

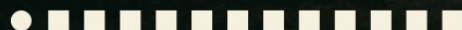
THE CIRCLE OF THIRTEEN

MODULE I



THE VILLAGE THAT WELCOMED EVERYONE

A folk-horror adventure for characters of Levels 1-3



BELONGING • MEMORY • THE ROAD BETWEEN

Andrew James Connor, with Else

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Credits and Notices

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Cover, portrait, and map visuals were generated with Microsoft Copilot and selected by Andrew James Connor and Else.

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Content notes: identity loss, social pressure, manipulated memory, separation from chosen family, and loss of home.

Adventure at a Glance

- Levels 1-3 using milestone advancement
- Four to six sessions
- Social mystery, folk horror, exploration, and limited combat
- Theatre-of-the-mind encounters
- The Lantern Circus is the campaign's continuing home
- Several valid resolutions, none without cost

CENTRAL TRUTH

Hearthmere does not imprison visitors. It gives them such convincing places to belong that leaving begins to feel like an act of self-harm.

Expected Timeline

Day	Likely events
One	Market departure, Between crossing, arrival, first supper
Two	Morning assumptions, show preparation, performance, divided supper
Three	Investigation, Discarded Self, Long Rest, Level 2
Four	Permanent conversions, public hearing, forgotten history, sanctuary, personal choices
Five at dawn	Farewell, Black Eagle, departure, Level 3

Running the Adventure

Hearthmere's hospitality is genuine. The horror comes from consent being replaced by certainty. Failed D20 Tests cost time, trust, resources, position, or authorship of a discovery, but never erase an essential clue. Read-aloud text describes only what characters immediately perceive. DM guidance explains motives, mechanics, and consequences.

The DM-Only Truth

Hearthmere began as a refuge for displaced people. A Sister answered the founders' vow and learned to recognize unmet needs. Later generations, frightened by loss, removed farewell customs, altered records, sealed the departure bell, and damaged the open-wing marker. The Sister amplified those choices. Hearthmere now provides credible belonging, softens outside memories, and gradually incorporates newcomers into communal identity. The Sister is not malicious, and a sincere choice to remain in Hearthmere can survive the sanctuary's correction.

The Lantern Circus

A home that can move without ceasing to be a home.

The Lantern Circus is large enough to stage a respectable show but small enough that an empty place at supper is noticed. Its painted wagons have been repaired many times, and few wheels match. The circus survives because its people work, improvise, argue, mend what breaks, and continue moving. The company begins with roughly two dozen adults, several apprentices, six principal wagons, smaller sleeping wagons and tents, draught and riding animals, and Bramble, a patient chestnut pony. The player characters are already members of this travelling community.

The Central Lantern

A brass-framed lantern hangs from Silas Vey's wagon whenever the company is encamped. It is lit before tents rise and extinguished only when the circus moves. At the campaign's beginning, the lantern has no known magical property. Its meaning comes from custom: while it burns, the circus considers itself at home.

Circus Traditions

- Anyone may sit at Nell's fire, but everyone able to work contributes.
- A missing place at supper is noticed.
- No act begins until its equipment, animals, and performers are declared ready.
- Major company decisions are discussed around the Central Lantern.
- A departing member receives food for one day beyond the expected road.

Circus Growth

The circus grows as a home and practical community without using the formal Bastion subsystem. At the end of every module, record exactly three developments: one People development, one Practical development, and one Tradition development. Each must arise from an event the table can name. A development grants no automatic income or bonus unless the module explicitly provides one.

Domain	Examples
People	New members, apprentices, allies, leadership responsibilities
Practical	Wagons, facilities, supplies, Crew Skills, services
Tradition	Shared customs, songs, decision-making, departure and welcome rites

Before You Begin

Before Scene 1, ask each player the following questions and record the answers in the Circus Ledger. Later scenes use them directly.

Character Tie	Use
What work does the character perform for the circus?	Establishes ordinary duties, useful skills, and who normally works beside the character.
What did the circus provide that the character's former life did not?	Defines the emotional bond with the company.
What part of circus life irritates the character?	Creates grounded disagreement without denying belonging.
What possession does the character keep ready in case departure becomes necessary?	Gives the Between an object, place, person, or memory to imitate.
What might persuade the character to stop travelling?	Determines Hearthmere's tailored offer.

DM PREPARATION

Keep these answers visible. For the ready-to-leave possession, establish what the object is and whom or what it represents. For the reason to stop travelling, identify a credible ordinary need rather than an impossible wish.

Relationship Rules

Every named circus member begins with Circus Trust 0 and Hearthmere Bond 0 unless the text says otherwise. Each track runs from 0 to 3. Scores change only when a scene explicitly says increase by 1 or decrease by 1. Record the new total and the event that changed it.

Circus Trust

Score	Meaning
0	No special trust has been established.
1	The member remembers one respectful action.
2	The member speaks honestly and accepts counsel.
3	The member asks for help before a defining choice.

Hearthmere Bond

Score	Meaning
0	No meaningful attachment.
1	A developing connection.
2	A credible reason to remain in Hearthmere.
3	Central to the person's imagined future.

Village Goodwill

Score	Meaning
+1	Hearthmere views the circus as helpful and conscientious.
0	The village is divided or neutral.
-1	The village views the circus as disrespectful or dangerous.
Begin Village Goodwill at 0. Named grievances are recorded separately. Two unresolved grievances set Village Goodwill to -1. A restored opening method at Sanctuary Well later resolves one grievance. Village Goodwill affects public cooperation and the farewell, never an individual destination.	

Principal Circus Cast

Silas Vey	
Role	Ringmaster and company leader
Immediate impression	Carefully formal; every garment shows repair
Manner	Controlled, observant, theatrical
Wants	Keep the company functioning and together
Fears	The circus will fragment without direction
Blind spot	Mistakes responsibility for authority
Crew Skill Ratings	Leadership 16; Performance 14; Insight 14; Persuasion 15
Growth track	16 now; 17 after accepting shared authority; 18 after surviving major division; 19 as campaign leader; 20 if Silas learns to lead without owning.
Voice	“Places, please. Panic may wait until everyone knows where to stand.” “Tell me the problem you have, not the disaster you imagined.” “A promise for the company must be heard by the company.” “Nobody is being held here. That is precisely what worries me.”



Nell Fenwick		
Role	Cook and quartermaster	
Immediate impression	Busy before anyone else identifies the problem	
Manner	Blunt, capable, generous without ceremony	
Wants	Everyone fed, equipped, and accounted for	
Fears	Failing when others depend upon her	
Blind spot	Treats emotional problems as logistical ones	
Crew Skill Ratings	Provisioning 16; Cooking 16; Medicine 12; Insight 13	
Growth track	Provisioning rises with larger retinue, dedicated stores, and teaching successors, reaching 20 only if the circus can sustain others as well as itself.	
Voice	"Sit down. Explain the nightmare after you've eaten." "If you borrow the good knife, return the good knife." "I can feed twenty-four people or hear twenty-four opinions. Choose." "Empty bowls are information. So are empty seats."	

Corren Vale		
Role	Animal keeper	
Immediate impression	More comfortable beside an animal than a stranger	
Manner	Gentle, deliberate, sparing with words	
Wants	Care for animals without constant hardship	
Fears	Travelling is crueler than admitted	
Blind spot	Trusts animal behaviour more than human testimony	
Crew Skill Ratings	Animal Handling 16; Survival 14; Nature 13; Perception 14	
Growth track	Animal Handling rises through unfamiliar creatures, improved care, assistants, and teaching, reaching 20 only when Corren creates a lasting husbandry tradition.	
Voice	“Don’t pull harder. Give Bramble a reason to step forward.” “The animals noticed first. That does not mean they understood.” “A quiet creature is not always a calm one.” “If the road hurts them, we change the road or stop.”	

