younger than I. You, my girl, must help her. Go out and stop the menace of the night people. That will calm the nerves of the people."

Tatyana nodded her head in resigned agreement. Petyr spoke up in support of the idea as well, but Nicolae had another idea.

"We should leave town with her. Take her to Mordentshire or somewhere. Somewhere where the mob will not get her."

The others were skeptical of the idea at first, but Nicolae pressed on.

"At least it will give us some time. We may not be able to find the night people before dawn tomorrow. At least this way we can get more time for us to track them down."

With that argument the others agreed. They walked back to the boarding house to tell Bernard. The innkeeper seemed relieved at the solution, but they had a problem when they told Blasse. The shy girl shook her head in refusal. She would not go.

"My suitor will save me," she whispered. This took everyone by surprise. Bernard said he knew nothing about a suitor and when asked the girl would not say anything more. Frustrated in their plans, the group was disorganized for sometime. With sunset fast approaching, Günther had an idea. They had trouble tracking the night people so far, but he suggested they look for the tracks of the dark hooded figure Petyr had seen the night before.

Günther was able to find the tracks and they saw that they continued from the place where Petyr had lost the figure the night before. They followed the tracks back to the tree line. Günther concluded that the tracks were similar to the tracks he had seen the day before at the tree line. They discussed some ideas regarding this figure. Though uncertain, they felt he may be the leader of the night people, as he seemed to be watching over them.

They decided to lay a trap for the figure. Both times the figure's tracks had come to the village from the same direction. So with night falling they set themselves up in a position to watch for the figure. Günther and Nicolae hid themselves in the forest to surprise the figure. Petyr, wearing his armor, was too bulky and noisy to do so. So as not to give away the ambush he stayed out of the forest beside the nearest building. Tatyana waited with him there.

After an hour of waiting in the darkness, Nicolae started wondering how long they would wait if the figure did not come. He had just decided to go to Günther and ask him when he heard movement. Günther heard it too and prepared to strike. But when neither of them could see anything they held themselves back. Long moments past as they strained to see through the night, but could see nothing moving. When the sound did not repeat itself they relaxed.

Petyr and Tatyana waited back at the village for the sound that the ambush had been sprung. They were concerned as the second hour of the night past with no progress. Suddenly there was a shout from the forest. It was Nicolae shouting that they found the night people.

Indeed, a band of the short white figures had been going through the forest a good distance away from Nicolae and Günther. They had seen the flashes of white color stand out in the night. Now Nicolae and Günther gave chase, and their shouts brought Tatyana and Petyr running as well. What followed was a confused chase through the dark forest. The night people scattered in all directions. Nicolae witnessed a night person run right through a tree as if it were not there. Another did the same thing when Nicolae thought he had it cornered. He shouted this to Günther thinking the night people may be ghosts.

The chase had not gone far, before Petyr had fallen behind because of his limp. The others were far in front of him chasing after the night people, when he heard a voice from out of the darkness.

“You will never catch them that way.”

Petyr drew his sword and spun around looking for the speaker. He could see no one nearby.

“I mean you no harm. Please. Do not be alarmed. I am here.”

Petyr saw a part of the night move slightly near a tree and turned towards it. The voice spoke in Mordentish but with a strange accent that Petyr could not place.

“Who are you?” Petyr asked.

“I am someone who can help you.”

Petyr could see that the voice came from a figure clad in black clothing, with a black hood pulled low hiding the figure’s face in shadows.

“That is not an answer,” Petyr replied, but he sheathed his sword and held his arms open to show that he was unarmed.

“How can you help me?”

“You are trying to stop the raids, are you not? Judging by the way you are going about it you do not know what you face,” the dark figure said.

“Your foes are bakhna rakhna, mischievous fey creatures. You will not be able to chase them down.”

“What do they want?” Petyr asked

“Normally they prey on communities by stealing food. There is something different here. I have been watching them the past few nights. They seemed to be interested in the young human girl of the village with extremely white skin.”

“Blasse? Why her?” Petyr asked.

“I do not know. But perhaps with my help we can catch one and ask him,” the dark figure said.

“You have a plan to do that?” Petyr asked.

“We will need bait. Normally we could use food. Pies, sweets, that sort of thing. But here they are intent on the white girl.”

“You will not use that poor girl as bait for these creatures!” Petyr said emphatically.

“No, no. That was not what I was suggesting. We shall use a decoy. Perhaps your lady priest could pose as her.”

“Ok, but we must do it tonight. The girl, Blasse will be killed in the morning unless we can catch one of them tonight. What about the carnival flyers? How are they a part of all this?” Petyr asked.

“I do not know. I have never seen them before. It is possible they are tied to the bakhna rakhna but I have not witnessed them posting the flyers, but otherwise I do not know what they signify.

If you would take my advice, there is a clearing a short distance from here to the east. Collect your friends and meet me there when you are ready to plan the ambush,” the figure said and disappeared into the darkness.

Petyr caught up with the others and told them about the mysterious figure. After discussing it for a time, they decided to trust the figure for now. They returned to the village to look for some way to disguise Tatyana as Blasse. They took a white sheet to wrap her in, but were stumped for a time on how to disguise Tatyana’s dark black hair. Finally they decided to make a veil out of the white sheets and wrap her hair in it.⁴⁷ Thus prepared they ventured into the forest to find the clearing.

⁴⁷ The players never thought of the suggested solution in the adventure, and instead came up with this half-hearted attempt. I must have been feeling generous that night to have let this work.

They arrived at the clearing but found it empty.

“Where is your friend?” Günther asked Petyr.

“Dim your lanterns, please. You will give us away to the bakhna rakhna,” a voice said out of the darkness. The others turned about trying to find the voice, but Petyr told them not to worry. All but one of the lanterns were extinguished. The last one was turned low to provide only the barest of light.

The dark figure came to the edge of the clearing and surveyed the group. After examining the disguised Tatyana he gave a short snort, as if to say, ‘is that the best you could do?’

“We shall see if we can tempt the bakhna rakhna here. Her skin is pale yes, but not as pale as the young girl. We shall see what happens,” the figure said and then gave orders. He asked Tatyana to sit in the center of the clearing in the light of the lantern. He had the three men positioned on one side of the clearing while he would be on the other.

“The bakhna rakhna are timid. They will come to the edge of the clearing to investigate the woman, but will quickly flee. Do not worry they will return. Do not act until I do, once they have entered the clearing.”

“Excuse me, sir. What should we call you?” Tatyana asked.

“Call me ...,” the figure paused and then gestured towards the darkness, “Night.”

Petyr could see Night better now in the dim light of the lantern than he could before. Night was slight of figure. His face was still hidden mostly in the shadows of his hood. What little Petyr could see of his face showed skin and hair colored almost as dark as the shadows.

Tatyana explained to Night that she had a prayer that could conjure a bright light. In the past she had used it to startle people and she wondered if it would work on the night people. Night told her it would be a good idea to use it once the bakhna rakhna had entered the clearing and that they did not like bright lights and may be stunned by the spell.

The group waited by the clearing for hours. The one lantern still alight was left in the clearing to shed a small amount of illumination on Tatyana to draw the attention of the night people. Finally after many hours of waiting, small figures appeared on the far side of the clearing. They remained in the shadows for a while before one darted into the clearing. It only took a couple of steps before turning around and rushing back into the forest. They could all see that it was one of the night people. They heard the bakhna rakhnas run off into the forest and silence. However, a half hour later, the short creatures returned.

There seemed to be a dozen of the creatures. Most stayed at the edge of the clearing, but three of the creatures entered the clearing and approached Tatyana warily. Before they came close enough to see through her disguise, Tatyana called her prayer to Ezra. The clearing was bathed in bright light. Two of the creatures fell to the ground convulsing in a strange fit. The others fled. The men rushed after them but could not catch any. Instead of pursuing the fleeing bakhna rakhnas, they returned to the clearing and subdued the two creatures that had not fled.

After the light Tatyana had conjured was extinguished the two bakhna rakhnas came out of their fit. Night also joined the heroes in the clearing.

“Why are you attacking the village?” Petyr asked.

“Frees our queen, yes,” the creature responded.

“Your queen? Blasse?” Tatyana asked, but the creature looked at her puzzled.

“Who is your queen?” she asked rephrasing her question.

“Queen imprisoned by the humans, oh yes. Forces her to work for them. She’s been slave to them, but, but we wish to see her freed, yes, yes.”

“When was your queen taken from you?” Petyr asked. After puzzling over the question the bakhna rakhna finally replied.

