

FROM THE FOREST THEY FLED

by Alison Huang

CREATURE: *Dryad* | **LEVEL(S):** 1-3 | **CW:** *Forest fires*

SYNOPSIS

Ashvale is a simple village, full of people who live their simple lives without knowing anything about the world outside their simple valley. But there is one thing that they know: animals can sense danger. And, for the last few days, animals have been running out of the woods. Characters are hired to investigate and must venture into the forest. But the culprit, a dryad, may have a good reason for chasing all of those animals away. *From The Forest They Fled* is intended for levels 1-3.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The party would may be adventurers traveling through the town, or they might have heard word from a neighboring town.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Ashvale is a nondescript farming village located in the middle of a valley. It consists of a number of farmhouses, with one of them acting as a makeshift tavern of sorts where farmers go to drink after a long day.

The nearby forest, simply named Ashvale Forest, looks unremarkable at first sight, but it is actually home to a rare species of tree known as the Ash Gum. Ash Gums, like their real life equivalent Eucalyptus Regnans, require fire to germinate their seeds.

It is healthy for Ash Gums to be exposed to fire every five years, but since Ashvale was established fifty years ago, the villagers have prevented any fires from happening. The desperate trees have been silently pleading for help. A dryad recently arrived to aid them. Using her ability to speak with beasts, she asked all of the animals to leave so that they won't be harmed by the controlled fire she plans on causing. She intends to extinguish the fire herself if it gets out of hand.

As she is a fey, the dryad has a true name that she won't reveal to anyone. If an adventurer asks her what her name is, she says her name is Calypsa.

CHAPTER 1 – INTO THE WOODS

A nondescript farming village, Ashvale would just be like any other settlement in this part of the world if not for the numerous animal tracks scattered all over the valley side: deer tracks, wolf tracks, even bear tracks. Though their owners have clearly gone in different directions, they all originate from the forest... the same forest that you've been hired to enter, to figure out why all of these animals have fled.

It's the middle of the day. The sun is shining down, and the edge of the forest looms in front of you. Sooner or later, you'll have to enter. Who will be the first to step in?

TRAVERSING THROUGH THE FOREST

Though this is not a horror adventure, it is important to make sure the characters do feel cautious about the forest and what they might find within it. Keep characters on their toes with the following suggestions.

- **DC 10 WISDOM (PERCEPTION) CHECK:** On a success, they hear a crashing sound in the distance. It is a tree branch that fell. On a failure, they hear nothing.
- **DC 12 DEXTERITY SAVING THROW:** On a success, they notice the ground beneath them is unstable, and move out of the way safely. On a failure, the ground beneath them falls 2 feet into an abandoned burrow, and they are knocked prone.

- **DC 12 WISDOM (PERCEPTION) CHECK:** On a success, they don't notice anything. On a failure, they feel something brushing against their leg. It is a bush that they hadn't realized was there.

FIRST HOUR

Once the characters have started walking through the forest, immediately bring to their attention that it is extremely quiet. Forest sounds that they would take for granted, like bird song, are missing. It is so quiet that the loudest sounds that they can hear are their footsteps and their heartbeats (if they have one).

As they walk, encourage your characters to speculate on what they think has happened.

Despite the unnerving nature of the forest, the first hour of travel is uneventful.

SECOND HOUR

At the start of the second hour, ask the player with the highest Wisdom (Survival) bonus to roll 1d4, or 2d4 if the party is at 3rd level. Their roll will determine what random encounter the party will face. If the player rolled 2d4, the random encounter includes the enemies from both results.

D4	ENCOUNTERS
1	Six crawling claws that are plants instead of undead, and look like they're made out of twigs
2	Four twig blights
3	One vine blight and one needle blight
4	Two piercers that are plants instead of monstrosities, and look like tree branches

THIRD HOUR

If the characters want to have a short rest, tell them they can do so while still moving forward, but they will have disadvantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks and Initiative rolls for the duration.

Regardless if the party takes a short rest or not, ask them each to make a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check. On a success, tell them that they notice trees of a different species than the ones they have seen so far. A DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check is required to recognize these trees as Ash Gums.

As they continue forward, tell the player with the highest passive perception that they smell smoke in the distance, further into the forest.

A DC 5 Wisdom (Survival) check is required to figure out the exact direction the smoke is coming from.

If no one succeeds on this check, tell the character with the highest passive Perception that while they can't see anything unusual up ahead, they do sense that something is watching them. Undetectable due to its false appearance, a **vine blight** surprises and attacks the party.

By the time the encounter finishes, the smoke increases to the point the direction is clear.

DEVELOPMENT

When the characters have successfully tracked direction of the smoke, proceed to *Chapter 2*.

CHAPTER 2 — CALYPTA

The smell of smoke grows and grows as you move forward, until you can see it. It spills out between the trees before you like water. Boiling water. Because there's no mistaking that the world in front of you has begun to burn.