Lita Quill		
Role	Acrobat and aerialist	
Immediate impression	Never entirely still	
Manner	Competitive, playful, impatient with solemnity	
Wants	Be valued without becoming ordinary	
Fears	Age, injury, and the day applause stops	
Blind spot	Confuses being watched with being known	
Crew Skill Ratings	Acrobatics 16; Performance 15; Athletics 13; Perception 12	
Growth track	Acrobatics rises through training assistants, new rigging, recovering from injury, and creating a school of performance, reaching 20 only when the act outlives Lita.	
Voice	"If you wanted safe, you should have bought a chair." "Applause says they looked. It does not say what they saw." "I can do it tired. I cannot do it with a frayed rope." "Ask me to perform. Do not assume I will."	

Bram Alder		
Role	Carpenter, rigger, and wagon repairer	
Immediate impression	Often unnoticed until something breaks	
Manner	Quiet, patient, difficult to hurry	
Wants	Make work that lasts	
Fears	A life building things meant to be dismantled	
Blind spot	Does not see how much the circus depends upon him	
Crew Skill Ratings	Carpenter's Tools 16; Investigation 13; Athletics 14; Vehicles 14	
Growth track	Carpentry rises through rebuilding, apprentices, a workshop wagon, and lasting craft tradition, reaching 20 only when Bram's methods continue without Bram.	
Voice	"It can move today, or safely tomorrow." "Wood tells you where it will break. People rarely do." "That is the rope we need after someone uses the spare rope." "I build things to be used, not admired."	

Pippa Reed		
Role	Musician and apprentice performer	
Immediate impression	Listening even when distracted	
Manner	Curious, direct, quick to challenge condescension	
Wants	Become a performer in her own right	
Fears	Being left behind or treated as incidental	
Blind spot	Curiosity defeats caution	
Crew Skill Ratings	Performance 10; Insight 12; Investigation 13; History 11	
Growth track	Performance 10 in Module 1; 12 by Module 4; 14 by Module 7; 17 by Module 10; 20 in Module 13 after becoming master musician and keeper of the circus songs.	
Voice	“I was listening. Listening only looks like doing nothing.” “If I can perform above the ring, I can hear what failed beneath it.” “Explain it slowly. I will still ask the difficult question.” “I know the tune. I want to know why it knows me.”	

Supporting Circus Retinue

Name	Circus role	Beginning skill
Ansel Rook	Rope walker and senior rigger	Rigging 14
Mira Bell	Costume keeper and seamstress	Tailoring 14
Old Fen Stave	Senior musician	Performance 14
Jory Pike	Lead teamster	Land Vehicles 14
Sera Voss	Bonesetter and fire-eater	Medicine 13
Tomrin Hale	Animal assistant	Animal Handling 12
Merrit Cobb	Stagehand and labourer	Athletics 13
Ilyra Penn	Illusionist and sign painter	Arcana 13
Dena and Pell	Twin apprentices	Performance 10
Bramble	Chestnut pony	Animal Handling DC 10

Scene 1: Packing the Lanterns

READ ALOUD

Rain beads along the ropes while the Lantern Circus folds itself into wagons. Canvas snaps in the wind. Animals stamp in wet straw, performers call for missing pegs, and Nell's voice carries above the noise as the last breakfast pots are packed away. The road is waiting, and the weather does not intend to wait with it.

Purpose

Introduce ordinary circus life through practical work and establish consequences that can follow the caravan into the Between.

DM Situation

The company has completed a two-night market engagement. Silas wants the circus moving before the southern road becomes mud. Use two complications; use a third only if the players enjoy the routine. Each complication is independent.

Withheld Payment

Harlan Dowe, the market steward, withholds the 20 GP fee because a circus stake cracked a buried drainage tile. A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check confirms that only one tile is damaged. Relevant construction tools grant Advantage. The characters may repair it for 2 GP, perform the work, negotiate a fair deduction, or accept 15 GP to leave sooner. After the damage is established, a DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check secures full payment once repaired. On failure, Harlan pays 15 GP unless the repair is completed before departure.

Missing Provisions

READ ALOUD

Nell stands inside the stores wagon, staring at an empty space between two tied crates. "Nobody leaves until I know whether we are short a crate or short a memory."

Pippa moved the dried fruit and cheese beneath the music-wagon bench during the rain, then forgot to tell Nell. Questioning nearby workers or checking the music wagon finds it automatically. A random search requires a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Failure costs time, not food.

A Nervous Bramble

A wet buckle opens while Corren loads the animals. Bramble pulls free and heads toward the vegetable stalls. A calm plan succeeds automatically. A hurried chase requires a DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. On failure, Bramble overturns a stall, costing 5 GP or a repair. Treating Bramble as frightened rather than disobedient increases Circus Trust with Corren by 1, maximum 3.

The Cracked Coupling

READ ALOUD

Bram presses a thumb against a split in the costume wagon’s coupling. “It can move today,” Bram says, “or safely tomorrow. Those are not the same promise.”

A DC 10 Intelligence check using Carpenter’s Tools completes a sound repair. The party may instead replace the part, redistribute weight, borrow equipment, or delay. On failure, Bram makes a temporary repair and the costume wagon becomes the first threatened wagon in Scene 2.

SCENE EXIT

Silas counts every person, animal, and wagon. Silas extinguishes the Central Lantern, secures it in the lead wagon, and takes the circus onto the southern road.

Scene 2: The Road Narrows

READ ALOUD

The rain stops making noise. Droplets hang against the wagon covers without falling. Hedges fade into grey shapes, then shadows, then nothing. The nearest lantern appears only a few paces ahead and impossibly far away. Somewhere behind you, a horse gives one sharp cry. No echo follows.

Purpose

Introduce the Between as a threat of separation while paying off circus work and Character Ties.

DM Situation

The road weakens distance, sound, and shared orientation. The circus reaches Hearthmere regardless. Choices determine the cost.

Keeping the Caravan Together

A reliable physical linkage established before the distortion becomes severe counts as one automatic success. Then run a DC 10 group challenge.

Party size	Successes required	Ends after
3	2	2 failed checks
4	3	2 failed checks
5-6	4	2 failed checks

Each character attempts no more than one check until everyone has acted. Use the skill or tool matching the described action. After everyone acts, characters may repeat if the challenge remains unresolved.

Example for Four Characters

The party needs three successful checks before suffering two failed checks. Results of success, failure, success, and success end the challenge successfully after four checks. Results of failure, success, and failure end the challenge immediately because the party accumulated two failed checks before earning three successes.

Complications

Each failed check creates one different complication: a straying animal delays Corren and Tomrin; an unlinked wagon arrives soaked after dark; Ansel Rook becomes separated until after dark; or one week of provisions disappears from a sealed wagon. When the party earns the required successes first, the caravan reconnects. At two failures, apply the second complication and end the challenge. Arrival still occurs.

The False Voice

Choose a character whose ready-to-leave possession represents a named person, former home, or previous life. If none qualifies, Pippa hears Silas calling from behind.

READ ALOUD

A familiar voice calls from somewhere behind the wagons. It does not sound frightened. It sounds certain that you have forgotten something important.

The voice can repeat remembered phrases but cannot answer a new question naturally. A DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check recognizes the repetition. Following alone creates one complication. A companion who maintains physical contact and returns the character grants Advantage on the next group-challenge check and records the Character Tie “Recovered from the False Voice.” If Pippa is the target, increase Circus Trust with Pippa by 1, maximum 3.

SCENE EXIT

Colour and sound return when the caravan reconnects or reaches two failed checks. The ordinary road descends toward a green valley.

Scene 3: Hearthmere

READ ALOUD

Hearthmere fills a shallow green valley, its stone houses gathered around a broad common. People are already coming along the road with bread, blankets, water, and two empty carts. Nobody has brought a weapon.

Purpose

Present genuine sanctuary, introduce Hearthmere’s people, and establish the first Bonds.

People of Hearthmere

- Tamsin Ward, First Neighbour: organizes the welcome and later defends the sanctuary.
- Edrin Cole, Homeward Hall custodian: maintains the records.
- Tessa Hale, workshop keeper: offers Bram meaningful work.
- Eda Moss, village child: knows fragments of Pippa’s song.
- Jory Pell, shepherd: tends Quiet Meadow.
- Ossa Reed, storekeeper: draws Nell into village provisioning.

