

《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

31 Calm before the storm 1

Step. Step. Step. Step

In a stormy weather, a skeleton with flashing blue eyes was walking slowly in the air under the rain and thunder.

"Finally in sight. Now to find the Tree's remnant... Hmm, I'll have to get to the forest of Creation first. I'll just call back the past to know where he's gone."

Step. Step. Step.

Jack was coming down from the sky in his tattered robes, preparing his arrival on the northwestern coast of the Primal continent.

"Oh? Finished with your wanton killing?"

Step. Step

"Don't act all innocent, you immortal bastard. The Jagged Heights have almost nothing living there, that's why you didn't care. I'm perfectly aware of your bottom line though."

"Oh? Did you make some progress? Care to enlighten me?"

Step.

"I am just a ghost, a relic of the past to scare children now. And you don't want it to change before you've won your little game or I die for good."

Step.

"You want me to stay dead to the world. You'd prevent me from making myself known, so why bother?"

Step. Step.

"Same with plundering time here. You would just block my spells."

Step. Step. Step.

"I'll do it your way this time, as much as I hate it. Closer to my goal, closer to yours, closer to my end, closer to his. Dancing on Time's edge."

Brighter than ever, two ghastly torches lit up the way amidst the clouds, harbingers of times past coming to reap their due.

Step. Step. Step. Step.

"Hey, Ole' Elements, what's with that giant tree over there? Did you make another little Oak while I slept?"

Now calmed down, Nidhögran was making his way north over God's Eye Lake, taking in the sunny view in his burning eyes. One advantage of flying was definitely height for the longer sight distance under the horizon.

"Nope. Should be where Nature's latest Child is, though."

"Oh? Hey, it's in a human city too. That should be Ebb then. Hah, stupid humans, making temples for you everywhere. Still haven't understood they're useless after millenia."

"You have to admit it's convenient for us to spread our awareness."

"Why would I? I'm not a god, I don't care."

"Why have I chosen you again? ..."

"Because I'm the biggest bastard you've met. Let's go and say hello."

"..."

As much as he disdained them, the dragon didn't want to scare them. Causing panics everywhere would invariably bring some trouble, and he didn't want to deal with that. Once he was at a reasonable distance, he began reducing his size and camouflaged his silhouette in the sky before landing on the tree's crown.

Tapping a claw tentatively against the rock-solid bark, the dragon felt something wasn't quite right with it, but couldn't tell exactly what. Given his powers, it wasn't every day that something would stump him. This tree was divine, but also not ; how

odd. Absorbed in the feeling of divinity flowing, he only woke up from his reverie when it left the tree itself to reveal Talia the dryad standing behind him.

"Hm? Oh! Who are you? I know! You're the Child of Nature, I can feel it! Haha, that's why I couldn't get a grasp of the tree! No way anything mortal could elude me!"

"Yes, yes, you are an almighty lizard. What are you here for?" Before Nidhögran could lose himself in a cycle of boasting, Talia interrupted him so the conversation could go on and walked in front of the beast. Nature had told her a bit about him, and knew that she'd fall victim to his antics if she let him set his pace. The challenge was to weave her own agenda in his drivel without angering him.

"Dragon! Dra-gon. Hmph! See the wings? Claws? Horns? Are you a bat?"

"I do, and I also have your attention now." The dryad answered with a deadpan expression before repeating her earlier question. "So? What are you here for?"

"Urgh, you're as pushy as Eludia you know? Has Nature ever told you that? That brat really is something else, always running around. I remember that time she visited me, made a mess of my cave. Next time I meet her, I'll-"

"Stop ignoring me, will you? I'll just go back to sleep and you can freeze your fat bottom on my windy branches!"

"What a rude little dryad! Interrupting people is rude, you know? Hmmm, still haven't paid a visit to that prick with the shield, got to get back at him for that treasure he stole while I slept."

True to her words, Talia rolled her eyes before sinking back into the tree, exasperated. This didn't seem to disturb Nidhögran's monologue, listing one memory or grudge after another. His unstable personality enabled him to entertain himself almost indefinitely as the elements he harmonized with rampaged in his mind. He apparently had much to say, as he continued for the good part of an hour. His ramblings included stories of petty thieves burned to death, Gods and Children visiting, treasures being stolen, female dragon companions or him going for walks and bringing back riches from terrified people ; but never one of him owing anything to anyone.

"Hey, where did she go? We were talking here!"

"She left about ten seconds after you started speaking."

"How dare a little Child ignore me like that! I'm going to teach her a lesson."

"..."

The dragon began tapping the tree again with his claws to call Talia back. As soon as her annoyed face surfaced from the bark, he started again.

"Why would you leave like that, you boorish kid? Am I not worthy of your attention? Hmmmm? Watch out or I'll discipline you myself!" Feeling the dragon's anger, she could only put on a show of sincere apology and bottle up her aggravation.

"Now that's better! So, what are you here for? I appreciate you coming to say hello, but I have no time to lose, I'm on a mission you know."

Talia was dumbfounded. How did that bird-brained oversized lizard manage to forget he was the one to pay her a visit? He even managed to reverse their roles!

"A mission you say? Can I help you maybe?"

"Yes, yes! I know you met little Oak's creation, and I'm looking for it now too! Can you tell me where it is now?"

Damn, that lizard really changes mood too quickly. Did he even need to fight the Gods to kill them? Just one minute in his presence was enough to torture someone to death!

Even though those words were thought as hard as could be, what got out from behind Talia's crooked smile was another thing entirely. In fact, Nature himself took over the dryad to answer because Elements was too busy gloating over the poor Child's misfortune.

"The little Oakbud is not here and has left the city already. But he is travelling with a Saintess of Kali, so you can just follow the traces of divinity that she left. Just like his father, he bears the power of us three brothers, you will recognise him easily when you meet them. Now stop traumatizing my Child like that, Nidhögran. I thought you worked on your personality problems with Elements already?"

"Oh, it's you, Ole' Nature! Been a few millenia! Thanks for the info, there's no way I could miss little Droplet's divinity." He continued with an angry puff. "Yeah, I've worked most of it out already, you know how I was during the Anger. But I've touched upon that one element Ole' scrooge here had been hiding recently, and it's begun messing with the thin balance I had going. That and sleep. Ten thousand years can give you such a crick in the neck! I always need a bit of time to get the feel back. You know I'm not a God."

"And that the position holds no interest in your eyes. Yes. Now go, until our next meeting."

Finished with what he had to say, Nature sank Talia back into the tree before handing her back her autonomy, leaving a perplexed Nidhögran behind. She was glad that her God was the one to get her out of the face-to-face ; being a God-Child didn't mean interacting with Gods and behemoths like the dragon wouldn't make her insane. Being a mortal really was different.

"Hey, is it me or did he just flee? Has my temper come back that badly?"

"I feel he gave the little one and the saintess a huge blessing and it took a toll on him, let Nature sleep..."

"Well, now I know where to go and how to get there, so don't mind me. Heh Heh."

And with these words, Nidhögran curled up to take another nap under the sun, perched on the saint tree's crown.