

《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

3 First meeting

Unaware of the waves it sent through the world, the little fist-sized Spirit woke up near sunset, still near the snake it just fought. It felt happiness and relief at the notion of never again feeling the hunger that plagued him before. But then it got surprised, and shocked again immediately at the thought that it could now feel emotions and think! This was interesting. Gaining individuality, it felt for the first time that it was alive. Was this part of the blessing of eating the leaf? What would that little snake become, had it eaten the leaf before the Spirit ?

Getting out of its reverie, the Spirit felt uncomfortable without the leaf on its head, and went to a nearby tree to pull off a piece of bark to cover itself (<https://i.imgur.com/1cXZ1rK.jpg>, enjoy some hand drawn cuteness). Shuddering in delight, it poured magic into the tree to help it grow and heal as thanks. When it removed its tendrils from the tree, it felt a rush of information about the surrounding area come into its head, like a sonar wave. There was an unusual concentration of bushes around a little clearing a bit further on the trail, and smoke was still rising from a fire pit. Four people were sitting around it. Hunters, or pilgrims maybe? This was a good opportunity, because in order to fulfill the Stalwart Oak's last wish, it would need to make contact with civilization.

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"Hey, what was that?" said a leather clad-man, still wearing full equipment despite the camp being set up for the night. He sat against a wooden shield that was planted vertically into the soil, facing the fire.

"What's what? You know I already asked the plants around here to prevent creatures from coming too close. And we're so close to the God-Tree too, nothing bad dares to come close. Aaaaah, I can't help but be happy at the idea of meeting him again. A being blessed by the Three, how many are there in this world? Can't believe it didn't convince you to worship one of them after the last time you came here with me."

"You're a bit of a nutcase Aldo, and you know it just as well as me. I'm happy to live as I am. Blessings sure could be helpful, but I love myself more than that. You got your hair changed to a freaking birdnest and now you can talk to plants, what's the big deal? Anyway I saw the bushes near the trail sway, and that definitely wasn't wind."

"Eeeeh, alright alright. No need to fight about that now Mark, and don't even start on how we dress, I like my hand-made loincloth very much and I won't make one for

you."

"Mention that loincloth again and I'll have my axe say 'hi' to it, you pervert." Mark looked towards the other two members of the group. The first was a frail teenager with an open-back green sundress, a cute face, strikingly blue eyes, waist-length chestnut hair and a pair of dragonfly-esque wings. Why did the believers of Deva, the Goddess of Truce, have to be so damn pretty? She was helping an old man set up his tent, but was panting heavily under the weight of the fabric. Even with his hunching back and greying half-bald head, her uncle seemed in better shape than the little beauty assisting him. His tasteful clothes were a bit messy from trekking in the forest, but he was the core of this team. "Maya, sir Klib, I'm going to see what moved!"

Klib's wrinkled face cracked into a smile : "You do you kid, I'm going to finish setting up the tents. Maya dear, stop pushing yourself and start with the food, will you? Keep it up and you won't be able to cast anything until you've slept." He turned away humming, taking the tent's roof from Maya's hands.

"Okay, okay... but don't hurt your back carrying all that stuff at once, you hear me? It won't make a difference if I need to heal you instead of helping you now." She pouted and rummaged through a bag half as big as herself, "How the hell can you even carry all that stuff all day, Aldo?"

"Hehe, that's one of the perks of worshipping the god of Nature, the wilder I live the stronger I get! I won't force myself to live naked in a cave to try and get a third blessing though, however close I may be to it. I still fancy living in towns. Living in a hand-made wooden cabin and being barefoot and half-naked all the time's more than enough for me."

"ALDOOOOOOOO! You were right, it was nothing bad." Mark came back, carrying a little black ball covered in a piece of bark in his right hand. "Look how cute those tiny wiggly arms are."

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Seeing no threat, the Spirit decided to reveal itself to the armoured human, and let him carry it back to the others. It feared no physical attack after all, and could easily mend itself back if it got hurt somehow. Only its precious bark hat would suffer. I felt a friendly aura from the wild-haired, half-naked man. The girl looked exhausted, but still emitted some magical power around her little wings.

"Look how cute those tiny wiggly arms are."

Hey, those are tools for working, using magic and maybe fighting, they are not CUTE, tried to say the Spirit. But as scary as its mouth was, what came out of it was a little squeal. Aldo and Maya were transfixed as soon as they laid their eyes upon it. Kilb went on with his tent-building, ignoring them.

"So cuuuuute! I want to pet it!"

"Wh... what is that... it was just an instant... but it felt just like the God-Tree... p-p-put it down. RIGHT NOW!"

Aldo fell to his knees, eyes bloodshot and arms trembling, while Maya walked slowly towards the Spirit, eyes glowing like she just found the best thing in the world. Surprised by Aldo's shout, Mark put the Spirit to the ground ; his friend was a prankster, but he could see that this time's look of terror and awe was not feigned. "Calm down Aldo, if it was hostile it wouldn't need to hide, and it certainly wouldn't have let me pick it up either." The Spirit nodded and waved at Mark in answer, before turning around and emitting a panicked cry, grabbing its bark hat. Maya, who was behind the Spirit, opened her fingers to let go of it "Okay okay, I won't try to pet you anymore.". Still holding its precious hat, it looked carefully at the crouching Maya, before experimentally sending a tendril towards her forehead.

As soon as it made contact, she howled in pain, breaking her voice, before falling to the floor. Shocked still, everyone could see her grow a new pair of wings, also attached to her shoulder blades, in the opposite direction from her first pair. She now had four meter-long wings, shaped like a butterfly's. Panting and crying, she fainted.

Kilb dropped the wooden stake he was carrying to rush to his niece, as Mark immediately went to grab his weapon before standing on guard. Aldo still hadn't moved, getting paler by the second. "It just pushed Maya to her third blessing... It just pushed Maya to her third blessing... just what are you, what do you want..."

As if waiting for the question, the little Spirit shuffled to an empty plot of dirt, before using its now clawed tendrils to draw on the ground. "Wait, did it just understand what you said?" Kilb was stunned. Intelligent creatures were rare, and friendly ones even more so. Holding Maya to his chest, he nudged Aldo and pulled him to look at what it was drawing. When they came close, the Spirit turned around and took a step back. Before it were plenty of tiny gashes, and a deep and long one in the middle. It pointed to a gash, then to a tree, as if comparing them. Then again with another, then another.

"Is it saying those cuts represent a tree each?" Kilb asked Aldo. The Spirit nodded, stunning them, and pointed at the long one, then at the trail. "Is that... the God-Tree?" A nod again. Then once more at the long gash, then at itself. "Did you come from there?" It shook its head and repeated its gesture.

"It didnt just come from it Kilb... I know what I felt now.I think it was MADE by the God-Tree. Mark, put down your axe, we... have nothing to fear." Aldo had stopped trembling, and was now staring at the nodding little Spirit. "I've already come before the God-Tree six times. The first time, before its majesty, I became a follower of the God of Nature, and obtained my first blessing on the spot. The fourth time, it gifted me one of its leaf, and touching it granted me with my second blessing, because I came to pray, not to him, but to Nature. Not escorting other pilgrims like today. However this time, we are accompanying Maya, who follows Deva. This little thing is... just like the God-Tree, it could grant blessing to a follower that isn't his."

"Wait, so there's no more need to finish the trip? She came here to try and be blessed by the Tree, but now it's already happened. What do we do?" Mark was puzzled, and had lowered his axe and shield.

"First, we wait for her to wake up".