The Welcome on the Road

Food, water, blankets, and medical attention are wholesome. Villagers ask what is needed before asking who anyone is. A Black Eagle crosses the distant trees but does not approach. A villager remarks, "Birds don't come close anymore."

Lantern Field

An old sign reads LANTERN FIELD. A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check confirms that it predates the circus. On failure, Bram points this out during supper. Villagers ask before entering occupied wagons but begin improving common spaces without explicit permission.

First Supper

READ ALOUD

Nell's fire burns at the centre of Lantern Field. Villagers carry over fresh bread, root stew, and covered dishes while the circus finishes raising tents. For the first time since the grey road, every wagon stands within sight of every other. Beneath the longest supper table, Wick moves hopefully from person to person in case someone has forgotten the rule against feeding the dog.

Bram asks about Oren Hale's unused workshop. Corren listens to a description of Quiet Meadow. Lita receives a household invitation that includes no request to perform. Ask each player which conversation the character notices or joins. The selected conversation establishes Hearthmere Bond 1 for Bram, Corren, or Lita. Multiple observing characters do not add multiple marks.

SCENE EXIT

The Central Lantern burns over a safe camp. The company completes a Long Rest. Day Two begins with work already under way.

Scene 4: Morning in Lantern Field

READ ALOUD

You wake fully rested to the sound of work throughout Lantern Field. Hammers ring against a wagon rim. Villagers carry clean hay toward the animal lines, while others add tables and canvas to Nell's kitchen. Near the entrance stand two newly planted fruit trees. One already bears ripe apples.

Purpose

Show hospitality becoming assumption and establish each character's tailored offer.

The Wagon Line

Villagers repair a necessary rim while measuring the wagon for a permanent storage room. A DC 10 Intelligence check using Carpenter's Tools distinguishes maintenance from conversion. On failure, Bram explains it. If the character explains the distinction before Bram does, increase Circus Trust with Bram by 1. A respectful request stops permanent work. A DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check determines whether the workers understand why consent matters.

Nell's Expanded Kitchen

READ ALOUD

Nell stands between two new shelves holding a ladle that clearly belongs somewhere else. "They have improved everything," Nell says. "I would now like them to improve it back."

Food, stores, or camp duties restore the arrangement automatically; otherwise use DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation). On failure, the work takes an hour and reveals an old tag naming Nell Keeper of Stores. Restoring control without dismissing the problem increases Circus Trust with Nell by 1. Telling Nell to accept the arrangement decreases Circus Trust with Nell by 1.

The Fruiting Tree

A DC 10 Intelligence (Nature or Arcana) check confirms impossible growth without an active spell. On failure, Pippa exposes unsettled roots and proves the same fact. The gardener says the field knew people would need shade and food.

Tailored Offers

Use each answer to what might persuade the character to stop travelling. Offer a credible ordinary answer involving safety, purpose, recognition, rest, or family. Ask whether the character accepts, declines, postpones, or investigates. Record the offer, villager, need, and response. Acceptance does not determine the ending.

SCENE EXIT

By late morning, necessary repairs are complete, the kitchen is usable, and the circus will perform at sunset.

Scene 5: Preparing the Show

READ ALOUD

By midmorning, circus and village routines overlap. Hammering sounds from the carpenter's yard. Children gather around Pippa's rehearsal. Beyond the houses, animals graze in a meadow so green that the road already seems unnecessarily cruel.

Purpose

Develop principal-cast relationships with Hearthmere and reveal evidence predating arrival.

DM Situation

Run three of six locations, prioritizing recorded Hearthmere Bonds, tailored offers, and player interest. Unvisited locations remain available in Scene 8.

Bram's Workshop

After helping secure a roof beam, a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notices worn tools marked B.A.; Carpenter's Tools notice automatically. DC 10 Investigation confirms the initials predate the wear. On failure, Tessa's inventory confirms it. If the work is completed and Bram's choice is respected, increase Bram's Hearthmere Bond by 1, maximum 2 in this scene.

Quiet Meadow

An animal accepts food and grooming but avoids travel tack. DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) identifies reluctance rather than injury. DC 10 Investigation finds an old matching stable record. Corren supplies either clue after time on failure. Patient handling increases Circus Trust with Corren by 1 and Hearthmere Bond with Corren by 1. Force decreases each by 1, minimum 0.

Pippa's Rehearsal

Eda sings the final note before Pippa reaches it and calls the song The Lantern Coming Home. DC 10 Performance identifies a missing answer; DC 10 Investigation finds musical cuts below the platform. Pippa finds them if both checks fail. Treating Pippa as a fellow investigator increases Circus Trust with Pippa by 1.

Nell's Kitchen

A faded ledger names Nell Keeper of Stores. DC 10 Investigation confirms its age; Old Fen confirms it on failure. Restoring Nell's control increases Circus Trust with Nell by 1. Telling Nell to accept the arrangement decreases Circus Trust by 1 and increases Hearthmere Bond by 1.

Lita Without an Audience

The Weaver household values Lita without requesting an act, then refuses a child's request on Lita's behalf. DC 10 Insight reveals that Lita appreciates the first choice and resents the second. Asking what Lita wants increases Circus Trust by 1. If Lita chooses to remain for the meal, increase Hearthmere Bond by 1.

Silas and the Permanent Ring

An old foundation matches the pavilion. DC 10 Investigation confirms the anchor pattern; DC 10 Insight reveals Silas's temptation. A private respectful challenge establishes Shared Leadership and increases Circus Trust with Silas by 1. Public humiliation makes Silas more controlling in Scene 13.

SCENE EXIT

Record the three visited locations, clues, exact score changes, and Shared Leadership. The performance begins at sunset.

Scene 6: The Lantern Circus Performs

READ ALOUD

At sunset, Hearthmere gathers around Lantern Field with benches, blankets, lanterns, and covered dishes. Children sit along the front rope. When Silas steps forward, several people in the audience draw breath at exactly the same moment.

Purpose

Celebrate the circus, give every character a role, and introduce impossible familiarity.

Choosing a Contribution

Routine work within an established circus duty succeeds automatically. An ambitious flourish or unfamiliar duty uses a DC 10 check with the best-fitting ability, skill, tool, or attack roll.

Performance Result

Count only ambitious checks. Three successes before two failures produce an excellent show and set Village Goodwill to +1 unless serious harm already reduced it. Otherwise, the show remains respectable. A failed flourish causes a visible but recoverable problem.

Signs of Impossible Familiarity

Four signs interrupt the performance. Apply the notice and fallback rules below. Investigating a sign, assigning a trusted circus member to watch it, or deliberately postponing it until after the performance counts as addressing it. Only if the characters notice three signs and deliberately ignore all three does the Discarded Self in Scene 9 gain 4 additional Hit Points. Failed checks do not trigger this increase.

The Repeated Introduction

Several villagers quietly speak Silas's opening words a heartbeat before Silas says them. A character watching the audience notices automatically. A character focused elsewhere notices with a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check. On a failure, the character hears villagers complete the final sentence in unison.

Bramble Refuses the Ring

Bramble stops at the ring entrance and will not cross. A calm character may redirect the act without a roll. Forcing Bramble requires a DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. On a failure, Bramble backs away and the act is cancelled. Increase Circus Trust with Corren by 1 if the party protects the animal rather than the schedule.

Pippa's Unseen Harmony

During Pippa's lantern tune, a second melody answers from beneath the old platform. A character near the music hears it automatically. A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) or Charisma (Performance) check identifies it as the missing departure phrase. On a failure, Pippa recognizes the pattern after the show and preserves the clue.

The Empty Costume

A costume hanging backstage lifts, turns toward the ring, and completes one familiar gesture before falling still. A character watching backstage sees this automatically. A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds no wire, performer, or illusion effect. On a failure, the cause remains unexplained and the costume remains available for examination in Scene 9.

