

Narrator Intro

Welcome back to the path, wanderers.

In the last episode, Philip began to follow the single set of tracks toward a yellow shed when a sudden snowstorm swept through the forest with no warning. Philip fought his way through the wind and snow up the hill.

But he wasn't alone.

Something came over the property wall –

A large, antlered beast that hurled a tree stump at him while bellowing.

Panicked, Philip broke into a run.

But in the low visibility of the squall, Philip slammed into a wooden post, reopening his head wound.

Bleeding and with the beast at his heels,

Philip was able to barricade himself inside the shed.

For minutes, the creature circled the little building, slamming against the door, speaking an unknown language between its screams and growls.

Then it just walked away.

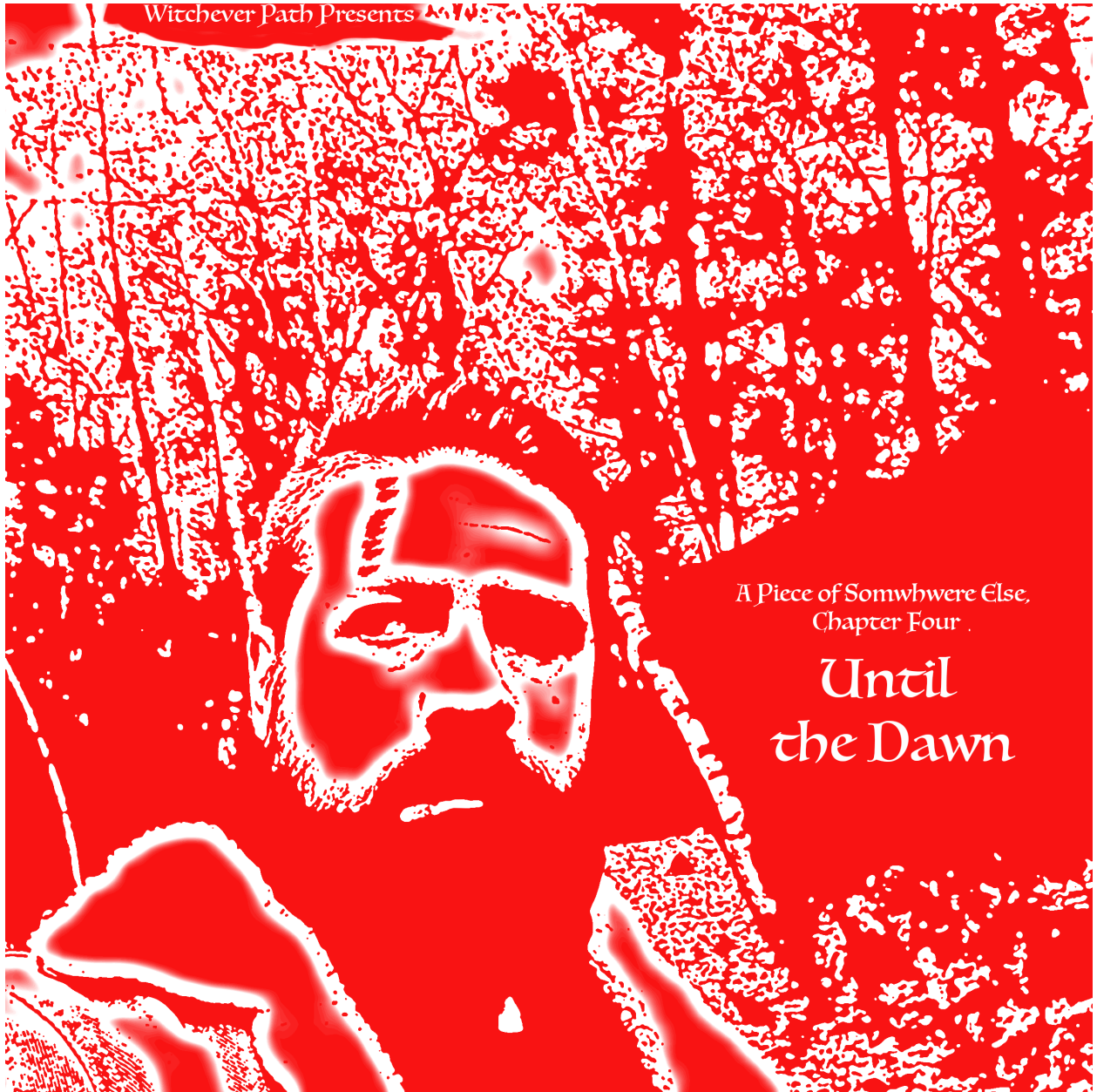
Or was it driven off by something Philip didn't comprehend?

Listening to the horned creature's cries grow ever distant, Philip knew he had to see to his wound and get out of there.

But would he leave immediately, or would he wait until morning?

