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Nnylf sat with Azile and Lustre at a table near the hearth of the young man's lodge. He ate quick bites of the food placed in front of them. Sweet, spicy bread, creamy butter and yellow cheese, pears and apples, and nuts and dried berries filled their plates. Lustre poured cool milk into shiny white cups from a clay pitcher that Nnylf had not noticed before. He wondered at the ceiling, higher than four men one above the next, that spanned over his head. Held up by massive wooden beams, its planks must have been darkened by years of smoke from the wide fireplace centered in one of the long walls.

Relaxing in a heavy carved chair opposite them, Lustre lifted a pretty green cloth to reveal a honey-coated cake and he cut them each a piece. "I can't thank you enough for your kindness. I hope this small meal will satisfy." He cut himself a slice of cake, too, but left it untouched as he murmured with a sweet smile, "How do you feel, my young friends?" He watched Nnylf and Azile gobble the sweet. The past seasons had been hungry ones for Eunan's little family.

With new energy, Nnylf and Azile now chewed, swallowed, and licked their lips. After eating every crumb on their plates, they smiled.

"This was a feast, Lustre. Very kind of you. Even so," Nnylf said, turning to his sister, "Azile, come. Father expects us home tonight." As Nnylf expressed his thanks, he rose from the table, but he was surprised to feel his legs as heavy as logs. His head nodded and he struggled to find his way to the door. Azile, too, felt her eyes itching with sleepiness, and she stretched with a big yawn.

"I mustn't put you on the road to home now. You are so tired," said the man. "Why don't you sit for a moment here? Rest a little."

Nnylf and Azile nodded slowly and let him lead them to a long bench, where they sat for a moment on billowy, soft cushions. Soon, Azile slumped to one side, yawned, and curled into a cushion. Nnylf closed his eyes and began to snore loudly.

The man who called himself Lustre walked to the hearth and crouched while humming a low and dark tune. An acrid green mist enveloped him until the humming ended and the mist fell away. A hork stood in the young man's place. He knocked on a silver disk attached to a wall lining the hearth. A knob popped out. He pulled it with a sharp tug and stepped back. A grinding noise tore the air as a door to one side of the hearth opened and a hunched, shadowy creature emerged.

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