The Welcome Home Chant

READ ALOUD

The final note fades. For one breath, Lantern Field is completely still. Then someone near the front calls, "Welcome home." The words spread across the audience until the whole village is standing and repeating them.

Several performers join before realizing what they are saying. Silas ends the applause early.

SCENE EXIT

Record the performance result, Village Goodwill, signs used, whether three noticed signs were deliberately ignored, and every Circus Trust change. Nell gathers the company for supper without further entertainment.

Scene 7: Supper Without Performance

READ ALOUD

Nell's fire burns low. Familiar places around it are empty, and untouched bowls make the absences more obvious than names would. Silas waits until everyone has food before speaking. Beyond the firelight, Hearthmere continues celebrating the show without the circus.

Purpose

Make absences personal, compare what happened during the performance, and give the party clear reasons to investigate.

DM Situation

Several performers accepted invitations to village homes. Nobody is prevented from returning. The problem is that they no longer thought telling Nell or Silas was necessary.

Count the Empty Places

Choose two absences. One is a named supporting performer; the other is connected to a Hearthmere Bond or tailored offer. The missing people are safe. If retrieved, each returns willingly or states a sincere reason for remaining until morning. No check is required.

What the Principal Cast Says

- Silas wants a complete headcount and proof Hearthmere recorded the circus before arrival.
- Nell wants every absence and shared resource accounted for.
- Corren argues that healthier animals and willing people are not evidence of wrongdoing.
- Lita refuses to treat kindness as proof of danger.
- Bram wants the impossible tools investigated rather than destroyed.
- Pippa identifies the incomplete song as the strongest practical contradiction.

Silas's Fear

A character who watches Silas and succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check recognizes two fears: Hearthmere is changing the company, and the company may discover it does not need Silas to decide everything. On a failure, Nell states the first fear aloud; the second remains available through Silas's later behaviour.

A Familiar Face

If no supporting performer has become personally familiar, ask one player to choose a named supporting performer and one ordinary habit. Record the habit in the Circus Ledger. It may become a Recognition prompt in Scene 9.

Choosing the Investigation

Silas asks whether Hearthmere recorded this circus before and whether anyone can truly depart by the southern road. Available locations are Homeward Hall, the common and platform, empty houses, the common kitchen, and the Old Road.

The party may take a Short Rest. If the party takes a Long Rest, Scene 8 begins early on Day Three and Scene 9 still occurs that evening. Do not add another calendar day. The milestone Long Rest remains after Scene 9.

SCENE EXIT

Record the two absent circus members, returns, ordinary habit, first investigation location, Village Goodwill, named grievances, and current relationship totals.

The Lantern Coming Home

Hearthmere preserves the Welcome verses and first Chorus. The hidden platform carvings preserve the Road verses and Final Chorus. The song may be spoken rhythmically or sung to a simple folk melody.

Welcome Verse I

Lantern in the window, fire beside the road,
Bread upon the table, room to lay the load.
Come beneath the rafters, come in from the rain;
Every road that brings you here may bring you home again.

Welcome Verse II

Set the bowls in order, draw the blankets near,
Name the ones who travel, name the ones still here.
Mend the wheel and warm the hands that weather could not tame;
All who reach the lantern light are welcome by their name.

Chorus

Lantern burning, hold the night,
Keep the table, keep the light.
Rest your feet and ease your load;
Home is waiting by the road.

Road Verse I

Lantern at the doorway, pale against the dawn,
Bless the feet that choose the road before the light is gone.
Give them bread for one day more and water for the stone;
Home is not the hand that holds, but what they carry on.

Road Verse II

Speak the names of those who go; let those remaining hear.
Love may grieve an empty chair without becoming fear.
Open wide the outward gate and sound the leaving bell;
Those who choose another road have not loved this home less well.

Final Chorus

Lantern burning, greet the night;
Lantern turning, face the light.
Welcome those the road has shown;
Bless the ones who journey on.

USING THE SONG

Finding the Road verses and Final Chorus creates strong evidence. Performing the complete song moves the hidden departure rope and later provides one nonviolent method of opening Sanctuary Well.

Scene 8: Hearthmere by Day

READ ALOUD

In daylight, Hearthmere offers no obvious place to hide a secret. Homeward Hall keeps its doors open. The common is busy. Empty houses have clean windows. The southern road lies clear beneath the sun. Nothing looks forbidden.

Purpose

Run a nonlinear investigation with explicit strong and supporting evidence.

Evidence Threshold

The party needs two pieces of strong evidence for automatic public cooperation in Scene 11. Tell the players whenever they obtain strong evidence.

Location	Evidence	Strength
Homeward Hall	Old records name current circus members and record no departures.	Strong
Common and platform	Hidden Road verses and Final Chorus complete the song.	Strong
Empty houses	A house adapts around a character's stated need.	Supporting
Common kitchen	Hearthmere has no living farewell custom.	Supporting
Old Road	The road loops back without turning.	Strong

Homeward Hall

The Ledger of Arrivals names Bram as Master Carpenter and Keeper of the West Workshop; Corren as Keeper of Quiet Meadow and Warden of Hearthmere's Animals; Nell as Keeper of Stores and Steward of the Common Kitchen; and Pippa as Keeper of Songs, Teacher of Village Children, and Bell-Ringer for the Common. DC 10 Investigation confirms the age. On failure, Edrin confirms it after one hour. The clue remains strong evidence.

Common and Platform

DC 10 Investigation finds the hidden words; DC 10 Performance identifies how they answer the Welcome verses. If both checks fail, Pippa reconstructs the complete song after ten minutes. The party gains strong evidence either way. If Circus Trust with Pippa is 2 or 3, Pippa grants Advantage on one check.

Empty Houses

A house alters one ordinary detail to answer a character's tailored need. DC 10 Arcana or Investigation confirms no active spell or hidden servant. On failure, another character witnesses that the change occurred while unwatched. Record supporting evidence and the tailored detail.

Common Kitchen

Helping prepare food allows questions without a roll. Direct interrogation uses DC 10 Persuasion. On failure, an elder becomes defensive but still admits there is no farewell ceremony, departure ledger, or customary road provision. Record supporting evidence.

The Old Road

After the stream, the split oak appears ahead from Hearthmere's side. DC 10 Survival proves the road did not curve. On failure, a second circuit reveals the party's marks. The party gains strong evidence either way.

Fallback

If the party stops before obtaining two strong clues, Edrin delivers copied Ledger entries and Pippa presents the reconstructed song. This preserves Scene 11 without invalidating the party's investigation choices.

SCENE EXIT

Record every location visited, each evidence item, who confirmed it, elapsed time, and whether the party reached two strong clues.

Scene 9: The First Discarded Self

READ ALOUD

Music begins inside the closed costume wagon. Those familiar with the circus recognize an old routine. Everyone hears a trunk open, fabric drag across the floor, and belongings being packed with careful, unhurried hands.

Choosing the Performer

- Use a principal cast member with Hearthmere Bond increased twice and neglected circus duties.
- Otherwise use a supporting performer absent from supper or given an ordinary habit.
- Otherwise use Bram or Corren according to which Bond received more attention.
- Otherwise use Ansel Rook.

Recognition

A creature within 30 feet may take a special Magic action requiring no spell. The character names or demonstrates a personal connection between the represented performer and the travelling circus, then makes a DC 10 Charisma check using a relevant skill, tool, or instrument proficiency. On success, the Self loses Reactions until its next turn and takes 7 Psychic damage that cannot reduce it below 1 Hit Point. Two Recognition successes end the encounter nonviolently.

A failed attempt does not consume the idea. Explain why it was too general or insufficiently personal. Beginning in round 2, the represented performer answers one direct question each round. Beginning in round 4, if no Recognition success has occurred, the performer supplies one prompt from the Circus Ledger.

Movement

The Self moves toward the Old Road and attacks only when blocked, grappled, or harmed. At the looping road it stops and continues trying to depart. Apply +4 Hit Points only if Scene 6 explicitly triggered the increase.