“Don’t know. How long humans made slave of queen. We not have queen before. But we see her, slave of da’ humans. We want to free her so that she can be our queen.”

The heroes tried to explain that Blasse was human but the creature just started an argument with them saying she was not.

Waterford, November 20

Günther was the first to notice the time. It was approaching dawn.

“We are getting nowhere with this thing and it is getting near dawn,” he said voicing his frustration.

“Go. Return to your village. Protect the girl. I will see what else I can pry from this one,” Night said. Petyr nodded his agreement followed by the others. The four raced back through the woods towards the village but they were slowed by Petyr’s limp. As the sun began to lighten the sky in the east, he became worried that they would not make it and he ordered the others to go on without him. So the three others sped on their way and reached the village just in time to see a large mob arrive at the boarding house.

“Here we go again. How are we going to stop them this time? They are already at the boarding house,” Nicolae asked. Just then they saw Bernard and his wife come out of the boarding house with Blasse. Some of the mob members seized her.

“Follow me!” Günther yelled and charged forward. Nicolae and Tatyana followed in his wake. The mob was focused towards Blasse, yelling insults at her, so they did not notice the heroes approach.

Günther struck into the back of the mob, using his strength to push members of the mob out of his way. Nicolae followed close behind, while Tatyana stopped before entering the mob and cast a prayer spell. Her spell caused one of the villagers to flee, reducing the mob by one member but there were dozens more.

Günther had made it halfway through the press of the mob before members of the mob realized he was coming and turned to stop him. The big man’s great strength helped him fight through the attackers, but Nicolae was quickly overcome and dragged down by members of the mob.

Tatyana tried to use her prayer to conjure light to distract the mob as she had done before, but this time it did not work. The mob had seen her magic before and recognized it. All her spell did was bring their attention towards her, and a half-dozen of the mob moved against her. She tried to fend them off with her mace, but she was not willing to hurt anyone with it.

The mob was starting to overwhelm her when Petyr arrived. He threw off a couple of her attackers and was going to protect her more but Tatyana called to him to help Blasse instead. The young girl had been dragged to a large tree by members of the mob not fighting the heroes and a rope was being tightened around her neck. Others had finally succeeded in stopping Günther, forcing the big man to the ground by piling the weight of their bodies on top of him.

Petyr rushed to Blasse’s aid. Some of the mob tried to stop him, but he beat them off using his sword, still in its sheath, as a club. When it looked like Petyr had a free path to Blasse, some of the ruffians holding Günther down went to stop him. With more numbers they were successful in stopping the paladin and they almost had him pinned. As this was happening the rope around Blasse’s neck was thrown over a tree branch and four of the mob members held the other end preparing to run her up.

With fewer men on him Günther managed to break free and rushed forward. He was only a few feet from Blasse when the rope went taut and the girl was lifted into the air, her feet kicking wildly. At the same moment Günther was struck from behind by a club and was knocked to the ground. He struggled to maintain his consciousness, as he reached up trying to support the choking Blasse.

Suddenly a blade spun out of nowhere and cut neatly through the rope. Blasse collapsed to the ground on top of Günther. The mob stopped and as one everyone turned to the east. A trio of strangers was walking forward, the rising sun at their backs.

As they came closer their appearances could be seen better. Two of the strangers were men. Both juggled a number of knives in the air as they came forward. Their faces were painted white like skulls.

The lead figure was a woman. She was stunningly beautiful. Her pale white skin with long black hair and intense eyes, made Tatyana think she was an incarnate of Ezra. Dressed completely in a dark shirt and pants, she held a glowing sword in one hand, and had a look of rage in her gaze.

Everyone seemed held mesmerized by the sight of these three strangers. When the strange woman reached Blasse she held out a hand to the girl, and said, “This is no longer your home. Come. I can give you a new one.”

The frightened Blasse seemed hesitant but she took the woman’s offered hand. The woman turned as Günther came to his feet. He seemed about to protest when the woman looked into his eyes. Her hard gaze softened slightly. She nodded her head to the tree where the knife that had cut Blasse down was imbedded in the trunk.

“For your bravery,” was all she said. As she walked a way, she paused a second and nodded her head in appreciation to Petyr. Then she led Blasse and the strange knife-jugglers away towards the rising sun.

Most everyone was amazed by the turn of events thought some members of the mob had begun to sneak off. The four heroes regrouped and checked their wounds. None were serious. Günther walked over to the tree and stared at the dagger. It was imbedded all the way to the hilt.

“She said it was for me,” Günther mumbled.

“I do not see how you are going to get it out,” Nicolae said. Günther grasped the dagger in one big hand and prepared to heave it out. To his surprise the dagger slipped easily out as if the tree offered it no resistance.⁴⁸

“We should go after them,” Tatyana said. By this time the heroes were alone in the street, the mob having disappeared. Tatyana was unsure what had happened, and still thought it may have been a vision of the goddess Ezra. The group discussed this possibility.

As if in answer to their questions the wind blew a carnival flyer that landed at their feet. That spurred them into motion and they went in search of Blasse and the strange woman. They found no sign of them. Just down the road, Günther found many fresh wagon tracks but they saw no sign of anyone.

Later they went back to the forest clearing, but they found no sign of Night or of the two captured bakhna rakhnas. The exhausted group returned to town and got some rest.

Later that night, Petyr returned to the clearing by himself. There as he thought Night was waiting for him. Petyr told him what happened in the village. Night seemed interested by the woman and asked for a detailed description of her appearance.

“Do you know who she was?” Petyr asked.

“No, though I hear many things. They may be true or they may not.”

“Why did you help us?” Petyr asked. Night hung his head and was silent for a time before answering.

“Because I hate the fey. They have taken everything that I once loved. Now I have dedicated my life against them, to prevent their preying on mortals. I have studied much about them and know their tactics and powers. It was just chance that I stumbled upon the path of the bakhna rakhnas and followed them to your village. You do not have to worry about them. They will not harm your village. The rest of them have fled, at least for now.”

“You have my thanks for your help,” Petyr said, and Night just nodded.

“What about you? Where are you going now?” Petyr asked him.

“I don’t know for sure, but I will be around to keep an eye on the village and you.”

⁴⁸ The characters get their first magical weapon.

Session 10: New Beginning and Rebirth⁴⁹

Richemulot on the road to Ste. Ronges, December 18, 752

They could not remain in Waterford. After the incident with Blasse, there was a lot of hurt feelings in the village. Almost everyone was uncomfortable whenever the heroes were around, and the villagers just wanted to forget the whole thing. After two weeks, Toret Thaddeus sent word to Mordentshire asking if there was any project Tatyana could work on in Mordentshire for a few months while everything got back to normal in Waterford. Word came back from Sentire Allistar with orders to take the possessions of Mikhail Varabaldi back to his relations in Borca. That would keep them out of Waterford for the winter and allow them to return the dead man's possessions to his family.

Günther also received another letter from Louise. She wrote about her continued charity work, and how she wished she could travel the world like Günther did. Almost in passing she made mention of a new acquaintance, a Monsieur Francois de Penible⁵⁰. He was an author and philosopher who was interested in helping the poor. Günther wrote her back and made arrangements for any of her letters to be forwarded to the Cathedral in Levkarest.

The four heroes had made their preparations for the journey and set out east. They had passed quickly through Merecreek and Crawford before crossing the border into Richemulot. The first heavy snow falls had begun in Mordent, but the winter weather in Richemulot was milder with only a light snowfall covering the ground. Günther assured them that Richemulot winters are milder than on the coast so they should be able to complete their journey without worrying about bad weather.

They had a short fight with some bandits that had attacked. No one was seriously injured and the bandits were driven off quickly.

The land they were riding through was sparsely populated with only the occasional farm. Tatyana rode in a foul mood.

'Run out of town. Its not enough that I have few friends. Now even they do not want we around. And it is all Petyr's fault. If he had not come...' the priestess thought to herself.

Hours later she had come to a different conclusion.

'No, it is not really Petyr's fault. He was doing Ezra's will. Protecting Blasse was the right thing to do. If Petyr and the others had not been there who knows what would have happened. Would the mysterious dark lady have shown up to save Blasse? I do not know. Our current fate is not Petyr's fault. It is due to the weakness of other men that we were sent from Waterford.'

Tatyana was lost in her thoughts, so she did not notice what the men had already noticed.

"It looks like you are wrong Günther," Petyr was saying. "There is a storm building and it looks bad."

"I'm sorry," Günther apologized. "The winter storms usually come later in Richemulot. But this one looks bad. We have a few hours yet, but we will need to find a place to shelter. There is a small hamlet we should reach before evening. I think we will make it there before the storm hits."