HOW THE MIGHTY FALL

One last obstacle separates the party from Calypta: a large fallen tree. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that it was dragged to this spot, but there are no clear tracks. Calypta ordered her vine blights to move it for her.

It is possible to simply bypass this obstacle by walking around it. However, it is faster to climb over it with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. A successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check, or enough time and teamwork, pushes the fallen tree out of the way.

THROUGH SMOKE AND MIRRORS

Through the smoke before you, you notice a humanoid shape. As you watch, the shape touches a tree next to them. In an instant, the bark underneath their hand bursts into flame. Satisfied, they move onto the next tree and repeat.

In a clearing beyond the fallen tree, Calypta is systematically lighting Ash Gum trees on fire with *druidcraft*. The clearing is circular, with a diameter of 50 feet. It is full of smoke, which means Calypta is heavily obscured.

If the party attacks her before she notices them, proceed to the *Fighting Calypta* section. Otherwise, once she is aware that the party is there, she will cast create or destroy water to dissipate the smoke.

ROLE-PLAYING CALYPTA

The smoke clears to reveal a feminine figure. You're not sure if the bark that covers her is armour, or merely her skin - either way, it extrudes outwards from her head and shoulders into spikes. Between the wooden plates on her face, her eyes glimmer like hot coals. Her fingertips glow, still slightly alight.

"Tell me," she says, her eyes narrowing.
"Why. Are. You. Here."

Calypta is compassionate — she heeded the plea of the trees, and asked all of the animals to leave so that they don't get hurt. However, her kindness is not for the benefit of humanoids or for civilization.

Although she is fundamentally kind, she is also ruthless and distrustful. While she won't hurt the party, except as a last resort, she won't act gently either. She demands to know why they are there. She firmly tells them to leave before they get caught in the fire. She bluntly states that her task is none of the party's business.

Her demeanor should be hostile enough that some parties will see her as someone who is unable to be reasoned with and attack her. At the same time, she should be approachable enough that continuing to talk with her doesn't seem like a lost cause. A success-

ful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check gets her to explain what she is doing. However, each failed check lowers this DC by 5 for subsequent attempts.

If, after explaining herself, any party members ask if they can help her, she is flattered but declines their offer.

FIGHTING CALYPTA

During this encounter, it is important to note that parts of the clearing are on fire. Depending on the level of your party, and how determined they are to fight Calypta, you may consider having this fire come into play.

The encounter starts with two fires. each fire filling a 5-foot cube. These fires are considered magical. A creature takes 1d4 damage when it moves into the fire's space for the first time on a turn or ends its turn there.

If Calypta attacks with Produce Flame and misses, another fire will be created adjacent to the target.

At initiative count 20, 1d4 fires are created adjacent to existing fires. Calypta's stat block is on page 28.

TACTICS: Calypta will not immediately attack. Instead, she will demand that the party leave.

After one round, she will begin using her Fey Charm action in order to try and force them to go.

Only when it is clear to her that the party cannot be persuaded will she attack. Calypta only attacks using *produce flame*.

Whenever possible, Calypta will use her bonus action to Disengage and use her Tree Stride trait to move to another part of the clearing or up into the tree branches. She is notably nonchalant about this, as she is not trying to run away. Instead she finds it quite inconvenient that she is being attacked, and she would rather not be in a position for the attacks to continue.

Letting Calypta die is an unfavourable outcome! If characters are still insistent on fighting her, even if she is not fighting back, chase them away from the clearing with the fire.

DEVELOPMENT

When the characters have left Calypta and the clearing behind, and are leaving the forest, proceed to *Chapter 3*.

CHAPTER 3 — FIRE, FIRE

By the time the party has left the clearing, they have either distracted Calypta long enough that she hasn't been keeping a watchful eye on the fire, or they have caused Calypta to further amplify it. Either way, they need to get out of the forest. If your party did not previously push the fallen tree to the side, they can either succeed on a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to climb over it, or take the slower but surer option of walking around the fallen tree.

Any player who fails their Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, or opts to walk around the tree, must succeed at a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6 fire damage. If the party fought Calypta, this DC increases to DC 15.

OUT OF THE FIRE

Once the party has passed the fallen tree, they are able to move forward without the danger of being caught on fire. While the flames chase behind them, the gap quickly widens.

DEVELOPMENT

Once the characters are out of danger, proceed to the *Conclusion*.

CONCLUSION

You make your way out of the forest without any further problems. By the time you return to Ashvale, the sun has already set.

One of the villagers notices your approach, and excitedly yells, "*They're returned!*" Almost immediately, all of the doors to the houses open and the rest of the villagers rush out. They bring you into the house that serves as Ashvale's watering hole. Drinks and food are shoved into your hands.

It is only then that they ask what happened.