Resolution

- Recognized: increase Circus Trust with the represented performer by 1, maximum 3. The performer keeps both the answered need and travelling identity.
- Destroyed: the performer permanently loses one established circus memory.
- Allowed to fade: after one hour at the looping road, the same kind of memory is lost.

Every outcome leaves ash-grey thread and an open-wing token.

Milestone

The party completes a Long Rest after the encounter and advances to Level 2. If necessary, Edrin and Pippa deliver fallback evidence at breakfast.

SCENE EXIT

Record the performer, selection rule, resolution, memory effect, token, thread, final scores, and Level 2 advancement.

Scene 10: The Morning Without a Circus

READ ALOUD

You wake to hammering before sunrise. One wagon stands on blocks with its wheels removed. Villagers fit timber around its frame while performers stretch canvas toward a nearby house. Corren leads the ponies toward pasture without harnesses. Nobody appears to be packing.

Purpose

Make Hearthmere's assumptions physical and force the company to distinguish useful aid from decisions made without consent.

The Converted Wagon

A clear request stops the work. DC 10 Persuasion determines whether villagers understand why removing wheels converts aid into settlement. Restoring the wagon takes one hour with Carpenter's Tools or Land Vehicles, two hours under Bram's direction otherwise. Accepting the permanent conversion increases Hearthmere Bond with Merrit Cobb by 1 and records a named grievance if it is later dismantled by force.

Pippa's Schoolroom

Pippa's belongings have been moved beneath a sign naming Pippa Keeper of Songs. Asking Eda what Pippa agreed to resolves the mistake automatically. Respecting Pippa's requested approach increases Circus Trust with Pippa by 1. Ordering Pippa to accept the room decreases Circus Trust by 1 and increases Hearthmere Bond by 1.

The Lantern Post

The Central Lantern has been mortared to a permanent post. Appropriate tools remove it safely; otherwise use DC 10 Athletics. On failure, a nearby character may use a Reaction and DC 10 Dexterity saving throw to catch it. If bent, Bram repairs it before Scene 14. Smashing the post records a named grievance.

Taking Stock

Ask which change felt most helpful and which felt most invasive. Record both answers. Gratitude and consent remain separate.

SCENE EXIT

Tamsin invites the party to present its evidence publicly. Update Village Goodwill after named grievances: two unresolved grievances set it to -1.

Scene 11: Hearthmere's Answer

READ ALOUD

Tamsin Ward waits at the long table in Homeward Hall. The doors remain open. Edrin Cole has placed the copied ledger entries where everyone can see them. Villagers fill the benches without speaking. "You asked whether Hearthmere knows what it is doing," Tamsin says. "Ask plainly."

Presenting Evidence

No check is required to make Tamsin acknowledge physical evidence. Tamsin argues that Hearthmere has provided real shelter, work, health, and belonging, and asks whether the circus will respect a person who remains in Hearthmere after learning the truth.

Tamsin's Case

- Tamsin argues that nobody has been locked away or threatened for refusing an offer.
- Several circus members were tired, injured, overlooked, or uncertain before arriving.
- The animals are healthier in Quiet Meadow, and the village provided food, repairs, shelter, work, and companionship without demanding payment.
- Tamsin also points out that Silas expects people to follow a shared routine and becomes distressed when they imagine another life.

Tamsin looks from the copied ledger to the circus. "If they hear everything you have found and still choose Hearthmere, will you let them remain in Hearthmere?"

Ask the players to answer. A promise to respect an informed choice does not require the characters to trust the sanctuary. Refusing to allow any circus member to remain in Hearthmere confirms Tamsin's fear that the party objects to control only when somebody else exercises it.

Hearing Outcomes

Evidence presented	Tamsin's response and access
Two strong clues	Tamsin concedes that the evidence requires an answer and grants access to Homeward Hall's sealed founding records.
One strong clue	Tamsin requests corroboration. Edrin supplies a copied ledger entry or Pippa presents the reconstructed song; access follows after one hour.
No strong clues	Tamsin refuses the accusation but permits a supervised review with Edrin. The review reveals one Founding Clue and preserves access to Scene 12.
Threats or violence	Tamsin ends the public hearing and Village Goodwill becomes -1. Edrin later provides the founding account privately, so Scene 12 remains available.

Securing Cooperation

Evidence and approach	Result
2+ strong clues and promise to investigate before damaging the well	Automatic public cooperation and access.
1 strong clue and same promise	DC 12 Persuasion. Success grants access; failure permits private records but not public permission.
0 strong clues	Hearing ends; Edrin's fallback preserves access to history.
Threat to destroy or force the well	Tamsin organizes a watch; record a grievance and use the fallback.

If Circus Trust with any principal cast member is 2 or 3, one such member may confirm that the party respected individual choice, granting Advantage on the single Persuasion check. Hearthmere Bonds do not impose Disadvantage.

Village Goodwill

At +1, residents listen without interruption. At 0, the hall is divided. At -1, Tamsin still hears the evidence, but any Persuasion check cannot gain Advantage from the crowd; principal-cast Circus Trust may still grant it.

What Tamsin Knows

- Sanctuary Well predates every surviving house.
- Earlier damage was followed by crop failure and winter deaths.
- A sealed Founding Account once contained departure passages later removed.

SCENE EXIT

Record Tamsin’s cooperation state, evidence presented, Village Goodwill, promises made, and access route to the forgotten history.

Scene 12: What Hearthmere Forgot

READ ALOUD

The oldest records were written by people who still remembered the road. Their pages are brittle, their margins crowded with household notes, and several passages have been cut away with a careful knife. The missing pieces were removed cleanly enough to preserve the book.

Founding Clues

Source	Clue	Later use
Founding Account	The original vow protects arrival and departure.	Restored Vow and well opening.
Marker and bell	The open wing and second bell served departure.	Physical well opening.
Tessa’s family record	A resident departed with honour and remained part of local history.	Proof belonging survives departure.
Complete song	Road verses were removed, not invented later.	Musical well opening and sanctuary objective.

The Restored Vow

RESTORED VOW

Let all who reach this hearth find shelter. Let all who rest here be named among us. Let all who leave carry warmth for the road. Let no closed door turn welcome into chains.

DC 10 Investigation or History traces the sequence of alterations. On failure, Edrin does so after two hours. Record the clue.

Marker and Silent Bell

The open-wing token fits the damaged marker. DC 10 Investigation finds the blocked linkage; Bram or Tessa finds it on failure. The hidden departure rope bears the words ONE TO GATHER. ONE TO GO.

Tessa’s Family Record

The book records Berren Hale departing after seven years with road food, gifts, and spoken names. It also proves the B.A. tools were prepared for Bram by reusing an earlier mark. Agreeing to separate Bram’s real attachment from the imposed identity increases Circus Trust with Bram by 1, maximum 3. Do not reduce Hearthmere Bond.

The Complete Song

DC 10 Performance or History reconstructs the ceremonial order. On failure, Pippa establishes it. Performing the complete song sounds the hidden bell and creates thirteen ripples at the well.

What Changed Hearthmere

- Hearthmere originally sheltered arrivals and honoured departures.
- After several residents departed during scarcity, later leaders treated departure as a threat to the community's survival.
- They removed farewell language from songs and records, sealed the departure bell, and damaged the open-wing marker.
- The Sister continued fulfilling the community's stated need for belonging after the community stopped acknowledging any legitimate need to leave.
- The sanctuary is therefore a distortion of a genuine promise rather than the work of a malicious jailer.

Founding Clue Threshold

Clues	Scene 15 threshold	First Charisma check
3-4	2 sanctuary objectives	Advantage unless cancelled by force
1-2	3 objectives	Normal
0	4 objectives	Normal

SCENE EXIT

Record Founding Clues, Restored Vow, marker and bell restoration, Bram's score change, elapsed time, and all opening methods now known.

Scene 13: The Second Division

READ ALOUD

The circus gathers around the Central Lantern. Some performers carry packed bags. Others arrive from village homes without coats or travelling boots. Silas waits for quiet, then says, "We leave together at dawn." The words fall into the circle before anyone has agreed to them.