"I leave it in your hands, Günther," Petyr said, so Günther motioned for them to pick up their pace.

By early afternoon, a light snow had started to fall. They still had a few hours to travel to reach the hamlet and the snow was slowing them down. It was with a little relief when they spotted a farmhouse beside the road. After a short debate, they decided to ask for shelter at the farm house. If no one was home they would continue on.

Nicolae's knock did not bring anyone at first. Just as he was about to knock again the door was pulled open quickly and a harried looking young man stood in the doorway.

"Is there a doctor among you? Can any of you help my wife?" the young man asked, his voice rising slightly with panic.

Tatyana stepped forward and asked what was wrong.

"My wife. She has gone into labor. A midwife was sent for, but she is not here yet," the young man replied.

"I can help her," Tatyana said.

⁴⁹ From the adventure Rebirth in The Forgotten Children netbook.

⁵⁰ From Children of the Night: Demons

“Thank you. Please come in,” the young man said and made to take her by the arm. Tatyana drew back before the man could touch her arm. To cover the awkward situation, Tatyana asked the man if she and her companions could have shelter at the man’s house during the storm.

“Of course. Yes, yes, yes. Please come in. My name is Alistair. There should be room in the barn for your horses. But please madam will you come see to my wife?”

Alistair led the group into the house’s small living room. He asked the men to make themselves at home and brought Tatyana into a back room. Günther brought the horses to the barn and made them comfortable while Nicolae and Petyr sat by the fire. With little else to do the two started talking about their encounter with the dark figure who called himself, “Night.”

“So, who do you think Night is?” Nicolae asked.

“I do not know. He said he hunted the fey, but other than that I know nothing about him.”

“His skin was black, and his hair. Black as coal. Where is he from?”

Later when Günther returned from securing the horses, he told them that people from Valachan had dark skin coloring.

“But they are not as dark as his was. Whatever he was, I do not think he was Valachani,” Günther said.

“You said whatever he is. Not whoever,” Petyr pointed out.

“Well it was hard to even tell if he was a man or a woman, let alone whether he was even human,” Günther responded.

“He sounded male from his voice. But you could be right about him not being human. How could we tell?” Nicolae said.

“Of course he is human,” Petyr said. “He acted to help us and the rest of the *humans* of Waterford. Didn’t he?”

Nicolae was not so sure that Petyr’s argument was sound but he choose to drop the argument. As they had been talking they could occasionally hear a cry of pain from the other room.

In the other room, Tatyana tried to minister to the young woman, Annita. The birth was longer than any she had ever witnessed before. Annita was in a lot of pain and Tatyana tried to minister to her as best as she could. The storm increased outside, with the howling of the wind outside matching the yells of pain from Annita. After hours of effort, there was still no sign of the child. Tatyana tried to ponder this, but she was too busy tending to Annita to give it much thought.

Later, Annita’s face contorted in concentration and a wail erupted from her lips as a torrent of fluid flowed from her. Tatyana could sense relief in Annita’s voice even as her yell began to ebb. Alistair moved hopefully towards the end of the bed. But there was no child still.

Exhausted, Annita fell into a deep slumber. Alistair and Tatyana stared at each other dumbfounded. Alistair gripped Tatyana by the arm and pulled her across the room to talk to her. Tatyana tried to break his grip but could not. Fortunately she had no vision.

“I do not know what has just happened, but I suggest we tell my wife that the child was stillborn. We must protect her from knowing what just happened. In her weakened state the shock may kill her.” As Alistair spoke, Tatyana could tell his dismay. Tatyana agreed after a moment of contemplation. Alistair also asked that she not tell her companions, as he did not want Annita to overhear them talking. Tatyana reluctantly agreed to this as well. That settled the two of them went about cleaning up.

Outside the birthing room, the three men had heard Annita’s cries finally cease and waited expectantly. Tatyana was the first one to leave the room, closing the door behind her. When she reported that the baby had been stillborn, the spirit of all fell. Petyr noticed Tatyana hesitate as she spoke and thought there was something Tatyana was not telling.

“What about the mother? How is she?” the paladin asked.

“She should be fine. It was a difficult birth, and she is very weak. She is resting now, but should recover fully. She...” Tatyana seemed about to add more but paused.

“And? What? Is there something wrong?” Petyr prodded.

Before Tatyana could answer, the door to the birthing room opened and Alistair came out, a bundle of soiled bed sheets in his hands. Instead of answering Petyr, Tatyana went to Alistair and offered to help him with the blankets. The two left the room to dispose of his bundle.

When the two returned, Alistair spoke to the group.

“The storm outside is getting worst. You are welcome to stay the night. I would offer you some dinner, but ... I feel I need to spend this time looking after my wife. Please help yourselves to anything

you find in the pantry. If there is anything you need please knock on the bedroom door otherwise I ask you to respect our privacy in this time of grief.” He spoke in a monotonous voice, with little show of emotion. And with that Alistair retired to the bed room.

Left alone, the four companions looked at each other as if to ask, What now? Tatyana answered the unspoken question.

“Let’s prepare dinner,” she offered and led the way into the kitchen. Searching the pantry she discovered enough ingredients to make a stew. She asked if Günther could start a fire as she began to chop the vegetables. Nicolae volunteered to help Günther collect some firewood.

The two went out the backdoor and found the firewood pile at the back of the house. They were in the lee of the house and protected from the full force of the storm. As Günther was collected the firewood from the pile, Nicolae called out.

“What is that over there? There do you see that grey form. What is it?” They both saw a grey form moving in the distance. It looked like a large animal, but they could not make out what it was through the storm. The form was soon lost in the falling snow. They gathered their arm load of firewood and quickly returned to the house.

They reported what they had seen outside but because they could not describe what the animal was, most of the companions were unconcerned. Only Nicolae seemed to be alarmed enough to return to the main room of the house to retrieve his sword and strap it around his waist. The rest tried to help Tatyana prepare the stew, though Petyr proved to be hopelessly inept in the kitchen.

Petyr left Tatyana and Günther to finish the meal, while he and Nicolae toured around the house. They checked to make sure all doors and windows were closed securely. They found a newly painted painting on an easel in the front room and wondered who if Alistair or his wife was the artist.

“It must be the wife,” Nicolae said. “This Alistair seems too emotionless to be an artist. Did you see how he seemed so cold and impersonal after what happened to the baby?”

“It is probably just his way of grieving. Remember how frantic with worry he was when we meet him. You could tell then he deeply cares for his wife and the baby,” Petyr replied.

The only other room in the house was a small nursery. After seeing what the room was the two left quickly, feeling uncomfortable. The two returned to the front room where they set up places for everyone to sleep.

The stew took a long time to prepare and there was little to do while the group waited. Tatyana and Nicolae both dozed off, while Günther spent most of the time staring out of the window trying to see the grey shape he had seen before. After a couple of hours he had seen more than one of the shapes and began to suspect that they were wolves, but it was difficult for him to be certain.

Alistair came out of the bedroom surprising Petyr. Petyr started to ask if there was something wrong with his wife, but Alistair waved him off.

“I need to speak with the lady...” he began and walked towards Tatyana. He reached out a hand to wake her, but Petyr called out to stop him.

“No, wait. Don’t touch her. It’s ah... She wouldn’t ah... Just call to her to wake her up.” Alistair looked puzzled at this, but their conversation had awaken Tatyana in any even.

“What is it, Alistair?”

“Please, I want to show you- I need your advice about – Annita. Please come with me.”

Tatyana agreed and followed Alistair into the bedroom. There she found Annita seated in the corner of the room, next to a small side table with a single flickering candle. As Tatyana drew nearer, she could see that Annita’s arms were positioned strangely across her chest.

“Annita, you have been through an ordeal, you should not be out of bed yet. You need more rest-” Tatyana broke off as she realized Annita held her arms as if she were cradling a child. Upon hearing Tatyana, Annita lifted her head and smiled largely.

“Isn’t he beautiful?” she asked. Tatyana could not answer, because her eyes were drawn from Annita’s joyous face to a dark red stain appearing on her white blouse and spreading down.

“You’re - you’re hurt,” Tatyana stammered.

“Oh that. It’s nothing. Just a scratch from Barton as I was feeding him.”

“Barton? Whose Barton? You are hurt badly?”

“Barton is our son. Isn’t he beautiful?” As Annita spoke she held out her arms towards Tatyana as if she held a baby in them.

“But, but. Annita I am sorry but your son did not survive the birth,” Tatyana tried to explain with a glance at Alistair. “There is no baby there.”

