



By the time the "possession" was finished, everyone had taken a few steps back. Maya was even holding herself in her arms, face a little green. Mark was the first, and only one to comment on what just happened "Welp, I've seen people die, some of them by my hands, but that is definitely a new one for me. I'll have to rephrase my question from when we met : what can you not do?"

"I have to agree on this one." said Kilb, "but I have a scary but must-ask question for you Oakbud : since you just made bird cries, does that mean you could speak like us, provided the right creature?" The zombie bird nodded, and the Spirit used his arms to point back to the crossed V and circle from earlier. "Oh, so only dead creatures then? Still, this is quite terrifying, you shouldn't show this to many people. You're lucky we've met you a few days ago and got to know you, otherwise we would have attacked you on sight."

This remark made Oakbud freeze. Kilb was right. He didn't really know what was considered "normal" outside of the forest. The Stalwart Oak only left him memories about the Gods of Creation, the Gods of Men, what their path was, and what kind of common blessings their followers could get. Even heroes and god candidates pioneering their own path would probably not turn to desecrating the dead. They would never dare to touch the favourites of the God of Time. But he would still need to in order to look for the Children of the Gods mingling through society.

Bud took his unstable flight to scout the beast trail from above, and for the first time in his short life, he saw the open sky, the top of the trees, the far-away God tree, and what looked like a city further in the plain beyond the forest. He shouted his joy, his arms funnily beating in sync with his wings, and made a few acrobaties before getting back to 'work'. He couldn't use his plant sonar while in the air, so he used his eyes looking from the bird's beak to check what was ahead. Around two kilometers further, Oakbud found a strange beast fighting with three people, two of them bleeding out on the ground and the third on his last legs. They were clearly not fighters, dressed in robes with a staff in their hands. The beast looked like a boar, crossed with a ram. It had a huge build, short hair and stubby short legs, making it comically imbalanced. However it had a boney protrusion at the end of its tail that reached the ground, and four sharp tusks : two curving over its head, and two at the sides of it mouth. The bird-Spirit decided to head back when the last man fell. The beast didn't see the strange bird flying over it, and started to munch on the corpses happily, barely hurt at all.

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"So, what did you see over there, Bud?" Maya was curious, obviously having recovered from the earlier fright. "Anything interesting?" Oakbud used his arms and

beak simultaneously to draw on the ground. Three circles, and a cross twice as big over them. "The beast killed three people? Oh Deva that can't be good. What do we do, do you think we can beat them?" Maya focused her power to feel the answer from Oakbud, and what she understood shocked her. "Draw that for the others please, I'm not sure I understood everything..."

The Spirit agilely drew a big cross again, then eight circles, and barred 3 of them. "Uncle Kilb, Mark, Aldo, he's telling us it thinks it could be beat with eight people, but not without sacrifices... we should really get out of here."

"Ooooh, that's way scarier than what I could tell from the marks on the trees. We're not hunting that blessed creature for sure. Can't do anything for those poor souls but pray to the God of Nature that their corpses are well-received by the forest..."

While everyone was debating on how fast they would need to bolt, Oakbud waddled towards Maya and pulled at the hem of her dress to get her attention. He pointed at her wings, then at his, and hopped. Since she had taken the habit of 'reading' him, she immediately understood the simple idea of 'can you fly too?'. "Sorry Bud, I'm only able to hover a bit, and it's really tiring because my wings aren't strong enough without magic to help." The zombie bird hung its head low, and Oakbud dropped from its mouth. It picked his bark hat back up before climbing on Maya's head again.

Mark stopped speaking with the other two and turned towards the bird with a stiff smile. "I don't know about you all, but this isn't dinner anymore for me." No one answered that, but they all knew they wouldn't eat it either.

"I'll bury it before we go. I'll also use some magic to cover our tracks with some plant overgrowth so that crazy beast doesn't catch up. We can get out of the forest by sundown and to the city by noon tomorrow if we hurry a bit." Kilb nodded to Aldo, picked up his backpack, and started walking, soon followed by the others.