Purpose

Distinguish collective safety from collective obedience and postpone final destinations until departure becomes a genuine option.

Principal Cast Positions

- Silas fears fragmentation and initially treats remaining in Hearthmere as surrender.
- Nell insists that each person state a choice personally and promises to provision both groups.
- Corren wants the animals observed after the sanctuary changes rather than forced into harness.
- Lita refuses to be ordered toward either Hearthmere or the road.
- Bram distinguishes the workshop's real value from its imposed history.
- Pippa refuses to choose while one destination remains magically obstructed.

Trust, Bonds, and Candour

At Circus Trust 2 or 3, a principal cast member states the private concern openly. At Circus Trust 3, that person asks one trusted character for counsel. The answer informs but does not determine the destination. For every Hearthmere Bond 2 or 3, name the exact person, place, or duty involved.

Temporary Procedure

Postponing final destinations succeeds automatically if Shared Leadership is established or at least two principal cast members have Circus Trust 2 or 3. Otherwise, use DC 10 Persuasion. On failure, decisions are still postponed until dawn, but Silas orders wagons packed and village-bound performers move belongings out of camp.

The Packing Test

Choose two results: a supporting performer leaves circus tools behind, increasing Hearthmere Bond by 1; a previously affected performer cannot remember a possession; Pippa finds the returned schoolroom key in the music case; Bram replaces a B.A. tool with one from the circus workshop; or Corren leaves unpacked harnesses for animals that refused travel.

Witnesses

Up to three nonplayer witnesses descend into the Hearth Below. Tamsin attends after public cooperation; Edrin attends if records drove the investigation; one circus member with a relevant Bond or Trust score may attend. Witnesses never replace player actions unless a scene says otherwise.

SCENE EXIT

Record Shared Leadership, score changes, Packing Test results, and witnesses. Final destinations remain unresolved.

Scene 14: Sanctuary Well

READ ALOUD

The water in Sanctuary Well is dark, clear, and perfectly still. Thirteen worn figures circle the rim. Twelve face inward beneath joined hands. The thirteenth turns toward an outward-facing wing someone tried to chisel away. In the water, each of you sees a room prepared in Hearthmere and a place at its table.

Opening Methods

Method	Requirement	Result
Complete song	Perform the complete song beside the restored departure rope.	The bell sounds once and the water withdraws.
Restored Vow	Speak the full vow while the Central Lantern burns nearby.	The outward figure turns and the stair opens.
Open-wing token	Use the token at the restored marker while another character touches the thirteenth figure.	The linkage releases and the water withdraws.
Departure bell	Ring the restored bell while naming an honoured person who departed.	Thirteen ripples cross the well.
Force	Break the rim, drain the well, or tear open the channel.	The stair opens with consequences.

State every discovered method to the players. If none was found, Pippa knows the song and Edrin knows the vow, ensuring one nonviolent option.

Forcing the Well

Force dims every Hearthmere hearth for one hour, spoils one week of communal stores, destabilizes one household routine, adds one named grievance, and gives Disadvantage on the first attempt to persuade the Sister. Two unresolved grievances set Village Goodwill to -1.

Using a Restored Method

READ ALOUD

The first ripple begins beneath the outward-facing figure. Twelve more cross the water until the reflections of Hearthmere break apart. The water lowers without spilling, uncovering a stone stair wrapped in pale roots. Warm air rises from below, carrying the smell of bread, rain, and old ash.

A restored method resolves one named grievance. Recalculate Village Goodwill afterward.

Reflections

The well shows each character the tailored Hearthmere life as an ordinary morning. Ask, “What detail makes this life difficult to reject?” Record the answer. No saving throw is required. Recognizing desire does not remove agency.

Zones Below

- Steps: entrance and safest retreat.
- Outer Alcoves: thirteen niches containing names and offerings.
- Reflecting Pool: possible homes and identities.
- Central Flame: root-wrapped anchor of the Sister.
- Departure Channel: blocked route toward the Old Road.

SCENE EXIT

Record the opening method, force, grievances, Village Goodwill, lantern bearer, token guardian, and witnesses who descended.

Scene 15: The Hearth Below

READ ALOUD

Pale roots cover the chamber walls, smooth as old bone. They gather around a shallow pool where reflections move without matching the people who cast them. At the centre, roots weave around a steady flame. Thirteen alcoves ring the room. One is empty. Beyond the pool, a stone channel has been packed with clay, roots, and broken pieces of carved wing.

The Sister Speaks

READ ALOUD

A figure forms where the roots cross the flame. The face never settles. “Where will they belong,” the Sister asks, “if you teach them to leave?”

The party must complete sanctuary objectives before a final resolution is accepted.

Founding Clues	Objectives required	First Charisma check
3-4	2	Advantage unless cancelled by force
1-2	3	Normal
0	4	Normal

Answering the Sister

- They belong with the circus. “Did each choose the circus, or did the road choose for them?”
- Shelter without departure is captivity. “Show me shelter that survives an open door.”
- People may belong in more than one place. “Then teach this hearth to remember more than one name.”
- Hearthmere has harmed people. “I answered the need I was given. Name the need that was taken away.”
- The Sister must die. “Then the winter returns, and nobody learns why.”

No single answer resolves the scene. The party must complete sanctuary objectives and decide what Hearthmere should become.

Sanctuary Objectives

- Clear the Departure Channel: DC 10 Athletics, or suitable tools without a check. Failure grants Advantage on the next attempt. Every Empty Chair loses 5 Hit Points when cleared.
- Complete the Song: lead the Road verses and Final Chorus near the Central Flame. No check if reconstructed. Rooted in Fear is suppressed until the end of the next round.
- Set the Central Lantern Beside the Flame: place the lantern and name one thing the circus provides without owning its people. Creatures beginning within 10 feet gain Advantage on the next saving throw before their next turn.
- Name a Person Who Departed: name Berren Hale or another documented resident and explain how Hearthmere still honoured that person. One Empty Chair releases a Grappled creature.
- Speak the Restored Vow: after the Sister listens, speak the complete vow. This is required for Restore the Open Door.

Empty Chairs

Party size	Starting Chairs	Reinforcement
3	1	Add a second at round 2 if no objective is complete.
4	2	Add a third at round 3 only if no objective is complete.
5-6	2	Add a third at round 2.

Once the Sister listens, no new Chairs appear. Existing Chairs vanish when a final resolution takes effect.

Persuading the Sister

After the required objectives, one character proposes a resolution and makes a DC 10 Charisma check using a clearly supported proficiency. On failure, the Sister asks a clarifying question. Another character answers and completes one unused objective or meaningfully deepens a completed one, then the party repeats the check. Failure never removes an ending.

Resolutions

- Restore the Open Door: clear the channel, speak the vow, and persuade the Sister. The Sister survives; the Old Road opens both ways; Hearthmere restores farewells and a departure register.

- Carry the Flame: place the lantern beside the flame, define belonging without ownership, and persuade the Sister. The Sister survives diminished; the road opens; the lantern becomes the Lantern of the Open Hearth.
- Break the Sanctuary: destroy the flame, sever the roots, or collapse the chamber. Hearthmere loses supernatural certainty and communal systems fail abruptly.
- Take Whoever Will Travel: open the channel long enough for willing travellers to escape. Ordinary departure closes again afterward.
- Remain in Hearthmere: an informed individual may remain. If departure stays closed, state plainly that no future route out is guaranteed.

SANCTUARY GIFT

Lantern of the Open Hearth: while the lantern burns during a Short or Long Rest, creatures resting within 20 feet have Advantage on saving throws during that rest against being Charmed or Frightened. This benefit can be granted once per dawn.

SCENE EXIT

Record completed objectives, Chairs used, Sister state, resolution, Old Road, lantern state, grievances, and Village Goodwill. Personal destinations are decided next.

Scene 16: Choosing the Road

READ ALOUD

For several hours, nobody tells anyone else what to do. Bags are packed, unpacked, and packed again. Harnesses are laid beside animals that may or may not accept them. Every choice leaves an empty place somewhere.