“How dare you!” Annita screamed.

Outside, Petyr could hear raised voices and the crash of something thrown against the wall. Shortly there after, Tatyana was ushered from the bedroom by Alistair, who only muttered, “I don’t know. I don’t know,” before closing the door.

“What is wrong?” Petyr asked concerned.

“The woman, Annita! She is mad with grief, I guess. She thinks her baby lived and is trying to care for a make-believe baby. She became very angry when I tried to explain.”

“Poor woman.”

“Yes but there was something else. She was-” Tatyana stopped short. “What is that sound?”

The sound was the noise made by a child’s rattle.

“Do you think that was her playing with the child?” Tatyana asked.

“No, it came from in here. This room not next door. I am sure of it,” Nicolae said. He had been awakened by the noisy argument and joined them.

“What could have made it?” Petyr asked.

“I don’t know?” Tatyana replied.

“Let’s look around the room. See if we can find what made the sound,” Nicolae suggested. A quick search of the room found nothing unusual, until Petyr called out.

“Hey look there on the painting. It’s been smeared.” It was true. A streak of blue paint was now smeared across the bottom of the painting.

“That was not there before, was it Nicolae?”

“No,” Nicolae said and bent forward for a closer look. “It looks like it was made by a bare hand, not a brush or anything. A pretty small hand too. It could easily fit inside of my palm.” The three stared at each other with the same questioning look.

The sound of a loud clang followed by a shout of pain brought them back to the situation at hand. The shout sent them running to the kitchen from where it came. Inside they found Günther standing over the pot of stew that had fallen from its place by the fire and spilt across the floor of the kitchen.

“Ouch, that it hot!” Günther said through clenched teeth as he rubbed his leg where the stew had splashed on it. Günther went outside to rub snow onto the burn. Tatyana went with him to tend to the wound and asked Nicolae and Petyr to clean up the mess. Afterwards the four regrouped in the kitchen to discuss what was going on.

As Petyr told Günther what had happened in the other room, Tatyana was struggling with her promise not to tell what really happened during the birth. Their discussion was interrupted by a shout from Annita.

“Burton, Burton, come back inside!” she screamed as she rushed from the bedroom and flung the front door open. Wearing only her nightclothes, Annita rushed out into the storm.

“Come on! After her. The wolves remember!” Günther said grapping his heavy cloak and rushing outside. The others followed quickly with Alistair close behind.

Through the heavy snowfall, they could barely see Annita struggling through the snow banks towards the back of the house. Tatyana reached her first. She stopped Annita and was trying to tell her she should not be out in the weather scantily dress. Petyr called out a warning. A short distance away was one of the grey shapes. They could see clearly now that it was a wolf.

Günther moved quickly, and, though he had nothing more than his hunting knife, he moved himself between the wolf and the women. Nicolae turned back to the house to get his weapons, while Petyr struggling with his limp and the snow tried to join Günther.

Upon seeing the wolf, Annita screamed, “Nooo! We have to get Barton!” and broke away from Tatyana. As she did, Tatyana thought she heard Annita said, “Not again. I won’t let it happen again.” But the others did not hear it from the storm.

The wolf watched Günther and Petyr but did not make any move to attack. It paced a few steps away but kept its gaze on them. Tatyana was able to catch up with Annita again, this time with Alistair. Together they subdued the hysterical woman and began to carry her back to the house.

The wolf started when Nicolae came running up, brandishing his bow and arrows. It backed into the falling snow and ran off. But that did not relieve the companions. They could make out other grey shapes, at least three more, moving slowly just beyond their vision.

Petyr joined Tatyana and Alistair to hurry them into the house. Together they were able to get the hysterical woman back into the house. Once there Annita collapsed into Alistair’s arms in sobs. Her husband returned her to their bedroom without a word of thanks to the four heroes.

After all four were back in the house, Tatyana told them what she thought she heard Annita shout. "Do you think they have had a baby before? That is what it sounded like to me." Nicolae suggested they take another look at the nursery to see if there were signs that it was used for a previous child.

At first glance, the room looked normal, with nothing to indicate that the family had a child previously. But during their search, Günther found a small handprint of blue paint on the side of the cradle, reminding the group of the smeared painting. Nicolae found some of the clothes that appeared to have grass stains on them.

"I think that is it," Petyr said. "They must have had a child a few years ago, and the child died. Having their second child be still birthed, must have driven Annita crazy. She cannot accept that another of her children has died."

"I wonder how the other child died," Tatyana said in a soft voice.

"But what about that?" Nicolae said, pointing at the fresh handprint. "That is a baby's handprint. Where did that come from? What about the rattle we heard earlier? Something else is going on here."

"What should we do?" Petyr asked. "Maybe we can find out more by talking to Alistair? I doubt we can learn much from Annita in her current state," Petyr said answering his own question. Nicolae and Günther agreed and the three men left. But Tatyana stayed back.

She had hardly hear their discussion. She was starting at the clothing Nicolae had left on the cradle. Tatyana felt sorry for Annita, as she tried to image what it would feel like to loose a child, maybe two. But that just made her more depressed. She doubted with her affliction that she would ever experience having a baby of her own. That got her thinking about her affliction and she started to wonder what would happen if she touched the child's clothes. Would she see a vision of the child? Could she see if it was true without having to interrogate Alistair? As she pondered this, she unconsciously removed the gloves from her hands.

Seeing her hands bare, she made her decision quickly, reaching out and grapping the clothes with both hands. Immediately a confusion jumble of images flashed before her eyes. She saw images of Annita, others of Alistair, a small boy in others, and a lone wolf. But the images flashed by too fast to understand. Tatyana began to shake as the images flashed before her eyes.

Almost overwhelmed, Tatyana cried out and threw the clothes down. The images stopped instantly. Tatyana clutched a hand to her breast as she tried to catch her breath. Before she could something struck her in the forehead. She staggered back more surprised than injured.

She looked down looking for what had hit her. Lying at her feet was a small wooden block, a child's toy. Looking up quickly, Tatyana saw a small pile of the blocks across the room. Her breath caught as she watched another block flung across the room at her by some unseen force.

Tatyana called out for help as that block was quickly followed by another. She shielded her head with her hands and tried to get to the door. The others arrived to see the last two blocks thrown across the room at Tatyana before it stopped. After that there was the distinct sound of a rattle in the room before everything went silent.

"What happened?" Petyr was the first to ask. Tatyana explained as best she could the bizarre series of events. Once she had told them, she finished by saying it was time they spoke with Alistair.

They found the farmer, just as he was leaving his bedroom.

"She is finally calm," he said. "I am sorry for all the trouble."

Tatyana confronted Alistair with what they had found and what they suspected. As she spoke, the stoic Alistair finally broke down and began crying. After being comforted, Alistair was able to tell them what had happened. He admitted that they had a son a year before. Burton was his name. Last winter, when Burton was only three months old he was attacked by a wolf cub. Annita had been with him and been distracted only for a moment, when the wolf struck. After they had buried Burton, Annita did not handle it well, descending into a deep depression. She only came out of the depression when she became pregnant again.

Tatyana made Alistair tell the others also what had happen during the birth earlier that day. Alistair was unsure what all of this meant and what to do next. The heroes decided it was best to talk to Annita next, as she claimed to see Burton again. They wanted to discover if the ghost of Burton had returned to haunt the house and Annita was the only one to have clamed to see the child. That proved a poor idea.

Annita reacted badly, jumping to her feet and yelling at them. She claimed they knew nothing of what they were talking about. Annita said she had had no child before only Burton now. She was still

arguing with the companions she when Nicolae heard the sound of the rattle again. He was the only one to hear it because everyone was shouting so loudly. He looked around the room for the source of the noise. He did not see the source, but he did notice that a candle had fallen over on the bedside table and started a small fire.

Nicolae shouted a warning and rushed to put out the fire before it spread. The others stopped their argument and rushed to help. Quickly the fire was put out.

During the commotion, Annita had fled the bedroom for the nursery. After the fire was out, Nicolae told everyone he had heard the rattle again, just before the candle fell over. Günther wondered out loud how they could fight a ghost. Tatyana offered that they only needed to put the ghost to rest, not defeat it.

With that in mind, Nicolae focused on the rattle. He asked Alistair if Burton had had a favorite rattle and stated he believed the baby had come back because it needed the rattle to rest peacefully. Alistair replied that Burton had a favorite rattle, but that it had been buried with him. That threw Nicolae, but he pressed on.