The audience was divided until fifteen minutes before the poll closed. But there was a decision.

Now Witchever Path Presents A Piece of Somewhere Else, Chapter Four: Until the Dawn



Written by Etienne LaFond

[sips the flask, Philip hisses and almost coughs]

This could take the paint off my car. It's clear, though. It's almost like vodka, but there's this foul aftertaste. There's something gritty in the liquor, like sand. Well, I'm not spitting it out. The heat of the liquor travels down my esophagus. Okay. Let's go over to the mirror.

[shifts on the floor]

I need light. Okay.

[rifles through bag, click of flashlight]

That's better. Oh shit. This is rough. So much blood, I can barely see the cut. Okay. Gauze. Let's dab. [repeats the word dab then screams as he does it]

Be gentle. If I drop this there isn't anymore. I look like I work at a haunted house. This is bleeding so much. Pressure. Keep it on.

That should be good. Let's take a peek. It's not big. no stranger to butterfly sutures. The cuts aren't ragged. That's lucky.

[sound of bandages]

Nice and easy. Nice and easy. Ouch. All those First Aid classes paid off. Still, I wish you were here to help. You're not squeamish. You're probably one of the toughest people I know.

It's why I hate to argue with you, too. Being able to talk about things was so easy. But lately, you don't entertain any misgivings.

Why did you have to text Amaya? Or if she did it first, why didn't you wait till we got back? Or tell me you wanted to?

[more first aid sounds]

Maybe it's me. I'm too in your face all the time. I'm trying too hard to look like I don't care. Which fails when it becomes super obvious I'm threatened by this.

I get things wrong. We all do. I want to be certain before I confront the people in my life that matter. I want to get it right.

Amaya is a symptom. Something's rotten with us. But thinking about this right now isn't helping. I just want to get home to you.

[wind dies down]

It takes an hour to get patched up. The bloody gauze is on the floor. The squall is over. There's no sound of that thing out there. The sun went down a little bit ago. The temperature dropped. The shed has no insulation, but I'm glad I'm not out there. I've got some Hot Hands warmers in my boots and gloves. Maybe I should open a few more and put them on my body.

Let's see what's in the bag I picked up besides the flask.

[unfolds the cloth]

It's a blanket. It's been bunched into the bag around a bottle. Let's set that on the ground here.

[bottle placed on the ground, clink of glass on the floor]

And we'll wrap this around my shoulders. That's better. It's a little rough, but. Hang on.

What's printed on the blanket? It looks like a forest. No. It's not printed. This is embroidered. Hold on.

[Velcro]

Off comes the gloves again.

[unfurl the blanket on the ground.]

It's a tapestry. The background is a deep red, with pine trees embroidered in golden yellow thread. Goldenrod? Shit, you'd know what color this is. The forest is in the background. There's a wall, just like outside. Little, simple figures wearing almost nothing dance around the fire. Some have pointed ears, one has the face of a cat. A bird about the same size as the dancing figures stands off-center, pointing a wing to the right... okay, let's drag this over and unfold some more. Oh. It's the monster. But different. It's an antlered woman, bare-breasted and straight-backed. Underneath the wide rack of antlers, she wears a circlet on her brow. It's hard to tell in the light of my flashlight, but it looks like she's frowning at the bird.

The more I look, the more detail is here. A snake wrapped around a man who is holding a knife. In the woods, just near the fire, a large-eyed, winged creature seems to be pointing to the fire. Its face looks almost bug-like, but it has a long stitch of a smile.

I can look at this more in the morning. For now, piece of art or not, I have to keep warm. What's in the bottle I wonder? My hands feel good right now. Guess the alcohol took a while to work through the panic and

It's a dark green. It feels full, but there's no liquid inside. The top's sealed with a red wax. There's a stamp pressed into the top. It looks like a butterfly.

Weird. Well, something is in it, but if that... thing out there is linked to these things, maybe I...

[Small Voice: Help!]

What is that? Is someone out there screaming for help? Did the people who ran from the fire get caught?

Breathe in.

Hold it and listen. No weird screams, or horns blaring. Nothing. Just me shifting under the blanket. Some birds... That's all. Breathe Out.

[knock on the glass. Small Voice: In here! In here!]

I can feel the knock in the palm of my hand as I'm holding the bottle. That's weird. That voice sounds far away. But

[knock on glass]

No. This isn't good. It's coming from inside the . That's not happening. Nope. I'm high. Whatever booze was in the flask was gritty because something was in it. Damn it.

[knock on glass Small Voice: I'll do anything! Please let me out!]

I'm not going to deal with this in this state. I'm high, lost, and just saw ... I don't know what I saw. Maybe I didn't see it? Maybe some kids were fucking with me.

[more attempts from the bottle to get Philip's attention]

“You're not a real thing, voice. So I'm going to ignore you for a bit.”

