

# 《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

## 57 Second visit to Ebb 2

"Soooo... No chance for a freebie?" Knowing it was a lost cause because of Auri's mood when he grabbed her, Thani still tried to ask with an innocent smile.

"None," he answered. "Now follow me to my office, we'll speak more in there. Too noisy in the workshop." Without waiting for an answer, the smith turned around and started walking at a brisk pace.

"Not even a little reduction or consultation fee weaving for an acquaintance?"

Auri stopped walking and turned his head for a moment, looking at Thani with squinted eyes. "You're not an acquaintance in my book right now, but a customer. And a troublesome one at that, so cut the nonsense."

With a sigh, Thani turned to Alice who was walking at her side: "There's your answer. Ready to fork out some gold yet?"

"Uh-uh... No choice I guess," she answered in a hushed tone. "But why does he look so annoyed with you?". Thani could only shrug in answer, wondering about the same question herself; Auri looked pretty happy with the trade when she left last time, after all.

The personal smithy looked the same behind its heavy door. Same desk, same chairs, same pile of papers, same forge and tool racks all over the walls. Once everyone was seated, Auri took the blueprints the girls had made in advance to look them over, nodding from time to time and adding some notes here and there. While he was studying the plans, Thani continued looking around and spotted the crystal Oakbud had made for the smith last time. It looked like it reduced in size for a bit, so she stood up to pick it up and look at it more closely. She also wondered why it wasn't in the safe with the other precious materials.

"Take it back with you if you like. That thing only brought me headaches; I should never have accepted the deal last time. So much for a follower of Monte taking a bet, huh?" Her standing up had alerted Auri, who was now watching her. "It made me lose time, favour with Monte, and I can't even craft anything with it. Look at all the colours in it, it's a giant mess of different elements and powers. I would need to master each and every one of them to be able to isolate them and do something with it. As it is, its only use is to be a magic reservoir from which I take a bit to support myself when working on hard projects. And even then, changing the power to pure magic isn't easy;

I couldn't without my blessings. Sleeping and taking one more day for a craft isn't worth your dagger in any way."

Thani flinched. Seems like she was lucky Auri didn't attack her outright when he saw her coming back. If she had to put a price on it... She made him suffer a loss of a good thousand gold if you accounted for her dagger's materials, engravings, crystal infusion, and time spent. "You... are not going to make me owe you for the bad trade, right?" They had no way to pay that much, after all.

Auri's face softened, and he let out a long sigh. "I know how to take a loss, it's not the first and won't be the last. It'll be compensated for with the overall revenue of the smithy during the next year somehow, even though it's putting me in the red for taxes. Now tell me which blueprint is for who, and what materials you have if any. I'm still going to ask you for extra service though, you owe me that much. Call it interest if you want."

Well, at least they weren't indebted too much. Thani wondered what favour Auri would ask of her, considering he knew of her strength. "Fine. We've got every base material for both daggers and the bowstring. All of it for my companion Alice here, and the armour engravings are for both of us."

"Congratulations, you just saved yourself several hundred gold on costs. I can do all of this but it's going to take time, a whole two or three weeks at least. Also, I have other commissions scheduled before yours, so it's going to take even longer overall." Taking a board from under his desk, he looked intently at what looked like a calendar planning sheet. "Count six or seven weeks from now for the finished product. Maybe a few days less if another experienced worker comes to give me a hand on the armour engravings since that's the easiest part. As for labour costs..." He looked up, grinning at them to see their reaction: "You better win some more in the arena, ladies, because total will be seven hundred fifty gold."

"se- seven... Gluk!" Alice was unable to even speak. She could buy half of her hometown with this! Thani fared better and managed to keep a bit of poise, faking a cough to hide her shock before speaking to the still smiling Auri: "We don't have that kind of money. I can spare a hundred fifty, but that still leaves six hundred..."

"Now, my charming ladies, about that favour you owe me..." That was the voice of temptation, in the form of the master smith in front of them. That's when Thani realised that the man wasn't only a genius at blacksmithing, but also a veteran businessman and a wily old fox. The discussion until now... She was ready to bet he

had it all planned while they walked from the common room to his private smithy!

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"He's got us good, right?"

The remark was lost in the noisy alleys of the artisans' district, but the look in Thani's and Alice's eyes was enough to convey the same meaning. A 600-gold favour... And it's not like they could go and visit the second master smith of Ebb either: Auri was sure to have dispatched someone to tell him they were his clients already, so he wouldn't take the business either. Both of their businesses were well enough to work together like that despite the competition. And the other wouldn't even ask anything before throwing them out anyway: one doesn't simply come in to make a deal only to tell that you lack 4/5 of the money after the estimate is done.

"Let's go back to the inn and tell Oakbud about the deal before accepting. It won't be too late tomorrow, I'm pretty sure Auri doesn't mind the help of two people like us." Thani had lost the detailed part of her emotions blessing, but what she had was still enough to know that the big bronze man didn't hate her down to the bones.

The rest of the way back was spent in the dark as they could only meet Auri at sundown before, but that was easily ignored through the public lighting: alchemical lights truly were a boon to cities. This kind of lighting was made with a simple translucent bulb with fire or lightning magic that agitating a special concoction inside. Lighting them up was easy, only needing to pour some un-aligned or same-element magic through it, and each light could emit around 15m of bright light. It was even possible to tint the bulbs if they were made out of glass, for a whole arsenal of colours used to decorate shop displays.

True to his word, Oakbud hadn't left the inn during the whole day. Instead, since they planned to stay for a while, he took the time to make their room feel more like a home. The room waiting for Thani and Alice looked nothing like the one they'd left in the morning, and they even had to do a double take to the number carved on the door to make sure it was theirs. They weren't even sure if "room" was the correct word to describe the place. "Forest" would be more appropriate.

While they were waiting in line for Auri, Oakbud hadn't spent his time doing nothing. During the same time, he took it upon himself to make the inn room feel more like home to him. The staff had been surprised that he could talk, and a bit perplexed at his request of arranging the decorations a bit (Ebb's Flow was a nice inn already, after all), but still agreed.

Using his seemingly infinite magic, Oakbud started the growth of the furniture again and guided it into new, more artful-ish shapes. The beds ended up a bit higher than

before, but their corners and feet didn't look like they had been cut into shape anymore; if one didn't give it a closer look, they would look like plants simply grew into the shape of beds. The chairs looked as if they were one with the floor and their padding had been doubled with a soft leaves cushion that would not wilt for a very long time. The wooden desk had re-grown its bark, young, springy and soft to the touch; it was thin too, and there was no height difference to mess writing on paper either.

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But the biggest transformation was still the one the walls and ceiling had gone through, as they couldn't be seen anymore. Oakbud had put everything he knew in practice to create the most beautiful and relaxing thing he knew: flowers. All kinds of roses, lilies, lilacs and other blossoms shared the whole available space.

The staff assumed he would move the furniture around a bit, but Oakbud had truly made himself home; a nature-rich home. Thani felt like she stepped back into the tree-houses the little spirit made her on their way from Pilgrim Woods, while Alice wasn't sure she was in the right place anymore.