

# 《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

## 59 Second visit to Ebb 4

By the time Oakbud made his way back to Ebb's Flow, night had begun to fall already. Some city guards were walking down the streets to light up the alchemical lights to fight the blanketing darkness. Nightfall wasn't the end of the day in Ebb, but rather the dawn of another city. It was the time the rowdier crowd got to let itself free after a hard day of work, the side that he hadn't stayed enough to experience during his last stay. Some people were dressed better, some worse depending on what they intended to do but whoever he came across only had the entertainment quarter as their destination.

The last months of the Boon were the hottest and most comfortable to live in, the lukewarm breeze of the lakeside perfect for nightly excursions and lighter clothing. Perhaps he would explore more later with Alice and Thani. He hoped than Alice would be there to stop him instead of laugh if there was a repeat of him going wild.

The entry hall that doubled as restaurant was nearly empty, it wasn't quite time to eat yet.

"Over here, Oakbud!" Alice called him from a table as he was going towards the stairs to get back to their room. Out of everyone present, she was the only one expecting someone to come at ankle level and that's the only reason she didn't miss him. His golem had been dismantled and returned to the earth outside because it was truly too big to keep and would only bother people and block the way. She was sitting on a cushioned bench, back to the wall, with a half a glass of unidentifiable juice.

"Is Thani fairy in the room? Why is Alice alone here?" He couldn't see her anywhere even after scouring the hall with his gaze. He was so used to everyone being together, did she not move from the bed all day?

"Word for word, she's gone 'hunting'. No idea when she'll come back, and in what state." She answered while grimacing. She just couldn't get used to that side of Thani; it's like she had a revenge to take on boredom and was ready to do anything, moral or not, to fight it. The cruise was very lacking in distractions, the crew didn't catch her eye either, and she'd been quite restless towards the end.

"Thani fairy need help, found monsters in Ebb?"

Alice choked on her drink. She just couldn't get used to that side of Oakbud either; he was so innocent and didn't understand what she meant despite the time spent living

with her. What in Liezel's name did she get herself into... That question would become a catchphrase quickly if she didn't pay attention.

"No, no, no." She sighed. "No monster, no danger, no beast. I thought you'd know that best since you can be considered one in a sense. My guess is she's going to waste a bit of money betting, get drunk or at least try to, surely get into a fight or other kind of contest, and then wreck the door here in the middle of the night or drag some poor soul to his own bed to have her fun."

"Oh."

She felt bad for giving such a bad image of Thani behind her back and ruining Oakbud's pure mind, but she wasn't in the best of moods. They each had their own burden to bear and Alice didn't understand how her companion could be so loose with how important hers was. She gave Oakbud a pat on his little head. Perhaps she was too anxious, serious and introverted for her own good; she started thinking that the gruff Tembra was right. Well, she wouldn't throw herself at the first man she met but she should still find some distractions somewhere; her hobby of woodcarving wasn't much fun and glory.

The arena seemed like a good prospect, but she still had vivid memories of her last time in the ring. Getting an arm broken was not the kind of pain she looked forward to again, so perhaps she could try to get another blessing first. Her first motivation to travel had been finding a cure to her friend's deadly illness. When she first arrived in Ebb, she had made rounds of every herb and potions shops and even went to the temple of Deva, only to find that it had been some old, rare and obscure affliction. She had resolved herself to travel more to find more information elsewhere to put an end to her regret, and in that process had found herself embroiled in divine affairs. That didn't leave her much time to think about it until they made their way back to the city on the boat, and she had to make a choice what to pursue.

"Me spoke to Talia today! Plenty of stories to tell. Talia asked if Alice would come meet her too, she wants to look at Repose-dad's stone he left you."

Oh well. Oakbud looked as happy as ever, and it started rubbing off her bad mood. Tomorrow wouldn't be too late to think more. Alice continued sipping from her glass, content with looking around and listening to the little spirit for a while.