Regardless of what happened in Ashvale Forest, the villagers are grateful for the party's assistance, and eagerly listen to their tale.

If the party mentions running away from Calypta and leaving the forest to burn, the villagers will be ter-

rified and ask why the party did not stop her. Regardless of how assuring their answer is, the party is paid 100gp, and the villagers go and make preparations to evacuate Ashvale. The party is not given a place to stay for the night.

- If the party does not mention running away from Calypta, the party is paid 100gp, and shown to warm beds for the night. In the middle of the night, the party is awoken by the sound of heavy rain. Any player that chooses to investigate will discover that it is raining on the edge of Ashvale and over Ashvale Forest. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) reveals that this is most likely the result of the *create or destroy water* spell.

- If the villagers of Ashvale were preparing to leave, this rain will put them at ease. However, in the morning they will encourage the party to go back into the forest to kill Calypta. She has already left.

- If the party left the clearing peacefully, Calypta will approach them once they have left Ashvale.

Once you have left Ashvale behind, you notice a figure standing by the road looking in your direction. A fae perhaps? Or a summer eladrin? As you approach, you notice her burning eyes. They seem familiar. When she speaks you recognise her instantly as the dryad you met in the forest.

"*For not interfering with my affairs,*" she says, holding a hand out to you. A piece of amber glistens in the center of her palm, surrounded by cord.

As soon as the amulet is taken from her, she vanishes, leaving behind a faint smell of fire.

She gives the party a *Summer Fey's Blessing* (see *Rewards*).

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

Add the total XP of creatures defeated by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

OBSTACLE	XP
Crawling Claw	10
Twig Blight	25
Vine Blight	100
Needle Blight	50
Piercer	100
Moving the fallen tree	20 per person
Reaching the clearing	100 per person
Conversing with Calypta	200 per person

TREASURE REWARDS

ITEM	VALUE
Ashvale's Reward	100 gp

SUMMER FEY'S BLESSING

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This amber amulet softly glows with a warm light, and smells like a campfire. While you are wearing it, you gain the following benefits: You can use the amulet as a spellcasting focus. You have resistance to fire damage, and you don't suffer the effects of extreme heat, as described in the *Dungeon Masters Guide*. Whenever you make a Charisma check when interacting with fey, you have advantage on the check.

CALYPTA

Medium fey, neutral good

Armor Class 16 (permanent barkskin)

Hit Points 40 (5d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	12 (+1)	11 (0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills	Acrobatics +3, Perception +2
Damage Resistances	fire, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Senses	darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages	Common, Sylvan
Challenge	1 (200 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. Calypta's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). Calypta can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *druidcraft, produce flame*

3/day each: *entangle, goodberry, create or destroy water*

1/day each: *barkskin, pass without trace*

Magic Resistance. Calypta has advantage on Saving Throws against Spells and other magical effects.

Nimble Escape. Calypta can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of her turns.

Speak with Beasts and Plants. Calypta can communicate with Beasts and Plants as if they shared a language.

Tree Stride. Once on her turn, Calypta can use 10 feet of her movement to step magically into one living tree within her reach and emerge from a second living tree within 60 feet of the first tree, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second tree. Both trees must be large or bigger.

ACTIONS

Fey Charm. Calypta targets one humanoid or beast that she can see within 30 feet of her. If the target can see Calypta, it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed. The charmed creature regards Calypta as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected. Although the target isn't under Calypta's control, it takes Calypta's requests or actions in the most favorable way it can.

Each time Calypta or her allies do anything harmful to the target, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until Calypta dies, is on a different plane of existence from the target, or ends the effect as a bonus action. If a target's saving throw is successful, the target is immune to Calypta's Fey Charm for the next 24 hours.

Calypta can have no more than one humanoid and up to three beasts charmed at a time.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

When we imagine strong female characters, it's easy to think of characters that are physically strong. But just conferring traditionally masculine qualities implies that traditionally feminine qualities are weak. Just making female characters physically strong doesn't actually change much.

Think about the Tarot Card, Strength. It depicts a maiden and a lion. The lion is strong because of all those traditionally masculine values. Physical strength, ferocity, and so forth. But the maiden is strong as well. It is her kindness and her inner strength that allows her to stroke the lion without fear.

Or consider Medea, from the play of the same name. Though it pains her, though she wishes it didn't have to be that way, she has the conviction to hurt even her own children, as revenge for her husband's callous decision to replace her with a more socially acceptable bride.

Strength doesn't have to be physical strength. It doesn't have to be contrary to compassion, to being open emotionally. It doesn't have to be pretty.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alison Huang, who lives in Australia, has a deep love for narrative, especially non-violent and queer narratives. She usually expresses this through works of interactive fiction, which can be found at [Drazillion.itch.io](https://drazillion.itch.io). Her Twitter handle is [@Drazillion](https://twitter.com/Drazillion).