“I think we need to get that rattle. It is some key to the ghost I am sure.” The others had nothing else to suggest and agreed. Alistair gave his permission dully and described where Burton’s grave was.

Outside, the storm had lessened in intensity. Günther and Petyr used shovels given to them by Alistair to clear the snow piled on the site and began digging through the earth. They had not gone far down, when a shriek stopped them.

“Stop!” Annita screamed from the doorway of the house. She ran forward screaming for them to stop, while she brandished a large butcher knife.

Tatyana and Alistair backed away from the screaming woman. Nicolae raised his bow and pointed an arrow at her, thinking he could scare her. Petyr misinterpreted Nicolae’s action and rushed towards him to knock the bow from his hands. Günther moved towards Annita to subdue her. She managed to cut him on the arm before he wrestled the knife away from her.

Günther gave the struggling woman to her husband to hold, so Tatyana could tend to the cut on his arm. But Alistair could not control his wife. Annita broke free and went for the knife again. It took Günther and Alistair working together to subdue Annita again. This time, Alistair and Nicolae both took hold of Annita and walked her back to the house. Annita continued to struggle in their grasp and shout for them to stop what they were doing.

After Tatyana treated Günther’s injury, she went into the house to see if she could help calm Annita. Meanwhile, Günther and Petyr continued to dig. Occasionally they noticed the grey shapes of wolves pacing nearby. The presents of the wolves worried the two men, and whenever one was spotted one of the men would stop digging and keep an eye on the wolf. The wolves did not attack but were never gone for long either.

Finally, they reached the buried coffin, and raised it to the surface. After prying off the lid they stared solemnly at the remains of Burton.

“He’s so young. What a waste of life,” Petyr whispered and said a pray to Ezra for Burton’s rest. Carefully, Günther searched the coffin for the rattle, but he did not find it. After Petyr looked as well they determined it was not in the coffin and decided to ask Alistair if he was sure the rattle had been buried with the boy.

First they moved the coffin into the barn behind the house and then went inside. Alistair, Nicolae, and Tatyana were in the front room. They had tried to calm Annita down, but she would not listen to them. In the end, they decided to tie her down to the bed and left her there until they could decide what to do.

Petyr asked Alistair if he was certain the rattle was in Burton’s coffin. Alistair replied that he knew it was because he had put it there himself. In response, Günther revealed that the rattle was not found in the coffin.

“Could the ghost have taken it?” Nicolae wondered out loud.

“I do not know. It is possible,” Petyr said. “In any case it is suspicious. I am beginning to believe the rattle does play some large roll here.”

Petyr then asked Alistair if he wanted them to return his son to rest. Alistair replied that he did want to see his son rest in peace.

Before they could decide on their next course of action, Annita threw open the bedroom door. Somehow she had escaped from her bonds. She was ranting and raving for the travelers to leave her and Burton alone. Again they subdued the woman, returned her to the bedroom, and tied her down. This time

they decided to have someone stay with her to try to calm her. A worried Alistair and Tatyana both volunteered. Meanwhile the others decided to search the house for the rattle.

The three men searched the rest of the house including the attic but could not find the rattle. They had one disturbing incident in the front room. An arrow rose out of Günther's quiver and hung, quivering in the air all by itself and pointed at Nicolae. But the arrow did nothing more and Günther batted it down.

While the others searched, Annita had finally quieted. Tatyana had the suggestion that she and Alistair search the bedroom for the rattle. They had not found much until Tatyana went to Annita's bedside table. As she did, Annita began shouting again, telling Tatyana to stay away from her things. Tatyana assured Annita that she meant no harm and proceeded to search the bedside table. Annita's screams became more frantic and demanding, but Tatyana did not give up and found what she was looking for. In the back of the draw she found the rattle.

Tatyana called the men together and a discussion began as to what to do with the rattle. As they were discussing it, the rattle sounded and suddenly began leaping about the room. It took some time for the companions to capture the rattle again. Nicolae thought the rattle should be destroyed but the others formed a consensus that they should rebury the rattle with Burton.

The burial was quick. Tatyana said a short burial service for Burton, while her three companions, Alistair and Annita looked on. Annita had to be restrained by Alistair for she was hysterical. The snow storm had finally stopped, but night had fallen. They heard the sounds of the wolves prowling not far away, but were not attacked.

After the grave was filled in, they could see Barton for the first time. The baby-ghost was clinging to Annita, wailing in pain. His form began to blur as something unseen appeared to be dragging him away from his mother. Barton struggled desperately to hold on but could not. As he was pulled away it appeared as if something was actually being torn away from Annita. Then the image faded away. Annita gave a short cry and fainted.

The companions determined that Annita was alright and helped Alistair carry her into the house. After ensuring she was in a deep sleep the rest of them turned in for some much needed rest.

Richemulot on the road to Ste. Ronges, December 19,

The next morning, Annita's condition had not changed. After examining her Tatyana concluded that she was in a deep healing sleep. The heroes decided to stay the day at the Deforet house to make sure the ghost of Barton was truly at rest and that Annita would recover.

Richemulot on the road to Ste. Ronges, December 20,

Annita had still not recovered by morning. However friends and neighbors began to arrive, and the road to Ste. Ronges seemed to have been reopened after the storm. The four travelers decided it was time to move on.

Session 11: The Lady

Western Borca, December 27, 752

Tatyana awoke with a start from the nightmare. The terror she felt from the dream was compounded by her unfamiliar surroundings and at first she had no idea where she was. Heart racing, her eyes darted around the darkened room and finally rested on the familiar forms of her three companions sleeping on the floor, Günther snoring loudly. Their presence reassured her and slowly she remembered where she was.

‘I am in the Wallenheim cottage, in rural Borca,’ she thought to her self.

“It was only a dream,” she whispered, but the setting of her dream and her current local seemed to match somehow. The nightmare had been a confusion of terror and blood. Screams of pain mixed with animalistic growls. She had seemed to be trapped under floorboards while some horrible tragedy occurred above her, until her vision was cut off by torrents of blood leaking through the floorboards. The more she thought about the dream the more it reminded her of the vision she had seen months ago when Günther had mistakenly touched her hand.⁵¹

‘It must be because we are in his family’s cabin. That must have jogged some memory of that scene from months ago. I wonder what it means,’ she thought and decided to discuss it with Petyr privately.

They were spending the night in the cabin where Günther had grown up. It was his aunt’s cabin; however, Leticia Wallenheim was not there. She had left earlier that day to investigate tracks that Tatyana and her companions had discovered two days before.

Leticia Wallenheim was an unusual woman, unlike any Tatyana had met before. She was strong, and though she was not nearly as big as her bear-like nephew, she looked like she could compete with Petyr in any strength competition. She dressed simply in brown traveler’s shirt and pants, wore a sword on her belt, and was a deadly shot with a bow.

Günther had told them that Leticia was hired as a warden for many of the Borca nobility that owned lands in the area. In western Borca, most of the nobles were absentee landowners, who rarely left the cities to venture into the rural lands. They hired people such as Leticia to oversee their lands.

She had been concerned when Günther reported the tracks they had found two days before. The four companions had been traveling through the vast House of Sages forest, when they stumbled upon the tracks of a large group of men. Günther had been able to determine that the tracks were less than a day old and the band of men had been headed south, but he was unsure as to who would have made the trail. Typically there were few large groups of travelers braving the House of Sages.

When she was told of the trail, Leticia explained that she had heard rumors of bands of Falkovnian soldiers attempting to sneak south through the House of Sages. She had yet to find proof of these rumors, but Günther’s report was the clearest indication yet that the rumors were true. After allowing Günther, Tatyana, and their companions to stay at her cabin as long as they needed, she gathered supplies and set out to find the trail and follow it to the end to see if she could find definitive proof that Falkovnian soldiers were crossing Borca land.

In the cabin, Tatyana realized she would not be getting much more sleep. Seeing the sky beginning to brighten through the window, she knew dawn was coming soon. So she decided to get up and prepare a breakfast for her companions. They had planned to leave this morning to continue their journey towards Levkarest, and a good breakfast would be welcome.

Günther adjusted the shoulder straps on his pack as he glanced back once more at cabin.

‘I should have gone with her,’ the big man thought of his aunt. Tracking down Falkovnian soldiers could be dangerous. She could use any help she could get. But his aunt was stubborn as always and refused to let him join her.

“You cannot come with me. Look, you have another responsibility. Those people hired you to take them to Levkarest. You cannot just abandon them here to chase rumors with me,” Leticia had told him.

“But it is not just rumors. I found the tracks. They were there, and it looked like a large party of soldiers too. You could be in danger if they see you,” Günther had pleaded.

