

《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

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The rising sun woke up the girls after an uneventful night. Oakbud was watching the celestial ball of fire rise over the horizon from the top of the golem's head (which never stopped rowing throughout the night).

"Alright! Now that Oakbud can dive too, let's see if we can find some interesting things at the bottom of the lake. With a name like God's Eye, you'd think there would be mountains of riches waiting, right?" Alice was excitedly making plans during breakfast. Once the last crumb was swallowed, she checked her outfit once more and made sure she had a dagger on hand this time. Pushing her bare hand through a fish's brain really was an unpleasant experience, so she prepared a killing tool this time just in case.

"If you want treasures there are indeed some, but it's way deeper than you could reach, you know?" A bubbly voice rose from the water behind her, prompting Alice to turn back immediately with her weapon unsheathed.

"Hi!"

"OH LIEZEL IT'S YOU AGAIN!"

In front of her aghast face, the water pixie they met a few days before flew up with a big smile on her face. The 'magic lesson' left a scar on her mental, and her appearance was equivalent to sprinkling salt in the wound.

"Fairy friend, say hello!"

"Heyo little spirit!"

Compared to her, Thani and Oakbud were much calmer and friendly. Still, they wondered why she'd come before them again, since they gave her much more than she expected in crystals already. The pixie was buzzing around furiously, exploring every nook and cranny of their new boat. She finally came to a stop between the little spirit and the saintess, floating quietly over the embers left from the night.

"Heard you talk about shinies, so I came to take a look. You can't escape me as long as you're on the lake, you know?" She playfully showed her tongue to Alice, who was

still tense and ready to jump. "You won't get anything good because the lake's way too deep, buuuuuuuut I might give you a hand if you can get me another crystal. Like, breathing underwater? Guiding you back to the boat when you want go come back up from the dive?"

"Breathing underwater? You can do that? That's seriously advanced magic, impressive."

"So she can just interrupt it and laugh as we drown? No thanks!"

"Me have a fish now, me don't need magic for diving!"

A fish, and didn't need the magic? He wouldn't need it as a spirit himself anyway... What did that mean? Up until now, the pixie had considered Oakbud as just another elemental spirit, albeit gifted who was able to manipulate a second element ; but that last statement forced her to reconsider her perspective. Her curiosity was stoked at the moment.

"What do you mean? Aren't you an elemental spirit like me? How would a dead fish help when you can just jump in? I know, stop hiding and let me look at your soul!"

"Wait, you can even do that? What kind of godly pixie are you?"

"Who said I'm a pixie? I may look like this, but I'm kind of the incarnation of the lake itself, you know? You were closer to home that you thought last time when angry, right? Right? Nothing going on over or under can escape my notice, it's just more convenient and less scary to people when I appear like that!" With this, she dropped her airheaded facade. Oakbud wasn't an elemental spirit like her, fine. But he wasn't an undead spirit nor a nature spirit like a dryad either. What in Elements' name was he really?

Under her repeated urges, and after remembering that antagonizing the lake they were on itself would be the worst idea possible, everyone removed their magic veil that would prevent Deva's disciples' peeping.

"Oh... OH? OH! OOOOOOOOH!" The pixie took a minute to wrap her mind around what she just saw, and told them it was fine to cover again. "So, I get the gist of the thing going with Oakbud here... I'll bring you to some nice shinies below, no need for another crystal! Do you want to know what you're like, misses? Think carefully, it can come as a shock for some, and it's not easy to change. And that's not something I'd joke about either."

Alice was sure of herself and knew what path she would like to tread in the future, and the reading of her soul being in the form of a bundled cloth weaved with shadows

came as no surprise. Free and unfettered, she wanted to see the world. It was all too common for those who chose to put their faith in Liezel, the God of Transgressions.

However, for the wavering Thani, it was as much of a blessing as it was a curse. At the moment she was questioning her own beliefs, seeing her soul itself in a mirror could break her, more than it could help her finding herself again. In the end, she decided not to listen to the water fairy. She had her Goddess Kali at her back, and even Nature himself, and that knowledge helped her to not fall.

