

《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

32 Calm before the storm 2

"See? Now THAT is a boat. Not a pile of crumbling mud!"

Hitting the east side of the island was only another step on the journey, but one Alice wouldn't get dangerous again. Before getting on the water again, she asked for help from locals to build a sturdy barge with Stalks trunks. The result was a six meters long, two meters wide boat with a flat bottom, a set of oars and a long perch for coast manoeuvres. The open-roofed interior featured a spot for a golem towards the back, benches on the sides, and an earthen fire pit in the center front. Its shape was ideal for lake travel, as the waters were usually still ; the risk of capsizing was none unless one actively tried to overturn that kind of boat, and even if it did it would stay afloat.

Thani, Alice and Oakbud had decided against hiring a ferryman to get to shore to the north. They didn't want to wait for a trader to pass by and take them along, and the town locals were mostly fishermen who wouldn't want to take four days for the journey to and back.

Once Oakbud finished making a brand new rowing golem and a last push, the little group of three was afloat again. Thani and Alice spent the whole morning fishing, making themselves a stash of fresh food that would let them eat something else than travel-friendly dry food. However, boredom quickly set itself back when the sun began its daily descent. Oakbud was happily dozing off under the heat of the day, looking at birds flying and occasionally practicing his new magic.

With a rope bound to the boat as a guide, it was decided that diving would be a great idea to pass time. Clear and melodious laughter quickly proved the idea's greatness, and the activity quickly turned into a contest to see who could go the furthest down. Alice proved to be the best swimmer and was able to beat Thani by a large margin, almost double the depth ; that record was flipped once magic became involved however : the blood saintess exploited her blood wings fully to fly up and gather momentum for monumental dives that sent her way past their fifteen meters long rope in one move. Sadly for Alice, her shadow magic was completely unable to augment her physical prowess in this manner, and the two bickered for a bit before deciding on a draw.

The balance was upset when Oakbud got jealous and tried to swim too when he didn't know how. He panicked when his spirit body, completely unadapted to swimming, began sinking as he couldn't get traction in the water to stay afloat with his tiny arms and claws. He was fished back out by one of Thani's tattoos, who could barely hold

her laughter, and grumblingly tried to use water magic to navigate in the water. As it turned out, walking on water was feasible, but swimming still stood out of his reach ; he would need to possess a body to explore the lake's depths or attain greater mastery over the element.

The occasion presented itself after another predatory fish tried to get his fill by eating Alice. Her shadow magic was used to make a decoy silhouette in front of her, making the attacker bite through water. Not letting go of this opportunity, she applied her blessing of [break] to one of her hands and pierced right through the fish's gills and into its head , ending its life with one fluid movement. Normal animals and monsters, which couldn't count on a blessing to protect themselves, were extremely vulnerable to magic-augmented attacks. Thani had struggled against the same type of fish before because she didn't have suitable underwater attack techniques, and had to rely on her stout body and an ordinary weapon.

"This is disgusting. Let me in!"

"Gross. Don't come closer, will you?"

"Let me grab something to wipe my hand at least! Otherwise the stench is going to stay for WEEKS!"

"No way! Stop trying to get on the boat, don't come and pollute it for the rest of the trip! Whose fault do you think it is you have fish brain all over your arm?"

"LET ME IIIIN!"

"Shoo! Shoo!"

Thani had already changed into dry clothes and was currently doing her best to slap Alice's hands from the boat to prevent her from climbing on board, while the dead fish was being possessed by Oakbud and twitching reflexively. The black-haired woman finally managed to climb up after Thani had enough of teasing her, sending her a dark glare all the while.

Night fell while Oakbud was getting familiar with his newest toy, and he only came back to the boat once a fire was started in the pit to grill the day's catch and keep some heat. The dead fish was dragged on board for use the next day ; attaching it to the boat with a rope was possible, but they feared it would get nibbled at by other creatures during the night. If that happened, Oakbud wouldn't be able to use it anymore, and another predator fish would need to be hunted (Regular fish could do, however being defenseless was not the best of ideas).

