***Narrator**: Visions of the past continue to haunt us in our dreams. The people of this narrative are:*

- *Me, the NARRATOR.*
- *First we have AUREN VROOD, a young man dressed in black robes.*
- *Next is KVALCA SAIN, a powerfully built woman dressed in brown leathers. Her stance is aggressive, yet her moves have grace. She is completely bald. Twin bone daggers sit on her belt.*
- *Next is CYBRISSA, an elven druid dressed in armour of bramble thorns, a falcon perched on her shoulder.*
- *Next is MATHUS, a burly woodsman, thick of chest and silver-bearded, two large bastard swords on his back.*
- *Last the BARKEEP, a stern serving lady.*

***Narrator**: We are on the edge of the mightiest forest in Ustalav - the Shudderwood – and in the hearth of The Last Friendly Face, an inn and tavern overlooking the dark brooding forest. Inside a fire is roaring and the tables are full of patrons: locals and travellers alike. Auren Vrood sits alone at a table, a glass of wine and some beef stew in front of him.*

Auren Vrood: Wench! Bring me some more stew. I have had a great victory today, and wish to celebrate. And be quick about it, lest I become angry.
Barkeep: I'll thank you not to speak to me that way sir. I've told you before, this house has rules, and you best stick to them if you want to stay.
Auren Vrood: You'll take my gold and do what I say ... wench. I pay twice as much what these sheep pay <he waves his arm at the rest of the bar>.

***Narrator**: The barkeep looks to respond, but at that moment the door to the inn swings open and the figures of Kvalca, Cybrissa and Mathus loom, casting long shadows over the patrons and tables. The bustle of conversation stops, and a number of customers grab their cloaks and hurry out of the back door. The barkeep takes several paces towards the trio and address Kvalca.*

Barkeep: M'lady. To what do we owe this pleasure? We don't... we weren't expecting you. My apologies, we'd have prepared something special.

***Narrator**: Kvalca strides slowly towards the centre of the inn and looks down at the barkeep (who stands a good foot shorter). She points her finger at Auren Vrood, alone on his table.*

Kvalca Sain: We have come for him. You will tell the weaklings to leave, if they value their lives.
Barkeep: <to the rest of the inn> You heard her. Everyone out now! We'll settle up in the morning.

***Narrator**: Panicked and hurried, the patrons hustle outside as the trio walk closer towards Auren Vrood. He continues to eat his stew, dunking his bread, and paying little attention to the three menacing figures. They continue to stare at him in silence, unflinching. Eventually, he gives up and looks up from his meal at them.*

Auren Vrood: Yes? Can I help you? I'm trying to enjoy my food here in case you haven't noticed.
Kvalca Sain: You are the creature known as Vrood. You have blackened my lands with your vile deeds.
Auren Vrood: <dunks some bread and chews on it> Oh, I have? What vile deeds would these be? I am a simple travelling mage. <he smiles>
Mathus: You will address the Queen of the Shudderwood as "m'lady" you cur.
Auren Vrood: <to Mathus> Oh, I see. And I suppose that applies to you too?
Kvalca Sain: All in these lands know me as their Queen.
Auren Vrood: <still to Mathus> Even the mighty ranger Mathus Mordrinacht must bow his head? How humbling that must be for you sir, especially for such a proud family as yours.
Mathus: <grinds his teeth and mutters under his breath>
Kvalca Sain: Silence cur! You are not here to sow your malicious words among my loyal friends. You are here to pay for the robbing of graves, the murder of animals, villagers and creatures of the forest. The incarnation of dark deeds that break the cycle of life, the summoning of the dead, the poisoning of the Silverheart Brook with tainted blood, and the refusal to obey my doctrine and leave my lands.
Auren Vrood: Oh, *those* dark deeds. Sorry, completely slipped my mind. You missed the burning of Scharlachaar Grove though. One of my finest, if I may add. So many corpses, in such a small space. Ha ha ha.
Cybrissa: <gasps> My father! He was one of those that died at Scharlachaar Grove. The time for talk is over monster!
Auren Vrood: <narrows his eyes> do your worst, fools.