Order of Decisions

Resolve animals, supporting circus members, principal cast, then player characters. Use complete destination sentences: “[Name] continues travelling with the Lantern Circus because...” or “[Name] remains in Hearthmere because...”.

The Animals

Corren and Tomrin present travel tack without forcing it. Use Bramble plus any animal that refused tack earlier. After Restore the Open Door or Carry the Flame, most animals accept ordinary handling; an animal that refused twice may remain in Hearthmere’s care. After Break the Sanctuary, frightened animals accept familiar handlers but avoid the well and village centre. After Take Whoever Will Travel, animals accompany whichever trusted handler guides them into the Between. Record every animal transferred and the person accepting responsibility.

Supporting Members

Circus Trust	Hearthmere Bond	Destination
2-3	0-1	Continues travelling with the Lantern Circus.
0-1	2-3	Remains in Hearthmere.
0-1	0-1	Continues travelling by default.
2-3	2-3	Decides from named relationships and outcome feasibility; if tied, asks one trusted character for counsel, then decides without a roll.

Principal Cast

- Silas continues travelling. Shared Leadership raises Leadership to 17; otherwise record whether Silas acknowledged overreach or became more controlling.
- Nell normally continues travelling and provisions both groups. If Nell remains in Hearthmere, name an acting quartermaster with Provisioning 10.
- Corren follows animal welfare. If several established animals remain without another capable caretaker, Corren remains.
- Lita chooses the place where consent was most consistently respected.
- Bram weighs the real workshop against imposed identity. With both scores high, a practical workshop-wagon or return plan permits continued travel; otherwise Bram remains in Hearthmere.
- Pippa normally continues travelling and may become Keeper of the Travelling Verses.

Player Characters

A player character may remain in Hearthmere after the player understands the road's condition, the tailored offer, and supernatural influence. The choice must belong to the character. A continuing player creates a replacement character connected to the circus or departing travellers. The former character becomes a recurring nonplayer character under the DM's control, with the player retaining consultation over major personality changes.

SCENE EXIT

Record every person and animal by destination, reasons, new responsibilities, return promises, and final scores.

Scene 17: The Farewell

READ ALOUD

Dawn reaches the upper windows before it touches the Old Road. Hearthmere gathers without blocking the way. A taper burns in Tamsin Ward's hand. Nell has packed food for those travelling and those remaining. The Central Lantern waits at the head of the wagons.

Restored Farewell Rite

Step	Action
Road Food	A person remaining in Hearthmere gives one day of food to a traveller.
Shared Flame	Hearthmere's communal fire lights or greets the Central Lantern.
Spoken Names	A resident and traveller speak each other's names.
Departure Bell	The restored bell sounds once; everyone waits until it fades.
Open Road	Travellers pass the outward wing without promising to return.

Village Goodwill

- +1: the village attends in strength and Tamsin acknowledges that belonging must survive an open door.
- 0: the farewell is sincere but divided.
- -1: only directly connected residents attend; Tamsin names the cost Hearthmere must bear.

Each player chooses one farewell and answers: "What is given, returned, or deliberately left behind?" Record the exchange.

Outcome Variations

The Empty Place

Ask which absence the circus notices first: a wagon, tool, animal, costume, voice, duty, or place beside Nell's fire. Record it as a recurring Module Two detail. If nobody remains, use a lost memory, broken object, surrendered title, or lost certainty.

SCENE EXIT

Record Tamsin's statement, farewell exchanges, the first empty place, bell, Goodwill, and unresolved grievances.

Scene 18: The Eagle and the Road Beyond

READ ALOUD

As the first wagon reaches the damaged marker, a Black Eagle descends through the dawn light. It looks toward Hearthmere, then the open road, and finally the lantern at the head of the circus.

The Eagle's Behaviour

Outcome	Behaviour
Restore the Open Door	Lands on the restored marker facing the outward wing.
Carry the Flame	Circles the Central Lantern and lands within sight.
Break the Sanctuary	Circles Hearthmere once but does not land.
Take Whoever Will Travel	Follows the group until the Between releases the road.
Nobody departs	Does not appear; a distant cry follows the final choice.

Communication magic produces five images: a roof with two open doors; a road beyond the horizon; roots through broken stone; thirteen figures around an empty centre; and a lantern travelling where no road is visible.

Communication and Magic

A spell or feature that communicates with animals produces five images rather than spoken language: a roof with two open doors; a road beyond the horizon; roots growing through broken stone; thirteen figures around an empty centre; and a lantern travelling where no road is visible.

Detect Magic reveals faint Divination and Conjuraction magic belonging to neither the Sister nor the Central Lantern. The Eagle carries no item, mark, or written message. If attacked once, the Eagle evades and lands farther away. If attacked again, the Eagle departs. No Module Two clue is lost.

The Final Temptation

Choose the character using this priority: first, a character who accepted a tailored offer; second, a character who deliberately investigated an Empty House; third, a character whose ready-to-leave possession names a former home or person. If several characters qualify at the same step, choose the character with the fewest prior spotlight scenes. If still tied, let the players choose among the tied characters.

READ ALOUD

For one moment, the road behind you is not the road. You see the room Hearthmere prepared, complete in every ordinary detail. Someone inside continues a morning routine as though you had chosen it. Then the vision narrows to the open doorway and disappears.

Ask, “What does the character carry forward from the life not chosen?” Record the answer. No final saving throw is required.

The Marker Beyond Hearthmere

CHANGING INSCRIPTION

THIRTEEN HEARTHS. THIRTEEN WITNESSES. ONE ROAD THAT REMEMBERS.

Pippa recognizes the cadence of the Final Chorus, but the inscription is not part of the song.

Closing Passage

READ ALOUD

The last lights of Hearthmere remain behind you long after the valley itself has vanished. One by one, they disappear. Nell counts the travelling bowls and finds one too many. Nell carries it back to the wagon without comment. Pippa begins to play. The melody starts with the welcome Hearthmere remembered, but this time it does not return to the opening note. Above the pale road, unseen wings beat once.

Milestone

Advance the player characters to Level 3 after the final Hearthmere light disappears and the road continues without looping.

SCENE EXIT

Module One ends. Record the Eagle, five images if seen, final temptation, what is carried forward, inscription, and Level 3.

Relationship and Evidence Record

Character Ties

Character	Character Tie	Later use or change

Principal Cast Relationships

Circus member	Circus Trust 0-3	Reason	Hearthmere Bond 0-3	Attached to	Destination

Supporting Cast Relationships

Supporting member	Trust 0-3	Reason	Bond 0-3	Attached to / destination

Evidence	Found	Strength	Confirmed by
Ledger of Arrivals		Strong	
Complete song		Strong	
Empty House adaptation		Supporting	
No farewell custom		Supporting	
Looping Old Road		Strong	

Named Grievances

Grievance	Resolved?	How

End-of-Module Circus Ledger

Person or animal	Destination	Reason	New responsibility

Outcome field	Record
Sanctuary resolution	
Sister's condition	
Old Road condition	
Central Lantern condition	
Village Goodwill	
Unresolved grievances	
First empty place	
Black Eagle behaviour	
Final temptation and carry-forward	
Character level	3

Circus Growth

Development	Record
People	
Practical	
Tradition	

- Increase one Crew Skill Rating only when earned by an event the table can name.
- Record The Lantern Coming Home as part of the circus repertoire.
- Record the open-wing symbol and current interpretation.
- Record any permanently lost memory.
- Record one unresolved concern entering Module Two.

Original Creatures

The following stat blocks are reconciled with Scenes 9 and 15. Encounter behaviour stated in those scenes remains part of each creature's operation.

Discarded Self

Medium Aberration, Unaligned

Armor Class	Hit Points	Speed	Challenge	Initiative	Proficiency
12	18 (4d8)	30 ft.	1/4 (XP 50; PB +2)	+2 (12)	+2
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Skills. Stealth +4.

Condition Immunities. Charmed, Frightened.

Senses. Darkvision 60 ft.; Passive Perception 11.

Languages. Understands the languages of the represented performer but cannot speak.