--

Alice woke up at the first light of dawn. Thani's absence and Oakbud not being much for conversation had her go to bed earlier than usual, so the early wakeup didn't feel

bad. Then she realized that light was coming in their room, meaning that the blinds had been opened. Did someone break in?

The adrenaline rush sat her up immediately, giving her the full view of the inn room. Nothing seemed to be missing, and Oakbud looked at her curiously. In fact, something or rather someone had been added instead. Thani was snoring lightly, half naked and not even under her bed covers. Her breath still smelt of alcohol, but Alice knew she wouldn't be hungover at all since her body processed booze too fast for her to even get tipsy. The little spirit was watching over them like always from a little ceiling nest he made for himself in the flowers. Sighing, she stretched a bit and resolved to get up properly and do her morning exercise then wash up while waiting for Thani to wake up.

Good inns had the advantage of not serving the previous evening's leftovers for breakfast, so they were able to enjoy fresh bread, pastries and fruits while the beautiful white-haired woman shared her nightly adventures.

Alice was right in her prediction for the most part. Thani had started lightly by going to a bar and knocking back a few drinks, trying to find something she could buy for travel and not get bored of. Once the general clientele began to get a bit drunk and a lot rowdier, she left and went a few blocks further to a casino. Her luck, boldness and outgoing character didn't betray her and she managed to get back a majority of her drinking money. Roulette, dice, cards, shells game, arm wrestling... She built up quite a momentum until some losers accused her of cheating, citing her lucky streak and rapid changing of games as proof.

"All idiots, I swear... One of these idiots was even playing cards with a mirror to his back. Sure, if using that because the bloke is too drunk to even think is considered cheating, then I'm in the wrong. Muscle-brain warrior with two blessings thought he could arm-wrestle me and thought I used magic to weaken him. Since when do Kali followers have that? My body's simply more blessed than his."

Lifting an eyebrow, Alice countered: "Are you sure you didn't abuse having divinity to flatten him? I remember you get incredibly strong if you do that. And since it's not exactly magic no one would know, right?"

Thani looked at her with an admiring look. "Shit, I didn't even think of that! You really have to come with me next time, we'll make a killing!"

"Please don't drag me into this. First sign being a follower of Eludia or Liezel is usually enough to get booted from gambling dens, without your hair and eyes I think people would have jumped you there and then."

Thani chuckled. "Who said they didn't try? I've got a date with five sore losers at the

Arena. Bet their lost amount of money I cheated, and they want to fight it out this morning. That should get us about ten gold closer to Auri's price, and I get to kick some ass with perfect impunity."

Her smile looked outright carnivorous. "I'm a tad pissed I didn't get to finish my night like I wanted to."

"So, what's the plan for today? Oakbud told me that Nature's Child wanted to meet me, and I prefer delaying our response to Auri than missing that."

"I say you both come watch me get some easy money, then grab a bite and go visit Talia. We'll see if we've got some time left after that to go to the Twin Hammers. My match could be a bit late if there's some other thing planned for today or too many people want to fight over something."

"Ugh. I'll never understand that might makes right aspect. I know that going to guards for your drunk gambling scuffle would be more likely to get everyone in a cell for the night, but it still doesn't sit well with me."

He didn't need to eat, but Oakbud had been focused on eating a bread bun until that topic came up. He was happy just following the flow since they had more than a month of downtime. "Thani fairy want help fighting?"

"Thanks, Bud, but it's for involved parties only. And don't worry, out of five three don't have any blessings at all. I'm going to wipe the arena floor with their teeth, bare-handed."

"Then Thani fairy come see Talia with me after too?"

"Of course. Who knows, maybe she'll answer some of my questions about divinity and the path I chose. I hope she does because she's probably the most qualified to speak about it."

Once they had finished eating, Oakbud hopped on Thani's head and they began making their way to the arena. Alice only took her daggers and Thani did the same, as she wouldn't need her armour for a fist fight. She would abuse the poor challengers enough as is and the girls also didn't want to stand out with dragon scale.

Perhaps if they thought more about that, they wouldn't have Oakbud's golem carry them, but comfort was comfort.