

# 《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

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Ashirijen swam lazily, propelling herself quietly with her muscular lower body. She didn't have a destination in mind, and only steered with her tail to stay stable or if something caught her attention; and that meant not much. Moving from the sea to a lake had felt weird at first, as she wasn't used to fresh water. But God's Eye Lake had a peculiar feeling of its own, something she couldn't quite put her fin on.

"Heya! What'chu doing?" A high-pitched voice asked from behind her.

She spun around and grabbed her spear with practised movements, ready to face whatever managed to get the jump on her like this, only to find nothing. Which was strange, very strange indeed. Just as Kali had explained to Jacques before, Ashirijen was also able to "drag" and feel the world around her, albeit only underwater like she was now. Even a creature using some form of magic to conceal itself wouldn't be able to hide itself from her senses.

"Oooh, scary! You're from the sea, right? A nereid, right? Right?" Once again, behind her. Except this time, she didn't move, because whoever was speaking obviously didn't have bad intentions. Simply relaxing her aggressive stance, she waited.

"Oh you're no fun!" The lake spirit revealed its pixie form, barely as tall as the nereid's hand. "So, whose Child are you? The old man like you on the boat looks laaaaaame."

"I'm Kali's Child... But how'd you know that?" She couldn't feel the same kind of presence she had on Jacques when they first met, so the pixie wasn't a Child either. But even when with it under her nose, she wasn't able to sense it. Ashirijen frowned. "And what are you?"

"You're Kali's Child? Awesome awesome awesome!" The pixie started swimming frantically around the nereid, eager to take in all of her form and burn it in its mind. "I reaaaaaally really wanted to meet you and thank you in person at least once! I thought that crazy lizard would evaporate me dry if you hadn't stopped him! Hey, Kali's listening, right? Right?" She stopped in front of her face again. "Right?"

"Crazy lizard..? Stopped? Wait, you mean Nidhögran?" Ashirijen almost dropped her cherished spear from shock. After hearing about him from Kali's point of view and memories, hearing the beast called like that punched her in the gut. Kali had nothing but admiration for the almighty dragon, and having the Goddess directly recounting their story had left its mark on her too.

"Yeah! Crazy lizard, right? He's even flown by a while ago so I hid down there. Not sure if he didn't sense me or the skeletons are good cover, but I'm glad I didn't have to deal with him anyway. Soooooo, what are you here for?" The pixie was laying down on... nothing, arms crossed under its chin and rolling around, seemingly unable to stand still for a single second.

"Uh, just usual Godly stuff, I guess? Going to Ebb to start a little revolution with Kali's worship." Ashirijen was really perplexed by the strange creature. "But, seriously, what are you? How come I can't even feel your presence?"

"Oh? Ooooh! You're going to meet Talia to get help then? Good idea, she's nice! Even though it's super hard to meet her since she can't really leave her tree, since she's a dryad and all. Oh, and now that I think about it, there's pleeeeeeenty of interesting people you could meet there too. Like, there's the God-Oak's little guy who came by recently, he shouldn't be far, and he's with... you'll see. Hope you meet them, they're fun. Fun!"

"Yeah, I planned to ask Nature's Child about other supports we could get. Glad it's not another human, to be honest. Who's the little guy? And again, will you answer on what you are?" She was beginning to lose patience with the little hyperactive ball of nerves in front of her.

"I'm the lake, dummy! Dummy! Hey, you're strong right? Wanna see some coool stuff down there? Crazy lizard is crazy strong for sure, but he didn't even come back to take stuff after the fight. There's the bodies of three late Gods down there, with some of their divine artifacts to boot. Divine!"

The lake was obviously not trained in the art of mincing its words, so Ashirijen found herself speechless again. The lake? Remains of Gods? Not Children? That meant that the Gods had taken over their Children's body completely and burnt themselves down by using their own full strength! She trembled internally, getting a glimpse of the terror reigning during the Anger. Oblivious to the effect its words had, the pixie continued without stopping.

"There's the late god of War Procas with his axe, Behuia of Life and Healing, and a Child of elements who was titled Windchaser by people. Human, nereid and elf. Still no match against the lizard even after he was injured that badly. Pretty sure the blood he was losing in the lake helped me somehow."

Ashirijen was seeking confirmation from Kali while listening to the incredible tales. But it was true. Breathing a big gulp of cold water to calm herself down, she sighed.

This trip really wasn't easy on her heart since its beginning.

"But I guess I won't get as bored on the way as I thought..."

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Even after calming himself some, Jacques still felt terrified and his chest was heavy. Why did this happen to him, why? He had spent his life until now learning everything he could about everything he found, satisfying his curiosity and thirst for knowledge. Not to help other people, but only out of pure self-satisfaction. Trading out the knowledge he had accumulated for comfort was only an effortless benefit on his road. Or at the very least worth being disturbed for.

But now, something he could never had planned for had broken into his life: magic. He had never felt the need nor the desire to learn it. On the contrary, he wasn't too fond of it. Because of magic and the presence of the Gods' Blessings, many things became obsolete. No need for complex machinery to do the heavy lifting and build impressive architecture when you can be stronger than a beast thrice your own size. No need for alchemy, healing poultices and natural remedies if magic could fix your body. No need for agricultural knowledge and how to maintain the soil's health if you can just imbue it with magic to grow crops.

The loss of all this knowledge tore at his heart. Almost every time he moved from town to town, he was able to unearth some new things, some old things, some lost things. And that was only speaking about human settlements on the Primal, never mind going deep in the mountains, forests, seas or another island.

And now a God was looking inside him. Magic again. Jacques feared the Gods deeply. A wave of the hand, nothing more; that's what it would take to erase him. Even less than that perhaps. And then all the things that he found would be lost again. For the first time in his long years, his dream and ambition were facing the cold hard wall of reality.

Still, obstacles were bound to stand in front of him and that was only the biggest one he faced yet. Perhaps he'd look back at it later and laugh of it. But anxiety wasn't the kind of thing you could repress with rational arguments.

Taking a deep breath, he resolved to take the plunge. He'd go back "there" and meet the God or whatever was waiting for him face to face. But since he wouldn't fall asleep naturally in his anxious state, he got up from the bed to get one of his bags and began fishing in it, pulling out two different types of herbs. One could act as a painkiller by numbing his touch, the other one slightly toxic would put him in a stupor and hopefully sleep. He was Child through and through now; that's what he was betting on to get through the little overdose he planned for himself.

After smashing them with a portable mortar and mixing the pulp with some water, Jacques drank the mixture and got back on his bed.

"This is going to be a wild ride." Was his last thought before waking up in the dark world. At least he could see, this time.

Facing him sat a skeleton on a throne, wearing rags. Its flaming blue eyes were fixated on him, seemingly piercing through his innermost thoughts, and despite the lack of flesh it looked like it sported a mean smile.

"Jacques, meet Jack", said a voice in his head.