⁵¹ See session 4.

“Ha,” she had laughed. “See me. I am the one who taught you everything you know about wilderness lore. And you think coming with me would make it easier to stay out of sight. Ha, the Falkovnians would probably hear you coming from a mile away. No, no. You go on. Take the Mordentites to Levkarest. I’ll be fine on my own.”

The rebuke had hurt Günther. She still treated him like a child, and did not see him for the capable man he had become.

With a sigh, Günther turned away from the cabin.

“Let’s get going,” he said to Petyr and the others. He took the reigns of one of the horses and led it away from the cabin. As he led the group through the forest, their footfalls crunching through the light layer of snow, Günther continued to fume over the rebuke.

‘It was because of me that we even found signs of the Falkovnians. Wasn’t it my idea to cross the Borcan border in the House of Sages to avoid the border post and their “toll collectors?” Yes, I had to explain to Petyr how corrupt the border patrol guards were, and how there would have been more toll collectors every few miles if we had stuck to the roads. Their meager funds would have been exhausted before they were halfway to Levkarest if they had stayed on the road and paid every one of the tolls. But thanks to me we avoided all of that. Yeah, I saved us a lot of money.’ That thought comforted Günther as he continued the march through the House of Sages.

It was early afternoon when Petyr found Tatyana walking beside him.

“Petyr, I need to ask you about something,” she asked.

“Yes, what is it?”

“You have dreams. Strange dreams. Prophetic dreams. I remember you telling me about them before, how you dreamed of that dwarf Dunkel. And other times.”

“Yes. I do have such dreams. Bastion Raines told me the dreams were a blessing from Ezra, and showed that I was one of her chosen. I still believe that. I typically dream about someone I have meet or will meet. Sometimes I will get a glimpse of the future and sometimes I see a person’s past. Though I have no way to tell which.”

‘And which was it back in Mortigny,’ Petyr thought. The week before, they had stopped in Mortigny for the night. During their stay, Petyr had one of his unusual dreams.⁵²

He was having dinner in a café. The scene appeared to be in Richemulot; perhaps even in the city they were currently staying in, Mortigny. It was an elegant, pleasant café, and everything seemed fine, until a man rushed into the café and started berating a young couple who were dinning.

The man was shouting that the young man at the table was only a gigolo, that he cared nothing for the woman other than to fulfill his own pleasure. The young man, whose name apparently was Gaston, remained calm and composed, but his female companion appeared to be shocked by the outburst. The ranting man finished by saying Gaston only took and took from people and then discarded them when he tired of them.

Gaston calmed addressed the man as Alfons and told him he was probably right about him, but he was just like everyone else. Alfons’s problem was that he had nothing his female companion wanted.

At this, Alfons exploded and slapped Gaston across the face and challenged him to a duel. Gaston, seething with anger accepted but warned Alfons that he was making a terrible mistake. Neither man would back down, and so the duel was set for the next morning.

The dream changed to the scene the next morning, where a large crowd had gathered to watch the duel. The two combatants swung rapiers back and forth testing their balance, while the young woman looked on clutching her hands anxiously.

The duel began and the two men traded blows. Gaston seemed to be the better swordsman, thought both men received slight wounds that only enraged them more. Soon the two men were grappling with each other, punching and kicking, their rapiers having been knocked from their hands. Gaston rose first and dove for the nearest rapier, but before he could bring it to bear, Alfons had recovered the other rapier.

Again they went at each other, trading blows. Only Petyr noticed a strange look of panic begin to form in Alfons’s eyes. After the third time Gaston cut Alfons with the rapier, he suddenly dropped to the

⁵² This dream is foreshadowing the appearance of Simone Couture from the Children of the Night: the Created. I also make changes to her story to reflect the lack of firearms in my campaign.

ground crying out. The wound had not looked severe, but Alfons cried out in anguish. Gaston was at first put off by this display but soon overcame his shock and moved forward to finish Alfons. Before he could, Alfons held out a hand to stop him, saying, "We're dead. We're dead. Now, we are both dead."

Alfons went on to explain that he had poisoned his rapier before the duel began. He knew that Gaston was a better swordsman and that Alfons would be no match for him. The poison was very strong, and even the slight wounds Alfons had given him would prove deadly. However, during the fight they had mixed up the blades and Gaston now wielded the poison blade. Alfons too had enough poison in him to be fatal.

A short time later both men fell to the ground, coughing uncontrollable, as their bodies began twitching. Soon both were dead and the female suitor fainted at the sight.

The dream faded after that, and Petyr was confused by it as he did not recognize anyone in the dream. However the next day while out in the city he had seen the café where the dream began. He rushed inside and asked the owner if a scene had taken place similar to his dream. But the owner had said no. Nothing like that had ever happened in his café. Petyr was still sure that his dream meant something, but he still did not know what it was.

"So, yes. To answer your question. I do have unusual dreams," Petyr concluded.

"Do you ever have disturbing dreams?" Tatyana asked him.

"Well, yes often times Ezra's visions are of disturbing acts. Why do you ask?"

Tatyana stopped walking. She glanced ahead at Nicolae and Günther. Even though they had been speaking in Mordentish, which neither of the other two spoke fluently, she began to whisper.

"It is just last night I had a bad dream."

Petyr raised his eyebrows as if to say, "So?"

"Well the dream was bad. It disturbed me a lot, but that was not all. It reminded me of something else," Tatyana said and fell silent. Seeing that Nicolae and Günther were getting far ahead, she motioned for Petyr to continue walking.

"Do you remember that night we camped in Dementlieu back in October, before we reached Port-a-Lucine? When Günther uh ...uh...when I uh...,"

"When you had your fainting spell?" Petyr offered.

"Yes, when I fainted. That is it," Tatyana said, sounding relieved. Slowly, Tatyana explained to Petyr why she fainted, about her affliction and what triggers it, and described the vision she saw when Günther touched her and how it was similar to her dream. Petyr listened quietly and patiently as she explained, though he knew part of this already.⁵³

"Do you think it is some sign that Günther is dangerous?" Tatyana wondered.

"I do not know. Maybe it is something to do with his past. Maybe you saw something he saw when he was younger. If he grew up out here in the wilderness he probably witnessed a few animal attacks."

"Maybe you are right," Tatyana said brightening. "Perhaps he has some hidden traumatic memory from his childhood. I could help him overcome it. Yes, I think this could be our lady's doing. A blessing."

"Thank you, Petyr. I really appreciate talking with you. You have helped me see the possibilities Ezra has offered to me. I am grateful," Tatyana told him and smiled.

Petyr was both shocked and pleased. He had rarely seen Tatyana smile and this was the first time she had ever smiled at him. Petyr felt a pleasing glow at the center of his being, but he could only managed to mumble, "You're welcome."

Levkarest, December 30, 752

It was four days later that they approached the gates of Levkarest in the middle of the afternoon. There were lines of people both entering and leaving the city. The sky to the east was dark and many forecasted a blizzard was on its way though not immanent.

When the four companions finally reached the gate house Günther stepped forward to pay the toll for them all.

"How much?" Günther asked.

⁵³ See session 7.

“Who are you? Where are you from?” the guard asked him.

“I am called Günther, from out west, where I serve as a guide to travelers.”

“These the people ya’re guiding?” the guard asked pointed to Petyr and the others.

“Yes, those three are with me.”

“Two nightshades each, or three gold if you only have foreign coin,” the guard stated and held out a hand. Günther paid the toll with money Petyr handed to him and the guard waved them through.

Petyr felt an odd tinge as they started through the gate. Before he could dwell on he what was distracted, one of the guards stepped forward saying, “Hey these guys are loaded. Let’s take all of their stuff.”

The guard followed up this bizarrely brazen comment by drawing his sword and stepping towards Petyr. The other seven gate guards appeared to be just as surprised as Petyr and his companions to the guard’s statement. One of the other guards asked, “Stepka, what are you doing?”

But Stepka did not answer, only took a swing at Petyr. The attack was slow and clumsy, and Petyr was able to back out of the way.

“What the hell are you doing?” Petyr shouted at the man while struggling to draw his sword. He had not understood what the guards said because he did not speak Balok. When he met Stepka’s gaze Petyr knew the man would not answer him. The man had a glazed over look that Petyr had seen once before.⁵⁴

“He is not in control of his body. He does not know what he is doing. Do not hurt him,” Petyr shouted as he blocked another blow. The fight did not escalate far, as Nicolae was able to tackle Stepka and Günther rushed over to help hold the man down.

