

《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

37 Silence

"Hmmm, let's see if I can meet Nyx again on the return trip. Now that my mind has mostly cleared I won't get lost anymore. Good occasion to get back at her if she wants me to tell her about the little Oak."

"..." Elements, as Godly as he was, could still not fathom the next move or mood swing of Nidhögran. That was part of the reason he was still his Child after all this time. Variety to fight boredom.

"I know, I know, that's not like me. The Butcher of the Aeons, killer of more than ten Gods, suddenly being affectionate towards a budding life." The beast sported a toothy smile in self-mockery.

"..."

"Nothing to say, eh? Well I'm just like you, I'm curious, so why not stay around and watch the fun? No need! I'll simply ask the Wind from the comfort of my lair. Hehe, my old blood is boiling again. Let's see if he comes to me or I manage to grasp the Void without dying first."

"Speaking of Wind, what did you think of his approach to magic?"

"He's still only beginning, barely able to manipulate the base form of the elements. Definitely hasn't chosen a way of progression either, the little lass by his side is more impressive in that sense. Far from being a match against any serious fighter, even less if he meets some of the more reclusive species and old beasts. All he really has is his invulnerability." His blazing eyes shuddered for a moment, as he remembered something : "Damn it, remind me sooner! I wanted to introduce him to the elements he hadn't touched yet! Not that he could do anything to Ole'Time's Child anyway, but still!"

"He will learn eventually, there is no rush. Think about it from mortal perspective, he has barely been born and learned so much in comparison. What difference does a day or a year make to beings of your and my level?"

Elements' reply made Nidhögran laugh openly and joyfully : "GAHAHAHAHA! That's right, that's right! So much more to live, so much more to learn! He's nothing like these old bones of mine, and he will surely live enough to bury me. I'm not immortal after all, for the seat of God of the Elements is already taken!"

"It's not too late to take another seat, and you know it. It's still not too late if you want to glimpse at the worlds above." Elements was serious. He was one of the Three, no one would be more informed about the inner workings of the world he himself had a hand in making.

"Heh, what is still available? God of Magic? Being revered as the creator of a decent magical system so beings would stop blowing themselves up while experimenting? I don't need that fame! The only ones who would be out of the scope are you Ole'Three, who embody the makings of the world itself and don't depend on magic. Such a wide domain, at the core of every ascension, would only be the last blow to my frail sanity. Good luck doing anything up there then."

With a last shake of the head, Nidhögran put an end to the discussion.

"Who knows? Maybe after I walk your path and catch up I will see something else for myself ; but I'm too far gone to change now."

The next days of travel were spent in an awkward atmosphere : Thani was morose and uncommunicative, without a trace of her usual energy or smile ; Alice was feeling insignificant compared to everyone and everything she seemed to meet now, and lost her drive ; and Oakbud didn't know what to do, choosing silence too. The God refusing to meet and talk to him had hit a nerve, and taught him frustration.

The newly-learned God-candidate was trying to assess her current state fully, determining what was "hers" and what was "Kali's". The fact that her eyes hadn't recovered their pupils and were still blank like before didn't help, but the rest was pretty obvious. Emotions, Kali's. Regeneration, hers. Blood magic, hers. Injury manipulation, that would probably develop into a form of healing later, hers. Physical appearance... too much had changed for her already ; losing that on top of the rest would be too much to bear. Luckily, it was back under her control since the Goddess had removed the scars she had, and could choose to change it freely. She needed time and peace to be able to lift her head again.

On her side, Alice wasn't sure what to do anymore. It escalated so quickly. Leaving her sea-side home, coming to Ebb, fighting in the arena and living there for a bit, meeting Thani and Oakbud, the God-Tree's death and godly affairs, meeting with the fairy, then the crazy dragon. She feared what was to come next, especially considering the beast's last ominous message about time. Her vivacious violet eyes were muddled, her mind unsure. Was she worthy? Was she strong enough? Would she simply die

there? Would she turn back? Could she, now that she was involved? In a bout of self-deprecation, she couldn't help but think that the only thing her blessing could [break] right now was her own mind...

Speaking of which, Oakbud's was in turmoil too. He had never really worked on his magic outside of regular exercise on control, and bits of experimentation on what he already knew. But now, adding on the frustration of having missed a God to talk to, he had a bunch of heavy responsibilities shoved on him. Up until now, he had been happily living and discovering things, going with the flow and taking no initiative besides looking for Gods. However, Nidhögran's arrival had swept all that easy-going mindset away : he had begun understanding he was much more than what he thought he was, a messenger for his dad-tree ; Thani, who was the closest being to him today, was in danger ; and finally, he himself was in danger. Like the dragon had said, he was a whole new life, and this comment alone made him aware of his need to take things seriously and work relentlessly if he wanted to lead the life he wanted (not that he wanted much, only meeting the Gods and see people close to him happy).

Step. Step. Step. Step.

"Here you are... One more step for me, one more for my revenge! Kakakakaka"

From the horizon, Jack's creepy laugh, augmented by his jaws clacking against each other, was heard. His flaming blue eyes were pointed straight at a walking golem on the ground far away.

"O Time, O abusive jailer of mine... See how I am about to win your little game. Remember, I won't cross your line, but your move is your loss! Kakakaka. Death is nothing compared to beating a God!"

Step. Step. Step. Step.