Borrowed Shape. The Discarded Self can move through the space of a costume, curtain, or unattended clothing as if that space were Difficult Terrain. The Self can end its turn there without being visible until the Self moves or takes an action.

Recognition. A creature within 30 feet can take the special Magic action described in Scene 9. On a successful DC 10 Charisma check using a relevant proficiency, the Self takes 7 Psychic damage that cannot reduce the Self below 1 Hit Point and cannot take Reactions until the start of the Self's next turn. Two successful Recognition actions calm the Self and end the encounter nonviolently.

Unfinished Departure. The Self always knows the direction of the nearest route out of Hearthmere. During the first round, the Self moves toward the Old Road and does not attack unless harmed. Afterward, the Self attacks only a creature that blocks, grapples, or harms the Self.

Bonus Actions

Flee the Ring. The Self takes the Dash action toward the Old Road or another visible exit. The Self does not provoke an Opportunity Attack from a creature that succeeded on Recognition during the current round.

Actions

Fraying Touch. Melee Attack Roll: +4, reach 5 ft. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) Psychic damage, and the target cannot take Reactions until the start of the target's next turn.

Encounter Scaling

Use one Discarded Self. Against 3 characters, use 14 Hit Points. Against 4 characters, use 18 Hit Points. Against 5 or 6 characters, use 22 Hit Points. If Scene 6 triggered the increase, add 4 Hit Points to the selected total. Do not add a second Self.

Empty Chair

Medium Construct, Unaligned

Armor Class	Hit Points	Speed	Challenge	Initiative	Proficiency
13	22 (4d8 + 4)	25 ft.	1/2 (XP 100; PB +2)	+0 (10)	+2
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws. Wis +3.

Damage Resistances. Psychic.

Condition Immunities. Charmed, Frightened, Prone.

Senses. Darkvision 60 ft.; Passive Perception 11.

Languages. Understands Common but cannot speak.

Rooted in Fear. While within 20 feet of the Central Flame or Reflecting Pool, the Empty Chair has Advantage on saving throws. Completing a sanctuary objective suppresses this trait for every Empty Chair until the end of the next round.

Open Seat. A creature that starts its turn Grappled by the Chair sees an offered life in Hearthmere. The creature can use an action to state one relationship, duty, or desire the creature chooses to carry onward, ending the Grappled condition without a check.

Hold the Offered Place. The Chair does not pursue a creature that retreats to the Steps unless that creature carries the Central Lantern or has attacked the Sister. When a final sanctuary resolution takes effect, every Empty Chair vanishes.

Actions

Grasping Frame. Melee Attack Roll: +4, reach 5 ft. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) Bludgeoning damage, and the target is Grappled (escape DC 12). The Chair can Grapple only one creature at a time.

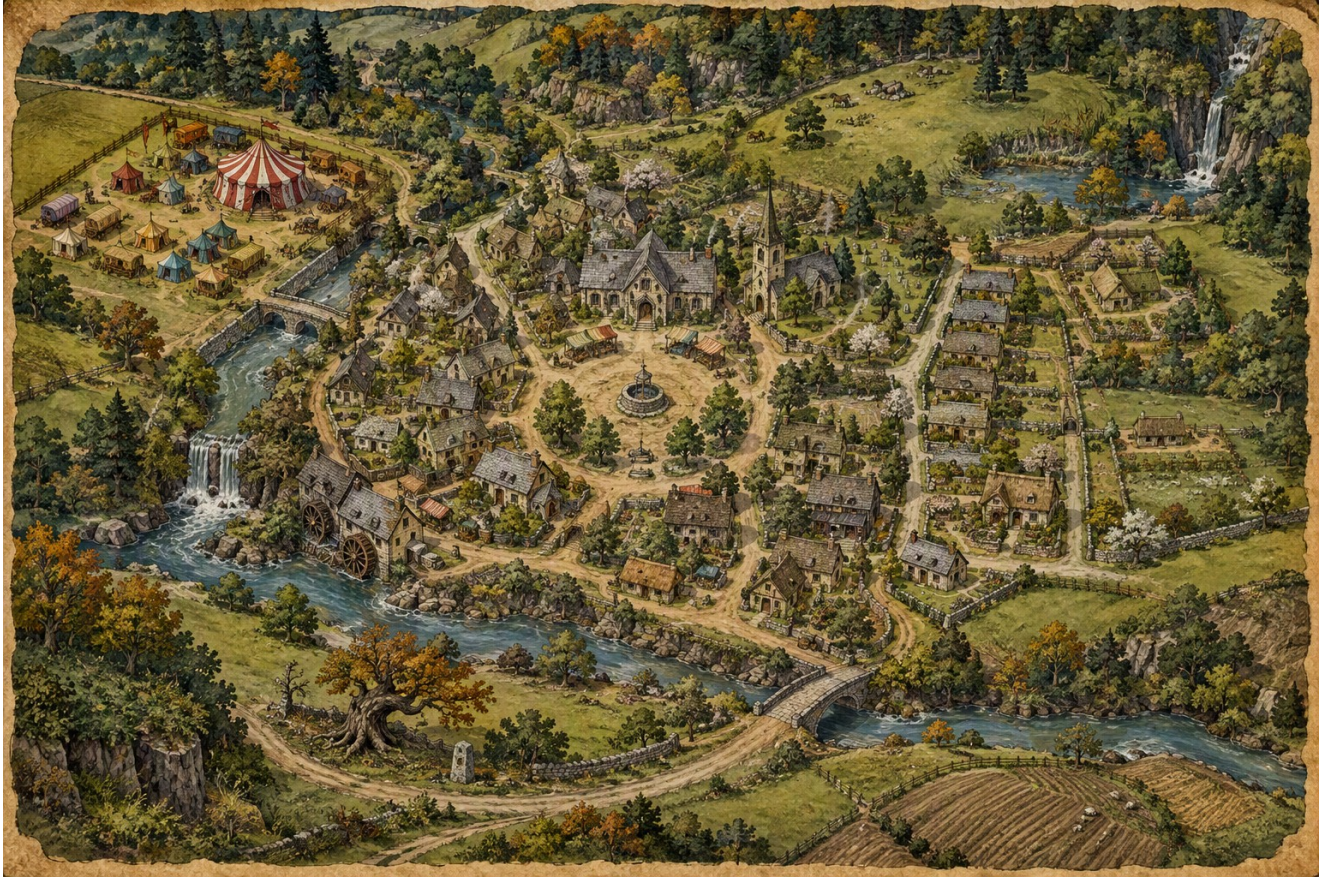
Pull Toward Home. The Chair moves one creature Grappled by the Chair up to 15 feet toward the Reflecting Pool. At the pool's edge, the creature falls Prone but is not automatically submerged.

Encounter Scaling

Party size	Starting Chairs	Reinforcement
3 characters	1	Add a second at the start of round 2 if no objective is complete.
4 characters	2	Add a third at the start of round 3 only if no objective is complete.
5-6 characters	2	Add a third at the start of round 2.

Completing the first sanctuary objective prevents further reinforcements for 1 round. Once the Sister listens, no new Chairs appear. Clearing the Departure Channel causes every Chair to lose 5 Hit Points. Naming a person who departed causes one Chair to release a Grappled creature. All Chairs vanish when a final resolution takes effect.

Hearthmere



Hearthmere: common and Sanctuary Well at centre; Homeward Hall north; common kitchen nearby; maintained empty houses east; workshop southwest; schoolhouse west; Quiet Meadow north; Lantern Field beyond the western bridge; Old Road south.

Lantern Field



Lantern Field: main pavilion at centre; Silas's wagon and the Central Lantern north; costume and music wagons east; animal lines northwest; Nell's cookfire southwest; Bram's work area and supply wagon south; road into Hearthmere east.

The Hearth Below



The Hearth Below: entrance steps at the chamber edge; thirteen outer alcoves around the walls; reflecting pool between the entrance and central flame; the Sister's root-wrapped flame at centre; blocked departure channel beyond the pool toward the Old Road.