

"The Arch Druid would have words with you."

That could mean a lot of things.

Which is probably why Drek said it that way. Asshole.

It didn't take you long to find the Arch Druid. Somehow she manages to be one with nature and a fountain of life that pours out around her. Grass grows, flowers bloom, bees swarm and birds sing wherever she goes.

Or doesn't. She'd practically set down roots and hadn't left the grove in at least a decade.

The Arch Druid didn't turn around as you approached.

But she did start speaking.

"Prepare for a journey. You're going to be helping a young paladin track down a mugger."

Somehow the Arch Druid's advanced age had made her become incredibly patient and incredibly direct. She never seemed hurried, but never seemed bothered with the need to mince words either.

*All things in balance...*

"The mugger attacked a friar during a bad time and escaped the city. An old friend reached out to ask for a guide."

You didn't expect more details. The Arch Druid said what she said and expected her students to figure out the important bits on their own. If they did, they would survive and thrive in the order. If not, they could still be one with nature in another way.

So far, you'd survived.

No one had entered the camp to speak to the Arch Druid. That probably meant an animal courier. The moon hadn't changed from when the delegation was sent to Valeryn to discuss their increased logging operations. It was only an hour's flight.

The Arch Druid turned. She held you in her gaze for a moment, assessing.

She must have approved of what she saw, because she spoke again.

"Help the Paladin catch the mugger."

Valeryn it was then. The Order trained there. Paladins upheld laws. When the Druids swayed the council to take measures favorable for nature, the Paladins were the most faithful to ensure the measures were followed.

"I'm sending you for two reasons. One, I like the idea of my friend owing me a favor. "

Which could generate good will and help the delegation, as well.

“Two, the mugger fled in the direction of the expanded logging.”

Normally a Druid approaching a logging site would be seen as a hostile act.

“Don’t catch the mugger before he manages to cause some trouble.”

Which would keep all things in balance. Help the city on one hand, but help nature with the other. It was a winning play for the Arch Druid...provided you didn’t get caught causing the trouble.

And if you did get caught, you were young. Young enough to be blamed for being brash.

And expendable.

*Survival of the fittest.*

“I have assigned Fedwick to guide you on your way.”

A chaffinch fluttered down and landed on your shoulder. A chirp identified him as Fedwick.

Then the Arch Druid’s attention turned elsewhere. There would be no questions.

It was time to go.