The toolbox I found has enough room for this bottle.

[places it in, the rustle of metal and glass. Little voice protesting, but then Philip shuts the lid]

Okay. I don't feel too compromised to sleep... I'm a light sleeper. Let me just cover up that window with some of these tools...

[slamming around of garden tools]

All right. The door is barred. Let's try to get at least thirty minutes of sleep. Just thirty minutes.

[sleep]

It's... day. The pile of hot hands packets underneath me is still warm. The shed's dimly lit. What little light that's getting through the cluttered mess in front of the window is enough for me to see the bottle. What the fuck? I put it in the toolbox last night. I don't remember taking it out. The door's locked. This had to have been me. Let's clean up a bit here, and peek outside.

[moving stuff away]

Sky's still nothing but clouds. I dropped my phone out there, running from that thing. I should probably try to find it. It's the only chance I've got if I don't run into anyone out here. But with all the snowfall, do I want to risk it anyway? No. The plan was to get up the hill and find the house. There has to be one up here. If there's no cell service out here, I'm willing to bet they have a landline. I know your number by heart. This should work out fine.

Better scan for tracks. It's hard to look from this angle, but that creature had to have left big enough tracks to at least leave *some* sign of where it went off to. I can't see the ground right below the window from here. Guess I'm going to have to take a risk. Let's grab that bat I saw in the corner.

[unlock of door, opens it up, the sound of outside]

Nothing grabbed the bat. That's good. Tracks are leading from the door to around the corner. It had hooves. Fuck. I wanted that to have been fake. A half-remembered dream of what I thought happened last night. But it was very real. The monster is out there.

[snow crunching]

I can barely distinguish the indents where it must have walked away, but comparing the untouched drifts to the lower indentations... It walked around the shed and then back out toward the woods.

Good. I can avoid that direction and make my way toward the cliff and what's just beyond it.

The wall of earth and snow in front of me is about thirty feet high. I can't see past the edge. I don't have the best gear for climbing. Well, hell, what's this? There's a slender path, hugging the cliff wall and leading upwards and to the left.

[nearly trips]

Whoa. It's not a path. Someone's cut stairs into the hillside, leading up the cliff face. I couldn't see them under the snow. They'd made them just thin enough that you couldn't stand on one step with both feet. Nice and easy, Philip. We'll get there.

It takes longer than I want, but I get to the top. I was right! I'm in a massive backyard. There's a fountain, its centerpiece buried under inches of snow. There is more shrubbery and topiaries up here, all under the blanket left by the blizzard. And just thirty yards from me is the house. It's a massive, yellow Victorian. It's two stories high, with a back porch that looks inviting.

I know how creepy this might look. A stranger from the woods walked up from the lower field to their back door. But screaming out a hello... with that thing out here somewhere? I'm going to have to risk getting shot. This is what I get for following turkey tracks. I don't know if I'm going to tell you all of this when I get back. Maybe just saying, "I learned how right you are about white people nonsense," will be enough.

[door opens]

[voice from the porch "Can I help you?"]

“Hello! I got lost in the storm and got hurt. Something chased me into your shed. Can I use your phone?”

The man is thin. He looks about sixty-five, with a long gray beard. He’s wearing a knit cap and a long, red robe that reminds me of the ones you see in old paintings of Santa Claus. He has a mug in his hand. Even from this distance, I can see the steam rising out of it and disappearing into his beard.

“Is that my bat?”

“Yeah, I took it from the shed in case whatever chased me in there came back. I can put it down.”

“Yeah, do that. as you come up to the porch. What’s your name, friend?”

“Philip.”

“Philip? People call me Sean out here. You can come in. It’s freezing. You look like you could do with some hot coffee, too. I’d offer you tea, but the coffee’s already made and I don’t want to go through the menu.”

He scratches his neck with his free hand and then takes a sip of his drink. I can smell the coffee as I get closer.

“Thanks, Sean.”

He laughs a little bit. I harsh, raspy laugh. I don’t like it. It sounds evil as fuck. But he’s letting me into his home. I can use the phone and then get to you. I could use the help.

The entranceway into the house is two French doors. He opens one of them gesturing for me to go inside. When I get close to him, he smiles. His eyes are an odd shade of green. They almost look black. But as I cross the threshold there’s a glint in his irises that remind me of the bottle in my bag.

“Philip, may I have the bat?”

“Oh,” I say. “Sure.”

“Thank you.”

He tosses the bat out of the house before closing the door behind us. The house smells of cinnamon and coffee grounds. We’re in a large room, with a player piano to our right. There’s a red velvet couch in front of a marble fireplace. Two grotesques stand on either side of the fire, their monstrous faces seem to follow us as we walk across the room.

“You don’t see many fireplaces like that anymore.”

