

The girl led Sunny and Darlene through the forest, past various bushes scattered about. They came to a wall of vines that stood in front of them. A tangled mess of spider webs and vegetation—it looked impossible to pass.

“Well, we’re not getting past this,” Darlene said, sighing. “Unless I burn it down.”

“No need,” the girl said. She lifted her hand up, and the vine wall grew higher. It came down then, and Sunny’s eyes brightened at what lay before her.

People walked around, dressed in greenish-brown clothing. They carried fruits, vegetables, and meat. Sunny and Darlene walked down and found a marketplace, where a man was selling clothes. Another market had food—while the third contained weaponry for hunting.

The girl pushed her green hair back and sighed. “This is my village.”

Sunny turned to her. “How did you—”

“A lot of work.” The girl smiled, then turned away from her. “I’ll let you two look around, I have business to tend to.”

As the girl walked away, Darlene brought Sunny to the side.

“Look, Sunny,” Darlene said in a hushed tone. “I think I know who this girl is.”

“What are you talking about?”

“She’s an Observer. She has to be the Nature Observer, I’m sure of it.”

“What’s that?” Sunny asked.

“I’ll explain later. But we might have to stay on our toes. She could be dangerous.”

“Why?”

“I’ve heard of Observers that have gone—off the deep end.”

Sunny turned when someone called out to her. It was a salesman, asking if she wanted to buy goods.

“No thank you,” she said. “I’ll be on my way.”

She felt a hand grasp her arm—it was Darlene.

“Come,” she said. “I’m going to find out what I can about this girl.”

They walked down the dirt road, past other people that were conversing or shopping. A crowd of people walked towards them, and through it they went—towards an isolated hut down the road. Sunny shivered. If Darlene was right, she didn’t want to go into that place.

Darlene knocked. The door opened slowly with a whine that made Sunny cringe. The demon stepped into the room first and surveyed the area.

There was a lone couch with a bookshelf beside it. A fireplace burned and Darlene knelt, staring into the flames. Sunny walked around, finding a hallway that led to a single bedroom. She peeked into the doorway and found the girl seated on the bed, alone.

“I knew you’d come here,” she said.

“I didn’t mean to trespass—”

The girl turned and her green eyes met Sunny’s.

“What’s with the eyepatch?”

Sunny’s left hand went to her eye and felt it. She tried lifting the eyepatch off—but something stopped her. There was a groan from within.

*It doesn’t want it off, she thought. It wants to stay.*

So she left it on as she felt her eye burning underneath the eyepatch. It stung, and Sunny winced, but she fought the pain.

“Are you okay?”

*Shit, Sunny thought. She knows. I’ll have to—*

Her hand went to the eyepatch again and grabbed it. She lifted it, barely—and a scream echoed in her ears. It was loud and she nearly collapsed to the ground. The burning intensified—as if her eye was melting away—and there was nothing she could do about it.

Darlene ran into the room, shouting something. Sunny couldn't hear it. The screams were strong and filled the room. There was something about a mark. Something about her. She didn't know what it meant, what it was. It was—

“Sunny!”

She jolted back into reality. The screams had stopped. The burning was faint, but it wasn't as painful as it was before. She sat up, slowly, and faced Darlene.

“Shit,” Darlene said. “I wasn't expecting this. Your mark—it's—” She looked down. “I should have talked Death out of doing that to you.”

“What the hell is going on?” the girl asked.

“It's complicated,” Darlene said. “Let's just say she's on her way to becoming a necromancer.”

“How? She's only a mere child—”

“A child trying to find out why her mother is dead.”

Darlene and the girl eyed each other for a moment. The girl sighed, then turned away.

“You, leave,” she said. “The girl can stay with me.”

“But I'm her escort!” Darlene cried. “You don't understand—there's a force out here that's more powerful than you can imagine.”

“Let me guess?” the girl said, turning to face Darlene. “A demon? I know your kind, and I know that whatever that thing was back there—it will be taken care of.”

Darlene sighed and sunk into the ground, disappearing from sight. Sunny looked up at the girl, who stood, staring at the black puddle that was left behind.

“You,” she said. “I have something to share with you.”

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The girl’s name was Dara. She was, indeed, the Observer of Nature. Sunny listened as she told her her tale. The tale of how the village came to be—and what Dara had to do to protect those within it.

“Why aren’t there cars or buildings or—anything?” Sunny asked.

“We want to preserve the life here, not cast everything away,” Dara said. “Making machines and metal structures only ruins places like this.”

Dara turned, and her green eyes lit up. “As the Nature Observer, I protect the environment in a way Mother Nature cannot.”

Dara held her hand out in front of her, and a vine sprouted from the side of the roof. The vine twisted as more vines appeared, wrapping themselves around each other. Eventually, a bridge was formed—out of thin air.

“I want to show you something,” she said.

Dara led her to the outskirts of the village, which was guarded by yet another wall of vines. Dara had lifted the wall—and placed it back. The pair walked through the forest, passing deer frolicking about, or raccoons feeding off of nuts. They approached a clearing, where Sunny eyed a metal structure embedded in the ground.

It looked like a slab, and Sunny walked towards it. Part of it was cracked, and there was a thick red line down the middle. The ground here was blackened, as if a fire had burned here—and only here.

“This is one of the remnants from battles past,” Dara said. “Those wretched demons tried invading this forest.”

Dara’s hand moved towards the slab and a vine poked out of it. It curled around the slab and slowly began wrapping itself around it.

“They nearly wiped us out with an ambush, but I prevailed. The animals—they helped me, and together we crushed those bastards.”

The vine—which now covered the slab entirely—began shriveling up. It sunk into the earth, bringing the slab with it.

“Those walls back there? I built them. I continue building upon them, and I won’t stop until my people are protected from anyone that tries to enter this place.”

“But you’re isolating yourself from everyone else—”

“Then so be it!” Dara said.

A hole had formed in the ground, and Sunny peeked into it to find the slab, buried partially in the ground. Dara moved her hand again in a circular motion, and the slab was covered with dirt. Another hand motion—and a tree began to grow from that spot.

“Sometimes, isolation is the only way you can keep people safe.”