

《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

27 Waves 1

Harp was petrified. He hadn't literally turned to stone, but might as well have ; at least the attention of the being in front of him wouldn't be focused on himself. He could feel his short fur stand on end, his claws cramping, and his instinct screaming at him to run without turning back. But his legs still refused to move, as if movement was the factor that would mark his death.

"Tell me your name, mortal, and what you were doing here."

"..."

Nidhögran had to squash a big sigh ; burning the little Oak's forest, even by accident, would earn him an ass-whopping from Ole'Elements. Even after making an effort to appear more human-like and reigning himself in, his sheer magical presence was still enough to send the weaker creatures to death or unconsciousness. At least the little human didn't faint. Or did he? Extending a scaly and clawed hand towards Harp, he cast a calming spell and waited a few seconds. At least they should be able to talk now.

"Answer my question."

His terror dissipating, Harp could finally think straight again. Covered in sweat, his body shivered one last time before he was able to understand what just happened. Just after he turned back, he felt like he was being watched, but couldn't find anything ; the feeling got more and more unnerving until that strange man jumped in front of him. He was wearing a shimmering heavy cloak, but that seemed to be all. He was only humanoïd, with his badly proportionned facial features. The most striking were his skin, covered in peach colored scales, blazing slitted eyes, two black horns curved around his skull, and messy grey hair and beard. He felt like a monster in human skin, and -oh how right he was.

"My name is... Harp, from Pilgrim Woods. I have come to check on the God-Tree's death, to verify the truth of a report." The wolfman's voice was even, the calm spell forcing his bubbling emotions to still. His apprehension was anything but receding though. The discordance was starting to make him sick, and he decided to tell more than was asked in the hope of getting out of here faster.

"Oh? So people already know? That makes things easier!" The dragon-man's toothy grin sent a new wave of nausea through Harp's brain. "Tell you what, you've done your job, so how about an exchange? You tell me all about that report, and I'll give you a

lift back home."

"And what guarantees me I'll stay alive when you have what you want? You don't seem exactly friendly..."

"Oh." Nidhögran scrunched his thick brows and brushed his beard slowly. "I guess it won't convince you, but I'm lazy, so I want a guide. I have zero interest in you humans. So the only thing is I won't eat you if you refuse to help."

"He didn't say he wouldn't kill me though... Guess I won't get a better answer." Harp was thinking as hard as he could to find a loophole, but couldn't. Well, there were plenty to get through wordplay, but in front of infinite strength, the best option was still to not piss the creature off.

"...I'll help. How may I address you?" He was feeling really sick now, and had to force himself not to vomit somewhere.

"I'm Nidhögran the dragon! Nice to meet you, little human! Don't go fainting on me when I change form later, okay? Wait no! Now, before I get a slap on the wrist for lazing about! Ahahaha."

On the surface of the sea, a closed shell was floating quietly, seemingly floating around randomly. Looking a bit longer, one would understand it was special. No bird came trying to peck it, no fish swam under trying to sink or swallow it, and it kept moving forward. More surprising, it had already made a detour around the Cursed Third and was making its way to the coast of the Primal. On its back, were engraved a few words imbued with powerful magic : "Open in front of the Three".

Floating around, moving at its own pace, the enchanted shell continued its route, carried by the waves.

Barely a few days after the real start to her adventures, Alice was considering retirement and even knew the title of the first book she'd write : "why earth magic constructs are a bad match for water", referencing the spirit Oakbud who already forgot his lesson from the arena, and Thani of the Blood who was just too excited to notice the problem before it manifested. It was now dawn, the start of their second and last day on the boat ; and her feet were wet.

"Alright, does anyone have an idea to bring us on the right shore before this boat finishes melting and sinks?" Her tone was reproachful, and she was glaring at the two people at fault in front of her. The fact that a golem twice her size with arms as thick as her body was still mechanically rowing behind her didn't help her stern image, but she tried her best.

"If me breaks the golem, me can make the boat again but boat will stop moving."

"No idea!"

Thani was laying on her back, beginning another relaxing sunbath on a plank across the boat, wearing only a pair of shorts. The cold morning air and frigid water splashes couldn't faze her, and she wasn't in any mood to think of a solution. The culprit of the boat's current predicament was playing in the water that infiltrated the hull.

"You both might be able to reach the shore with your absurd magic reserves, BUT I CAN'T! Help me for a bit, damn it, knowing how to swim won't save me here! If you're really coming from the God-Tree, can't you use something else than earth magic?" Alice was stuck between crying and shouting now. Why couldn't they take this more seriously?

"Well even though I got some special attention recently, I still follow Kali, so learning and using other magic is a no-no unless I want to renounce my faith. But you're actually making sense there! Hey Bud"! Why have you never tried some other magic?"

"Dad-Tree didn't show me... But me can try!" He was referencing the moment he ate the Stalwart Oak's last leaf, but Alice and Thani couldn't know that.

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The blood Angel continued her sunbath quietly while her tattoos helped Alice scoop some water out of the boat. The aim was to gain time for Oakbud to try his hands, or rather wriggly arms, at another magic, specifically water.

The problem that came up quickly was a simple one : the little spirit couldn't simply invent his own mastery of a whole new branch of magic in minutes. After a bit more time of trying out new spells, a solution came by itself at the same time as a four-meter high geyser on the starboard side. A little water fairy the size of Oakbud, probably attracted by the incredible amount of magic poured in the water, was looking at him and the two humans curiously.

"Do you need help?"