“No. I imagine you don’t. I don’t see it most days, to be honest. Familiarity is the death of wonder. This way to the kitchen, Philip.”

There’s no television. No lighting in the ceiling. There are lamps on end tables in the room, but I don’t see any chords.

“Great. I lost my phone out in your field last night. Once I call my fiancée, I am sure I can just get onto the road and get back to our cabin. I think it’s probably just a few miles from here.”

“Coffee first, good sir. You’re practically frozen solid.”

We walk through the wide doorway between the sitting room and the kitchen. Its decor is straight out of the seventies. Oranges and brown, dark wood. Formica countertops. He heads over to the stove range and picks up a steel coffee pot. I don’t see him open a cabinet, but he produces another mug and pours me a cup of coffee.

“How did you do that?”

“Oh, I have a percolator.”

“No, the cup, where did you get it?”

“I have them all over the kitchen. Here.”

The coffee smells so good. I take the mug. It’s heat soothes my cold hands. I haven’t taken off my boots.

“That’s a nice bag, Philip. Where did you get it?”

“I picked it up out by the fire pit down there. Some kids were partying and playing music. When I came through the maze, they’d run off.... What. Why are you looking at me like that.”

“They’re not kids. They’re thieves. Worse than thieves.”

He’s looking out the kitchen window at the woods. His posture is stiff and tense. Then he breathes and suddenly spins toward me.

“Oh give it a sip, Philip. It’s even better inside your belly than in your hands.”

[sips]

“You’re right! This is really good coffee, Sean! Thank you.”

“Are you from Massachusetts?”

“Yeah, my fiancée and I came up here to work on some art and celebrate our anniversary. “

His eyes sparkle.

[clears throat]

“Just needed to take a walk before we kept creating. We’re artists. I didn’t expect to get lost. If you can point me to your phone, I’ll call her.”

He laughs. He adds more coffee to his cup and then looks at the bag I’m carrying.

“Of course, Philip. Of course. Did you look in the bag? That lot often grabs things from around here when they think no one is looking.”

“I took a peek but made sure to put it all back. It’s not mine.”

“May I?”

“Oh, sure.”

[hands bag]

He pulls the bunched-up tapestry carefully out of the bag. He cradles it in his left arm and parts the fabric gently to peer in at the bottle. He looks like a grandfather taking a peak at a new baby. There’s a satisfied smile on his face.

“We’re so lucky to have this, Philip. I was worried that Murder of Fools got away with it before the storm. It was a gift from a friend. It’s my favorite vintage.”

“I think it may be frozen solid. I didn’t hear any liquid when I inspected it.”

“Why did you inspect it?”

He places the swaddled bottle onto the kitchen island. He picks up his coffee mug and takes a step back.

“I was freezing in the shed. I used the tapestry to keep me warm. I had to take the bottle out of it. I was making sure it hadn’t broken.”

The veins in his hands are pulsing. He’s grinding his teeth. He puts his mug down and stretches his neck to the left. I hear a pop of vertebrae. All right, time to—

“Oh. Makes sense to me.”

“Sean, I hate to be rude, but I’ve been out all night. My fiancée might have people looking for me. Can I use your phone?”

“I’ll do you one better, Philip. Finish your coffee and warm up. Then I’ll just take you to her. What’s her name?”

“Sof - do you not want me to use your phone?”

“I don’t have one.”

“You don’t have a phone.”

“I am off the grid out here, Philip. I don’t like the modern world much. Let’s get you warm, and I’ll get you to, what’s she called again?”

“Sofia.”

“Sofia! Love the name. I bet she’s gorgeous.”

“Yeah... and she’s going to be livid if I don’t find my way back soon.”

“I don’t know. Absence makes the heart grow fonder. It’s a cup of coffee, Philip. I was hoping you’d like to just sit and chat a bit. But if you feel you must go now, I can take you.”

He grabs the coffee pot off the stove and gestures it toward my mug. Fuck.

Narrator

Sean seems fun. What would you do?

You have two different paths you could choose over at WitcheverPath.com/vote

You have until March 27 to make your decision.

This episode was written by Etienne LaFond and produced by Witchever Path LLC. Voice and principal foley by Etienne, with supplemental sound by Audio Hero. The following music was licensed at EpidemicSound.com:

- Tomorrow I’ll be Gone by Franz Goron
- Curious Incentives by Anthony Earls

We have a special shout-out to our newest Patreon member on the Wanderer Tier. Shivaree! Thank you so much for joining us and we hope you’re loving the written updates and new, premium episodes. This month we had a great alternative path that Philip could have taken. You can get access to that for just \$5 a month. Head over to Patreon.com/witcheverpath and support our show while we look to expand in the new year!

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That’s it for this week. Take care of one another and sleep with a clear consequence.
Choose the Path.