"Alright, to diving then! You'll be surprised at what you can find down there, it's an important spot in the history of the Primal after all!"

And surprised they were. At first, light penetrated less and less, plunging the group in darkness ; the pixie took the responsibility to guide them further down, dragging the girls by a hand while Oakbud followed, wiggling his fins. They didn't know how deep they were anymore, numb to time because of the cold and dark. However, a blue-ish glow became visible when they began approaching the bottom of the lake.

What came in their sight was a gigantic humanoïd skeleton, illuminated by two weapons stuck in the rock and algae, pristine despite the unknown time they spent here. The first one was a chain and sickle wrapped around the left arm of the body, the other one a waraxe with its blade half-buried through the bedrock. The armaments were man-sized themselves, and Thani literally only scaled up to the corpse's ankle. Everyone but the pixie were awestruck and quietly let themselves be dragged. She tried to get her guests close to the body, however the weapons themselves seemed alive and pushed them back with a magical shockwave.

At this moment, a flash was emitted from somewhere close to the feet of the giant, attracting the divers' attention. The giant's weapons didn't prevent them from inspecting this light closer, and allowed them to discover a drinking cup. It was ornamented, and seemed carved from the horn of a blessed beast. When they got close enough, it detached itself from the lake's depths and flew directly to Thani's free hand. The strange event pushed the water fairy to simply drag everyone back up ; she just wanted to scare them a bit before bringing them to a more common stash of sunken gold!

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The fear of the moment had dissipated by the time they could take another breath of fresh air and dry themselves aboard the boat.

"What was that? Were those relics? And that corpse? That was terrifying! No way I'm ever diving again here! I knew you'd do something fishy!" Alice's tone was reproachful, and that was understandable after her previous experiences.

"I'm sorry... I didn't think the weapons would react like that, they don't bother usually... I've never seen that cup before either, but I can still say it's definitely a Relic if I couldn't see it. Why it responded to miss Thani here and came on its own I have no idea, something in you must have roused its interest."

"Rouse its interest? You mean it's aware?" Thani scrunched her brows and tried poking the cup that wouldn't leave her hand even if she tried to drop it. "What are you? What can you do?" In response, the engraved drinking vessel filled itself up with what seemed to be water, made its content disappear before filling itself again with something else, and repeated its cycle multiple times before flashing once and stopping. A pair of dice shone feebly at the bottom of the cup.

"Dice? That's a relic of Eludia! Seems like it's able to fill itself infinitely, but are the drinks random? Can you give me something in particular, like water or wine?" The goblet filled itself with fragrant red wine in response, answering the question in the most direct and convincing manner. "This is awesome!" Thani absorbed herself in the study of the Relic with Oakbud on the side poking it as well ; it seemed to respond to him more than to her, but chose to stay with the woman because the little spirit couldn't hold it well. Meanwhile, Alice continued her questioning of the fairy.

"You still haven't answered me! What were that corpse and those weapons?"

"I'm not sure I should say this... That's the predecessor of the God you call Theomars today and his weapons. He was killed during the Anger and has reposed here ever since"

That statement was enough to silence everyone on the boat. It was simply too shocking ; could Gods really be killed?

"I'm only talking to you about this because of Oakbud and his ties to the Three... It's related to the forgotten history of your world. After the Anger, the timeless existences like me and the late God-Tree convened a meeting and decided it would be better for that terrible event to be passed as a legend rather than history. The Three came to us too and agreed with our decision, before helping a new pantheon of Gods, the current one, rise up. Very few people today still know of the events that transpired at the time."

"Can Gods... really be killed? The only thing taught about the Anger is that a catastrophe ruined the continent and split it apart. Was it the intervention of Gods?"

"It was not their doing, otherwise it wouldn't be so terrifying. Just know that the God at the bottom of the lake wasn't the only one to die at the time. Anyone in the path of the Anger died, and the others were simply lucky. I'm not even sure how it ended."

The rest of the way was spent in calm, with everyone meditating about what they learned. The silence was only broken by the golem rowing the oars, pushing the boat towards its goal without pain or fatigue.