“It’s the fiend! He is back,” Petyr shouted, but already the glazed-over look was leaving the man’s face and the strange tinge Petyr felt was already fading.

“What are you doing? Let go of me?” Stepka began to shout. His fellow guardsmen moved forward to help him with hands on their sword hilts. Petyr sheathed his sword and tried to explain that the man had been possessed by a demon, but the guards did not understand him speaking in Mordentish.

Günther headed off any confrontation by apologizing and agreeing to pay the fine for assaulting a guardsman. The guards accepted the payment and allowed them to enter the city, though they stared malevolently after the group.

It was late afternoon. Nicolae stood at the end of a narrow street, staring at a house two door down. They had not search out the home of the Varabaldi family until now, because Petyr and Tatyana insisted on attending the weekly service to Ezra at the great cathedral.

“Are you sure this is the right place?” Petyr asked from behind him.

“Yeah, these are the directions he gave us,” Nicolae replied.

The house they were looking at was a large three story mansion that was ringed by a stone fence. There was little room between the fence and the house, giving the appearance that the house towered over the street. Despite the size, the house was a far cry from the opulent homes that decorated Levkarest’s public areas. All of the shutters were closed tightly, and at least one of the windows was broken. The roof sagged and was missing shingles. The color of the stone bricks had faded to a dreary gray, except on the near side where moss had spread throughout the mortar.

“Well if this is it, let’s find out. We need to return Mikhail Varabaldi’s possessions to his family, and we better get this done quickly and find an inn before the storm comes,” Tatyana said.

There was a bell above the gate to announce arrivals, but the draw string had broken off. Günther knocked on the gate. Minutes pass with no one coming, Günther banged louder on the gate, but still no one came to answer.

“It does not look like anyone has lived here in years,” Petyr said.

“It’s not that bad,” Nicolae contradicted him. “It looks to me like a noble family has lost their future and no longer has the money to keep up their mansion, but it is far from a derelict.”

“In any case, no one is home. Let’s find a place to stay for the night and come back tomorrow,” Petyr said.

Levkarest, December 31, 752

⁵⁴ This was Quist’s first attempt at revenge on the party. He fled the area soon after, but did not go far.

Dawn the next morning brought the blizzard that had threatened all night. Cold winds and heavy snowfall smothered the city of Levkarest.

"I guess that means we won't be going back to the Varabaldi place today," Nicolae said as he and Petyr stared out the window at the storm.

"No, I think you are right. This storm looks to last a while. You better go tell Tatyana and Günther," Petyr ordered. Grumbling under his breath, Nicolae went as ordered.

He found Tatyana and Günther sitting at a table in the inn's common room. They had been huddled together, whispering in soft tones, but stopped as Nicolae approached them. Nicolae told them the storm would keep them inside all day.

"Oh," was all Tatyana said. Günther simply shrugged, and then they all fell into an uncomfortable silence. Nicolae sensed that they wished him to leave so they could continue their conversation, but he deliberately stayed put and stared blankly back at them.

"Well, I ah ... think I'll go ask Petyr if he thinks we can make it to the cathedral. It would be interesting to see the archives," Tatyana said to break the silence. After she left, Nicolae sat down next to Günther.

"So, what were you two talking about?" Nicolae asked in a sly voice.

"Nothing," Günther said, blushing. Nicolae tried to press him, but the young man would say nothing more.

The day, New Year's Eve, past slowly as the four were trapped in the inn, along with the other travelers. The blizzard ruined many of the celebrations planned throughout the city and was roundly cursed by the aristocracy for the cancellation of all of the balls planned that night. The blizzard lasted all that day and through the night, only letting up the next morning.

Levkarest, January 1, 753

Knock, knock, knock. Petyr rapped on the gate to the Varabaldi estate. They had been knocking for ten minutes to no response.

"Alright, give it up. No one is home," Nicolae said, exasperated.

"Ok, but what should we do now? We did not come all this way to give up now," Petyr said.

"Maybe we should break in to see if something has happened to the family," Nicolae suggested.

"No!" Petyr said, offended. "We are not breaking into the house."

"What about setting a watch on the house?" suggested Günther.

Günther was the only one excited about this idea, so he volunteered to stay out in the cold and watch the house while the others trekked back to their inn.

Petyr and Tatyana were seated in the common room of the inn still trying to think of what to do next. Petyr was just suggested contacting the church hierarchy to see if they knew the Varabaldis when Günther rushed into the room.

"I saw someone. I saw a man go into the house," Günther said excitedly. "He was a tall man, maybe about fifty years old. He was all bundled up for the cold so I could not see him very clearly. He was carrying a bag under his arm as if he had just been out shopping. He went to the gate and opened it with a key. The same with the front door.

I thought that if he had left the house before we got there this morning I would be able to see his tracks in the snow. So I looked for them, and sure enough, they were there. I just did not see them earlier. I waited to see if he would come out again or stay in the house, but he never did. He is still there now."

Günther told the story in an excited rush. When he finished the four raced across town, but they were only disappointed again. There was no answer to their knock.

Levkarest, January 2, 753

"Good morning. Please have a sit."

"Thank you. It is kind of you to see us, Toret Lorenz," Tatyana said taking a seat. Because the toret spoke in Mordentish, Tatyana did not need Nicolae or Günther to translate for her as she had anticipated.

It had taken a couple of days to arrange this meeting. They had spent many hours talking with various priests and clerks at the great cathedral. Much of the time it had seemed as if they were running in

circles. Their frustration grew when Petyr had his pocket picked by a street urchin. He had tried to chase the thief down, but the thief escaped. Finally they had secured this meeting with Toret Lorenz.

Toret Lorenz was a middle-aged man with rich voice. He was immaculately groomed, perfect hair, spotless vestments, and hands that look as if they have never touched dirt. As he spoke his manner was controlled and at ease.

“We are always honored by visitors from Mordent here at the home faith. What is it that brings you here today?” Toret Lorenz said, and leaned forward and steepled his hands on his desk. He listened attentively to Tatyana’s story, nodding along to her narrative. When Tatyana finished, the toret spread his hands expansively.

“I see why you would be frustrated after all of that. However, I think I have a solution. The Varabaldi family have been great supporters of the church for many years. However the family matriarch, the widow Lucrezia Varabaldi is a very private person. She will only accept visitors that have an introduction from someone she knows well. So, I am not surprised that no one answered when you tried to go to the house.

This is what I propose. Toret Charlotta is very close to the widow Varabaldi. I will see if she can make arrangements for you to meet the widow Varabaldi in a few days’ time. Will that suffice?”

After the past days of frustration, Tatyana was overjoyed by the toret’s offer and enthusiastically accepted.

Levkarest, January 4, 753

The door opened with a long creak, evidence of the lack of upkeep done on the Varabaldi home. A very thin middle-aged man stood in the doorway, dressed as a butler. He was very tall, but stood hunched forward. Standing straight, he would have been a head taller than even Günther, but hunched over he almost looked Tatyana in the eye. Speaking in a faint voice, he spoke in Balok to the party, confirming who they were and then asked them to follow him to the mistress’s parlor.

Stepping into the entry hall, Tatyana’s eyes were drawn to the marble statue of Ezra that gazed down upon her. The statue had been placed on a small ledge on the opposite wall above the hallway. Only two candles lit the room leaving much of it in shadows. But the candlelight reflected brightly off the polished white marble of the statue, making it stand out vividly from the rest of the dark hall. The sight touched Tatyana’s faith.

The statue was not the last image of lady Ezra Tatyana saw throughout the house. As the butler lead them down a hallway to their meeting, Tatyana noticed silver icons bearing the image of Ezra hanging from the walls. Each was an exceptional work of art and would be the pride of any chapel of the lady in which it was displayed.

‘Toret Lornez said that the lady Varabaldi was devote, and it certainly appears that she is,’ Tatyana thought.

“Madame, your guests have arrived,” the butler announced as he lead them into the parlor. The parlor, like the rest of the house was dimly lit. The closed shutters prevented an outside light from brightening the room. However, the fire in the nearby hearth made it the brightest room Tatyana had seen in the house so far. In the center of the room, five chairs were arranged around a small low table, with coffee set out.

The widow Varabaldi sat in a high-backed chair with its back to the closed windows. With the poor lighting in the room, it was difficult for Tatyana to see where the chair ended and the woman began. Slowly, with the flickering light of the fire, Tatyana was able to make out her features.