***Narrator**: Vrood pushes over the table as the three heroes whip out their weapons. Kvalca and Mathus rush at Vrood, but his*

cloak billows around him and he flies into the air cackling maniacally. Vrood tosses a number of small balls to the ground which explode into full sized slavering ghouls, surrounding Kvalca, Mathus and Cybrissa. A fierce battle ensues, with blades flashing and the ghouls growling, hissing and biting. From up above in the rafters of the roof Vrood fires black rays of negative energy. One of these almost strikes Cybrissa, but she dodges away at the last minute. Mathus parries the claws of a ghoul with a mighty roar, and Kvalca thrusts her daggers into the back of the solitary ghast.

Auren Vrood: The power of the dead is behind me. You cannot stop me!
Kvalca Sain: You don't frighten us necromancer. I'll have your tainted blood before the day is up.

***Narrator**: Kvalca leaps onto a table and with almost cat-like agility jumps off the wall and towards Vrood. He tries to dodge in the air, but Kvalca draws her bone dagger across his thigh before softly landing on the floor.*

Auren Vrood: A feeble scratch. I've seen the face of death, not once, but a thousand times. If that's the best you have, then prepare for a new life as a minion of the dead!
Cybrissa: You're sinking fool.
Kvalca Sain: The *tooth of dispelling* finds another spell to bite on.

***Narrator**: Sure enough, Vrood's power of flight seems to have gone and he is drifting slowly to the floor. Beneath him the triumvirate stand looking up and grinning. Vrood's hitherto cocksure smile seems to have vanished and he waves his arms frantically in the air, trying to gain more height, but to no avail. He continues to sink.*

Mathus: First blow is mine. I'm gonna knock his stinking block off.
Cybrissa: I claim second blood, for my father and the people of the forest.
Kvalca Sain: And I claim his heart, which will be burned beneath a willow tree, his diabolic power destroyed in the winds.
Auren Vrood: OK, less of that you hear. Urgothoa isn't ready for my soul yet, I have more work to do. Damn it, I was planning on scribing this scroll... you see what you have cost me? You'll see me again though, mark my words. And Mathus, shame you have to take orders from these weaklings.

***Narrator**: Vrood reaches into his robes and unfurls a scroll. The runes glow blue in front of him and – just like that – he is gone. The wind whips up around Kvalca as the air rushes in to fill the vacuum above her.*

Kvalca Sain: He escaped again.
Mathus: We should have expected that. Cybrissa, why did ya not counterspell?
Cybrissa: I would need to have prepared appropriate spells for that, it can be complicated.
Kvalca Sain: It is no matter. We will catch him again, we are trackers and he is game. And soon he will have nowhere to run.
Mathus: But we should have crushed him this time. He has gained in power and resources and we did not prepare.
Kvalca Sain: He is still a weak-blooded milk drinker.
Mathus: That's not my point! I grow frustrated of this quarry. I have work to do within the wood, and this should have been over days ago. A counterspell would have ended it today.
Cybrissa: You are blaming me, is that it? I won't stand for insults from you Mordrinacht.
Kvalca Sain: Silence! We must not fracture ourselves. That's just what he wants.
Mathus: You think I could be manipulated by Vrood? You have that little respect for me? <he spits on the floor>. I won't stand and take such insults.
Kvalca Sain: I am your Queen!
Cybrissa: That is a title you chose, not one gifted. <she glances at Mathus>
Mathus: And perhaps one we should reconsider. <he scratches his beard> I'm leaving now. I have my own path to walk.
Cybrissa: And I will return to the wood to bury my father.
Kvalca Sain: Do not go. Return to me, the Shudderwood demands it! You will regret this, the both of you. You will regret it!

***Narrator**: But Mathus and Cybrissa have already left, through different doors, and Kvalca stands alone in the empty tavern.*