

Ursa was quick to put some breathing room between her and the animated doors. She wandered, feeling little hope that she could ever find Tuur in such a massive place but uncertain that the world above was ever worth going back to without him.

The souls of the departed ignored her. Other scarier underworld denizens took more interest, but when they caught a glimpse of her three-headed traveling companion, they carefully kept their distance.

And so, she wandered, resting from time to time and snuggling with Cerberus when her loneliness threatened to overtake her. In time, the scenery changed. She saw great rivers and seas, grasslands, tundra, and even the deep lush forests that made her feel so at home. At times, she even forgot that she was in the underworld at all. Either the light had shifted to the greens all around her, or her eyes had adapted. She couldn't be certain, nor did she care.

Cerberus's leftmost head waited with stick in mouth, ready for her to take it and throw it once more. His middle head seldom rested, ears always perked, listening for danger. But it was his rightmost head that had become Ursa's confidant these past few months. Though he never spoke—none of his heads ever did—it was the rightmost head that always listened when she talked. His eyes watched her closely, his brows lifted as if he was carefully considering what she said.

“Am I wasting my time?” she asked him. “Is this hopeless? Is it even possible to find someone in such a place, or would you have to have a guide?”

He tilted his head ever so slightly, his brows drawn together as if to say, “I don't know.”

“And if I chose to leave,” she continued, “could I? We've been wandering for ages! I've only got the faintest notion of how we got here. I certainly couldn't retrace our steps.”

She took a moment to toss the stick for Lefty. When they returned, Righty took up his post beside her, listening intently once more. “Do you suppose he's looking for me?” she asked the dog. “He had to have known that I'd come. I mean, of course I did. But there's no sign, no clues, no...”

She stopped and leaned against his shoulder for a long while. Then, she wiped her eyes, letting out a half-smile when Righty licked her cheek. “I guess I'm ... disappointed. I feel like he's left me.” Ursa shook her head. “Well, of course he has, but I wonder if he gave up on me coming back for him.”



The two of them—or four, depending on how you counted—stepped out of the trees and into a wide green clearing. The druid paused, her blue eyes squinting a moment as she caught a ray of yellow sunshine that glinted through the trees. She pointed. “Did you see that?”

Without waiting, she transformed into a hawk and soared above the trees. Though not bright, there absolutely was a yellowish light way off in the distance. Could this be the sign she’d been searching for? Was this Tuur’s doing? A fire? A beacon of some sort he’d set up to draw her attention?

Her heart lifted, and she wanted to set off across the treetops, but instead, she circled back around, refusing to leave Cerberus behind. And so, they traveled together: her flying from one branch to another, then waiting for the giant dog to bound through the trees and catch up. Occasionally, she’d soar back above the canopy before heading back down once more, adjusting their trajectory so they wouldn’t veer off the true path.

Whatever the light was, it continued to burn day-in and day-out. She rested when she had to and traveled whenever she could. And in less than a week, she was there.

Ursa slipped back into her bear form and stepped from the trees. There, not thirty yards away, sat a familiar-looking panda, sitting with his back toward her and warming his hands

against the yellow-orange glow. Tuur turned his head a moment, and he fixed her with his soft brown eyes. He gave her a sad smile before turning back.

“I was wondering if you’d come for this,” he said with a voice that every fiber of her being had missed.

“Yeah, well,” Ursa sighed as she stepped closer, “I kinda need it.”

He nodded without looking back. “Should never have given it to me.”

That made her smile. “I never intended to, y’know? It just sorta ... happened.”



Tuur scooted over and Ursa took a seat beside him on the fallen log, snuggling up close. “I’m glad you did though,” he whispered. He rubbed his hands together for a moment before extending them once again. He warmed his palms with the heat radiating from Ursa’s glowing heart as it hovered above the ring of stones like a campfire. He explained, “It’s brought me great comfort this whole time.”

The druid pressed a fist against her hollow chest. She squeezed her eyes closed and forced a tear to run down her cheek. “I’ve missed you,” she whispered. “I’ve missed you so, so, so much...”

"I've missed you too, honeysuckle." Tuur put his arm around her and pulled her close. He kissed her on the cheek, then smacked his lips a few times, savoring the taste. "But you know I can't go. This is my place now."

She looked at him with red eyes, and he smiled. "Take it," he said. "Use it. Love someone else."

Ursa buried her face in his shoulder. She grabbed two fistfuls of his black and white fur. "I can't."

He turned and cupped her face in his palms. "Of course, you can. You still have time left. Please don't waste it."

"I could never love another," she sniffled.

"Then, I'll be here, waiting for you, when you're finished."

She bit her lip. "But what if I do?" she whimpered. "What if I *do* find someone else? What will happen to you?"

"I don't know," admitted Tuur.



"Hold me," she begged. "Kiss me."

But the panda just shook his head. "I want to. I do. But every moment you spend here with me is just going to make it all the harder for you to go back, to go back where you belong." He drew a great breath and released it slowly, his brown eyes sparkling in the firelight of Ursa's heart. "Take it. Go home and live the rest of your life. When you're ready, I'll still be here, waiting."

Ursa shook her head. "No! I can't. That was the only way I found you in the first place," she explained. "If I take it back, then I'll *never* find you again. I just know it!"

Tuur just smiled. With his bare hands, he took her heart from where it hovered. And with a gentle push, he put it back where it belonged, deep inside her chest. Then, he cupped her face and gave her a kiss on the forehead. "Don't be so silly," he said as he wiped away her tears with his thumbs.

Then, he sat back and basked a moment in the warm yellow glow that radiated from her. "You won't have to," he promised. "I'll find you."

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Epilogue: Life Goes On

