

LAY OF LIFE AND DECAY

Aranor the spry, trueborn Valenwood son,
11
Stripling still, not yet a half century seen,
11
Loved to wander foothill, glade, and wooded grove.
11

Came to a hollow, and unfamiliar sight
11
Beheld: crouching therein a hoary Khajit
11
Washing from fur bloody stain and fleshy gore.
11

“Where thy prey, and wherefore such lust, newfound friend?
11
“No beast so great to merit such carnage lives
11
“Or mayhap art best hunter yet poor butcher?”
11

“Jest not, sapling elf, for barely three days past,
11
“Compelled by Earth Bones’ Pact, slain one dared profane
11
“Inviolate Green; soul for Ooze, flesh for food.”
11

“What name bear, stranger here, who honors Y’ffre?
11
“Too few elves remember and keep Meat Mandate,
11
“Barbarous ‘tis deemed, rev’rence for tradition.”
11

“Long in past, Twilight Queen brought forest race change,
11
“Fur-clad forms bound to moons, penance must be borne:
11
“Pact kept in Wooded Vale, new life for Za’kir.”
11

Triplet 1: Aranor is a relatively young Wood Elf living in Valenwood who loves to wander the forests.

Triplet 2: Aranor happens upon a hollow and sees an old Khajit (cat-man) washing blood and gore from his fur.

Triplet 3: Aranor asks the Khajit why he’s so coated with blood, and jests that perhaps he’s a messy butcher.

Triplet 4: The Khajit answers, and demands Aranor not joke. The cat-man claims to have killed and eaten someone who broke the Green Pact, which forbids harm to the forest’s plant life and demands no source of meat be wasted.

Triplet 5: Aranor asks for the Khajit’s name, surprised to find a stranger who keeps the Green Pact of Y’ffre, the chief goddess of the forest; he notes even few Wood Elves abide the traditional strictures of the Pact.

Triplet 6: The cat-man names himself Za’kir, and recounts that the Wood Elves and Khajit were once bound together, but were separated when a demon bound the cat-folk to the lunar phases. He claims to regret this, and keeps the Pact as penance.

Long discourse engaged these two, fast friendship forg'd.

11

Embarked on many hunts, swiftly prey pursued,

11

Greater love none: honor to Hostess Y'ffre.

11

Fateful day when chase brought them to aged elf,

11

In camp, small fire built, fallen deadwood fed.

11

Cat's eye, joyous rage, knife to throat, blood flame soaked.

11

“Wherefore this murder and such violence harbor?

11

“What tenet broke? No meat wasted, no sap burnt,

11

“Only dead grass and blighted branch for kindling!”

11

“Hear now, young elf, longer you live, but elder

11

“This one for now! No affront here, save the dead,

11

“Who took by fire new life through Rot from Green.”

11

Bowed then young Aranor to old feline's sight,

11

Agreed 'twas sin to take any plant from Green.

11

Chased they still after game, but Pact breakers first.

11

Benighted day! Came they across young mother

11

Bathing in pond whilst small daughter by reeds play'd,

11

Overturning stone, cry gave, revuls'd by Slugs.

11

Triplet 7: Aranor and Za'kir talk and become friends and hunting partners. Their greatest joy is honoring their divine hostess, Y'ffre.

Triplet 8: One day, the pair are chasing prey, and they stumble upon an elderly Wood Elf's campfire, fueled by burning deadwood. Joy and rage in his eye, Za'kir cuts the Wood Elf's throat, and the blood quenches the small campfire.

Triplet 9: Aghast, Aranor asks why Za'kir committed such violent murder, reasoning that the Wood Elf didn't violate the Green Pact since no living plants were being burned in the fire.

Triplet 10: Za'kir chastises Aranor, admonishing him to heed his elder companion's experience, and claims that no wrong was done except by the dead Wood Elf, who prevented new life from growing in the forest by burning what would become future compost.

Triplet 11: Aranor submits to Za'kir's perspective, agreeing that to harm any plant—living or dead—is to break the Green Pact. They continue hunting, but begin seeking those who violate the Pact.

Triplet 12: One day, the pair happen across a young Wood Elf mother bathing in a pond while her daughter plays by the shore. The daughter cries out when scared by slugs beneath a stone.

Startled matron quickly rose, stumbled toward girl,
11
Reached out, for steadying assist, nearby branch,
11
Still green, alas, snapped! Aranor arrow loos'd.
11

“We must needs this woman eat, lest Pact we break!
11
“But what of kid? Guide me now, my dearest friend,
11
“For Earth Bones nor Ancestors will aid us now.”
11

“Attend thy juv'nile ear; put hope in Y'ffer,
11
“Or, rather, her Shadow. Life fails, but Rot grows.
11
“Give we now the babe to Decay, Namiira.”
11

“What trust in Ancestors Not? Reveal'd now thy
11
“Leal service, not Y'ffre first, but Lady Rot.
11
“All lives taken, cover, for cannibal's heart!”
11

“Partner in my arts, thee, sit at Darkness' feet!
11
“Taste the meals She gives! Inevitable Rot,
11
“Life's end; feed Decay, and 'morrow thee She feeds.”
11

Twisted-broken, Bosmer relented; back to
11
Hollow the pair away'd, grisly work began:
11
Small cries cut short: meal dress'd, new Hostess did carve.
11

Triplet 13: The mother, startled by her daughter's cry, quickly gets up, but stumbles. She grabs a nearby green branch to steady herself, but it snaps. Aranor executes her with an arrow.

Triplet 14: Aranor knows he and Za'kir must consume the deceased, but has no idea what to do about the child. Scared, he turns to Za'kir for guidance, reasoning that no gods or laws of nature can help him now.

Triplet 15: Za'kir again admonishes Aranor to listen to his elder, telling him to trust not in the goddess Y'ffer but the demon of entropy, darkness, and decay, Namiira.

Triplet 16: Feeling horrified and betrayed, Aranor asks why he should trust the demon, and correctly accuses Za'kir of using zeal for the Green Pact as a cover for his murderous, cannibalistic appetites.

Triplet 17: Za'kir urges Aranor to join him in worshiping Namiira, pointing out that the young Wood Elf is complicit in the recent deaths, promising that she is a better hostess than Y'ffer.

Triplet 18: Aranor, twisted and broken in spirit, relents. The pair return to Za'kir's hollow for their dark deed with the child, whose cries are cut short when the new hostess carves the meal.