

Chapter IV: The Green Witch's Warning

Wherein dragons speak in riddles, elven ruins reveal more than dust, and a dwarf attempts diplomacy by glowing angrily.

The drow's name was DeSeth, and he had that curious air shared by all creatures who walk ancient caverns with daggers tucked into places knives don't belong.

He claimed peace, which was odd for someone coated in spider guts and followed by shadows. But his words held weight—and the party was in no shape to argue, covered in blood, webbing, and whatever it was that leaked from Quaggoth spleens.

"We are not of the Spider Queen," DeSeth said, offering a hand to Leydrick, who wiped his mace clean and ignored it.

"That's what the last guy said before summoning a squid god," muttered Rigg.

"They hunt the surface now. Took your villagers. Took many of ours too." His eyes narrowed. "But we know where."

Valen, still cradling his burnt spellbook, looked up. "You've seen their portal?"

DeSeth nodded. "We know where they took them. But it is not a place of life."

"Perfect," said High Jinks. "We're allergic to comfort."

They followed DeSeth deeper until the forest broke open like a wound—revealing a pool of still water so clear it reflected stars never seen on this plane. At its edge stood *her*.

The Green Witch.

She was tall—taller than a human, but not quite elven. Her form shimmered between shapes: woman, tree, serpent, storm. Robes of woven leaves draped her like a second forest. Her eyes—yellow, lidless, eternal—met each of theirs in turn and saw too much.

"Children of surface dust," she said. "You tread in root and blood."

"Hello," said Rigg. "We brought sarcasm and unresolved trauma."

The Witch's smile flickered like candlelight. "Your villagers are not here."

“Dead?” asked Leydrick.

“Taken. Below. The ones who lived... are food for the ones who don’t.”

There was silence.

Then High Jinks stepped forward, tail flicking. “Why tell us?”

“Because the Underdark is a hungry place. It does not need more minds to chew. Go after them, if you must. But do not bring more.”

Valen, eyes unreadable beneath his wide-brimmed hat, asked softly, “And if we do?”

The Witch blinked. “Then the forest will stop you.”

Before she left, she gestured to a twisted tree behind the pool. With a sigh, it opened like a blooming wound.

Within were ruins—elven stonework, vines grown over memory, and at its center, a shattered altar.

They stepped carefully, reverently. It felt sacred. And old. Older than any of them could name.

On the altar were three things:

- A **silver ring**, etched with vines, still warm. When High Jinks slid it on, the wind whispered “*Speak, and be heard.*”
- Two **potions**, bright red, thicker than blood—greater healing, thick with forest magic.
- And a third potion, dark green, swirling slowly in its vial. Valen took it without comment.

“Loot with purpose,” Rigg said. “The best kind.”

Then, with a deep breath and the forest watching, they descended into the Underdark.

The earth swallowed them. The light faded. And suddenly, the world was made of pressure and whisper.

They walked single file through tunnels wet with time. Once, they found a skeleton—a villager—his skull opened, his brain missing.

“Lovely,” said Rigg. “Very welcoming.”

“Better than missing your *soul*,” muttered High Jinks.

The path twisted. Stone became bone. And then the ambush came.

They had just entered a domed cavern when the ceiling *moved*.

The spiders dropped silently. No hiss. No warning. Just weight and hunger. One landed atop Valen, pinning him beneath long black legs.

Another snapped at High Jinks, whose Boots of Elvenkind did not squeak—but her voice did.

“OH GODS NO—!”

She darted backward, claws flashing, slicing across mandibles.

Rigg struck like a bolt from the blue—his wrench swinging in a brutal arc that *caved* in the spider’s abdomen. Its body cracked and crumpled like wet wood, and it collapsed in a heap.

Another spider lunged at Leydrick—but the dwarf didn’t flinch.

“Not today, you eight-legged boweltrap,” he roared, brandishing his holy symbol.

Radiant flame burst from his hands, and the creature shrieked, legs curling as it dissolved into ash.

Valen pushed the spider off with a growl and flung a *Firebolt* point-blank into its face. It exploded in a shower of ichor, and the smell was... unfortunate.

Then the Drow appeared—one wounded, darting from behind a stalagmite, blade flicking toward Jinks.

She danced back. “Oh come on! Aren’t we *done* with surprises?”

Dino, quiet all this time, raised his longsword—now glowing faintly—and drove it *through* the Drow’s thigh. The attacker collapsed with a groan.

“We keep one,” Dino muttered. “They always know more than they tell.”

The cavern quieted. Only the sound of dripping water and tired lungs remained.

They bound the Drow. He hissed but spoke.

“You don’t know what you’re walking into.”

“Oh we *do*,” Rigg said. “We just choose to walk loudly and armed.”

The Drow’s eyes darted to the glowing ring on High Jinks’ paw. “That belonged to my mother.”

“Then she had excellent taste,” Jinks said, and turned away.

Revision #2

Created 2025-06-28 22:46:54 UTC by Slitzer

Updated 2025-06-29 11:44:12 UTC by Slitzer