Lady Varabaldi was an elderly woman in her late fifties. Her steel gray hair was wrapped in a tight bun without a stray hair evident. She had a high forehead, and large eyes, a distinct blue-gray color. A large round nose topped a small mouth that was pursed in a manner that shows disappointment. Tatyana had the feeling this was the mouth’s natural state more often than not. Lady Varabaldi appeared to be short, and of average build. When they entered she lifted a hand and waved at the empty chairs.

“Welcome. Welcome, to my home. Please be seated and allow Dimitru to serve you.” She spoke in a firm rich voice that was surprising coming from such a small woman. She spoke in Mordentish, allowing Tatyana to respond by thanking her for seeing them.

“It is no trouble. I understand that you are fellow servants of our Lady. I myself, and my family have been servants of the Lady for many a long year.”

“Yes that is true. I am a holy knight dedicated to Ezra, and Tatyana is a priestess of the lady as well,” Petyr said in answer, unknowingly cutting off Tatyana who was about to speak. Internally, Tatyana fumed. She had wanted to lead the conversation, because she believed she could more compassionately break the news to Mrs. Varabaldi.

“Ah, you’re a holy knight. How wonderful. You are the first I have ever met, though I have heard stories,” Lady Varabaldi said and smiled. “Priests, however, I have known many priests in my time. Some good, some not so. They do try though. However, few live up to the faith of my husband, Ezra rest his soul. My husband, Raphael, was a priest of Ezra. Did you know that?”

“No, madam, we did not know that,” Tatyana replied, trying to think of a way to broach the subject that brought them there that day.

“He was a great missionary for our lady. Traveled far to spread the word of Ezra to the faithless. Until they-.” Varabaldi stopped no longer smiling. “He was a great man.”

“I see. I am sorry,” Tatyana said, wishing the memory of the woman’s dead husband had not come up while she was there to bring news of the death of the woman’s son. Not knowing what else to say, she fell silent.

“We do not want to take up too much of your time. It was difficult for us to arrangement this meeting,” Petyr began.

“Yes, I am sorry about that. You see I have not left this house in almost thirteen years. Ever since me husband died. I just could not face the world outside without him. But here, there are so many memories wrapped up in this house I need never be far from him. Ah the times we had...”

“How did your husband die?” Günther asked bluntly.

“Oh, it was those wicked Hazlani that did him in. I always hated it there, and pleaded with Raphael to come back to Borca with me many times. You see, Raphael was a missionary. The church sent him to Toyalis to seek converts. Raphael was strong, full of faith and confidence. He just knew we would succeed in converting those heathen. I went with him, but-.

Those Hazlani have many wicked customs; slavery, and they worship that devil, the Lawgiver. I could not stand it there. It was a hard life for us there. After three months, I had had enough and told Raphael I was leaving. I loved Raphael very much, but you see, we had left our children in the care of relatives back here in Levkarest, and I missed them so. Raphael agreed it was for the best that I return home, but he could not come with me. He knew his duty to our lady was more important. So he stayed and I was left to make the hazardous journey over the Balinoks alone. I swore never to cross those cursed mountains again.

We wrote to each other constantly. Raphael shared with me his frustration at the lack of converts among the Hazlani. I wrote to him pleading with him to return and be close to our family once again. For more than a year this went on, until finally Raphael wrote me the news I had longed for.

He had written to his superior in the church that he did not think he was doing any good in Hazlani and wanted to return home for a different assignment. He was given permission to do so. It was on his way back that he was killed. Some villains murdered him on the road. Bandits, thieves all of them. I have despised them ever since, for what they have taken from me.” As she finished, Lady Varabaldi did not weep, only fell silent.⁵⁵

The silence deepened, as no one knew what to say. Here they had come to tell her of their son’s murder and they dredged up memories of her husband’s death. The moment stretched out into a long silence. The firelight played off of the stone face of the widow, whose only outward show of emotion had been to lower her eyes.

“You’re Rodrigo’s friend aren’t you? What is your name again?” Everyone jumped a little when lady Varabaldi broke the silence. If they were surprised that she broke the silence they were even more surprised when they released she was talked to Nicolae.

“What? Who? Me?” was all he could manage.

“Vasili. That is it. Vasili. But, no. You are not him. I am sorry for the trouble. You do bear a resemblance to him, but it is not the same.”

“Who is Vasili? Rodrigo? You say that I look like this Vasili?” Nicolae leant forward in his chair to ask this.

⁵⁵ Is there more to Raphael Varabaldi’s death than Mrs. Varabaldi knows or has said? Well there was a major event that took place 13 years ago in Ravenloft. Could that have anything to do with it?

“Vasili is a friend of Rodrigo. They went off together to Bergovitsa to do the lady’s work. Rodrigo is a son of mine. Impetuous boy. Not like his father, though he does try.”

Nicolae was stunted. Could this Vasili be a relative of some kind? It was the first clue he had yet to discovering his background. His mind was thrown into confusion as he tried to assimilate this information. Before he could formulate his thoughts, Tatyana took the moment away.

“You mentioned one of your sons, ma’am. It is actually one of your sons that we came here to talk to you about.”

“Yes, which one.”

“We are here about Mikhail. He was, ah. We found, ah. He is...” Tatyana struggled to say.

“He is dead,” the widow finished for him.

“You knew? I am sorry. We did not know how to contact you sooner. We thought to be the first to tell you,” Petyr said shocked again.

“Yes, Mikhail was murderer while doing the lady’s work. I know. He told me,” Lady Varabaldi said as calm as could be.

“You’re son told you. Told you, he had been murderer?” Petyr asked skeptical.

“Yes, he sat right there,” she said and pointed at the chair Nicolae was sitting in. “And he told me that he had been murderer.” Nicolae tried to stop himself from squirming in his chair but could not.

“He was right here?” Nicolae asked.

“Yes. The enemies of the lady are everywhere. They must be punished. Not just for Mikhail’s murder, but because it is the will of our lady,” the widow Varabaldi said and clenched her jaw.

“We were the ones who found your son, when he was murdered in Nartok. We brought his possessions to return to you,” Tatyana said and the party rummaged through their packs to produce the items.

“Nartok you say. I thought poor Mikhail was searching for lycanthropes in Port-a-Lucine. At least he was the last time he wrote to me. Well never you mind. We must seek out our lady’s enemies wherever they run.”

“I have four other children who are all just as dedicated to spreading the will of our lady. They are out there in the world now, spreading her word. You should meet them, my children. You could be a help to them. Toret Charlotta and Toret Lorenz said you are capable. As fellow followers of our lady, you must face many adversaries. Together we could overcome them.”

“What is it you would have of us?” Petyr asked.

“Why the lady’s will, of course. With the wealth of my house combined with the knowledge we have collected my children are fighting the minions of darkness. You should help them? What do you say?”

The widow Varabaldi went on to describe where her four remaining children currently were, all spread out across the land, and asked which they would like to go and help.⁵⁶

The companions took a few minutes to discuss what the Lady Varabaldi had said and decide what they would do next.

“Lady Varabaldi, we are honored by your hospitality and your offer,” Petyr began. “We can see that you and your family are staunch supports of Ezra and her church, and we wish to be a part of that.”

“That is wonderful,” she said and made a slight smile.

“You asked us, which of your children we would like to help. Our answer is Mikhail. We were all moved by your words and do not think Mikhail will be able to rest until we have discovered his murderer. So, we intend to return to Port-a-Lucine and see if we can find any clue as to the murderer of your son.”

⁵⁶ Technically, the session ended here with the PC’s being given a choice as to which of the children to track down and meet. They were to tell me their choice to begin the next session. But because of their unusual choice, as you will see, I think it is better to continue with the beginning of the next session here.

DM's comment (Too long for a footnote):

Leave it to players. You give them four choices, a, b, c, or d, and they choose option e. This threw my plans into a mess. But I was not mad. I had intended for the party to return to Port-a-Lucine eventually, and had planted some adventure hooks during their first visit. So it was not all that bad. As I told the players when I agreed to their decision, rest assured, they will be going to meet some of the other Varabaldi children. My adventure hooks will not be denied!

After another session or two, I asked Billy, Petyr's player, why they made this decision. He told me it was the ghost of Mikhail that did it. You see, I was trying to be ambiguous about the ghostly visitation. Was it really a ghost or was the old woman crazy? I thought some of the players may at least think she was crazy. No. Billy told me this, "In Ravenloft, all ghost stories are never rumors. They are always true."

So, they thought the ghost of Mikhail was haunting the Varabaldi house until they solved his murder. They are also unsure if the dead husband also haunts the house or not. I have purposefully left open in the campaign whether Mikhail's ghost really exists or not, and it remains still unresolved.