

The flames heated Belladonna's skin as she approached the forest. Hordes of nymphs had come from the beach, but several burnt up on their way back turning to piles of ash that littered the ground. A nymph graveyard. *He's not going to fix the mess he's caused?* she thought.

When she glanced at his forest, it was mostly unscathed although a small pillar of smoke rose from the tree line. There was no raging inferno or fleeing nymphs in his forest. *Maybe they had the right idea after all. Look where allying with the humans has gotten us.*

She shook the thought from her head as she approached her plant with the water. The leaves were damp and so was the soil surrounding it. *Strange. Did someone else come here to help?*

Maybe it was one of the other nymphs. They knew she was the next in line and if the center of the forest were anything to go by, she was now the new guardian.

Belladonna pursed her lips and carried the water. "Everyone. Take your water towards the fire, we need to put it out before it spreads any further."

Several murmurs ran through the crowd, whispering. A boy shouted out. "But if we do that, we'll die."

Belladonna shook her head. "Not if we work together, but we need everyone working on this. Each of you needs to find a part of the fire and pour water on it. Once you've used your water, you're to use dirt and sand to help smother the flames. Understood?"

A girl placed her hands on her hips, her nose turned up. "And what if we say no?"

Belladonna walked up to the girl and craned her neck down so she gazed into the nymph girl's eyes. "Then you will have defied a guardian. Do you know what happens if you defy a guardian?"

Several murmurs rumbled through the crowd about "death and banishment."

The girl clenched her fist together at her side. "You would do that to a member of your forest?"

"If they chose themselves over the benefit of the entire forest, I'd have no choice. Is that going to be you?"

Her lip quivered. "No ma'am. I'll help. I'll take the water to the fire."

Belladonna's lip curved up in a smile. "Good. Everyone. We need to move quickly. This group over here. You can work on getting the edges of the fire that is approaching town."

She gestured to another group of nymphs. "You can get the part of the forest approaching farmland. If the fire destroys livestock and crops, more will be out for blood."

The nymphs fanned out in all directions, attacking the fire with sloshing buckets, leaking baskets, and handfuls of water. *It might not be enough. There's a chance we'll all die doing this.* The heat battering her face grew stronger with each step until the heat seared her fingertips.

Each step pained her and she worried her hair or clothes would catch. She saw another nymph moving to pour the water on the fire and held up her hand. "We need to all do this at the same time."

The nymph held the water. Some of it sloshed over the edge and the water hissed as it hit the flames. Once dozens of them had gathered, she shouted "Now" and they all dumped water onto the fire. It made a loud "hissing" noise, but the fire didn't shrink.

A wave of nymphs retreated and one shrieked as her arm caught fire. She flailed it wildly, ducking to the forest floor to try to put it out. A few nymphs grabbed handfuls of damp dirt and tossed it onto the fire, trying to quell the flames.

The flame roared, licking at trees. The scent of charred skin assaulted Belladonna's nose and she backed away as a human arm with angry red skin, covered in blisters reached out for her.

She winced when the hand went limp, falling back into the flames. Belladonna shouted to the crowd. "Don't let the fire touch you. Keep retrieving as much water as you can. Evacuate who you can. We have to stop this fire now."