

in her path.

When she had learned of two earthlings traveling through Twilight Spectrum, only one idea of who they were had come to her mind. She hoped she was wrong, but her chances were grim. Every piece of news she heard about them seemed to confirm her theory.

But all that didn't matter right now. All she needed was them out of her way, and her master wanted them dead. It was as simple as that. When she succeeded, this would all be worth it.

She smiled at that thought. Not a smile of joy, but a smile of pure evil—just like her heart.



The wind blew through the branches of the dead trees, and twigs snapped. Even with the air boiling hot, a shiver ran through Flynn's body. She sat staring into the forest—not that she could see far through the mist that had come with the night.

Elodie sat up groggily. “Do you want to get some sleep? We can switch if you want,” she suggested.

“Thanks,” Flynn gave a grateful smile, though she doubted she would be able to sleep.

She would only be able to relax if *she* was constantly watching out for

danger, and she couldn't sleep and guard at the same time. It wasn't that she didn't trust Elodie. She *did*. But with other people ... it always felt like there could be something they missed or something they did wrong. It was stupid, but leaving things for other people to do always made Flynn feel fidgety.

Even so, she needed to get some sleep. She rested back against a tree and closed her eyes. She was just starting to drift off to sleep when she heard a slight rustle.

"Uh, Flynn? Is that normal in Twilight Spectrum, or should we be worried?"

Flynn opened her eyes and saw Jax, still asleep, being lifted upside down by a tree.

"Jax!" Elodie screamed up to him.

He opened his eyes slightly and moaned, "What? Let me sleep," then realized what was happening and screamed.

"Don't panic," Flynn shouted. "We'll get you down from there!"

He looked down at them and raised an eyebrow. "You know, saying '*Don't* panic' is kind of making me panic."

"Well, just stay put," Flynn said.

"Where do you think I'm gonna go?" he asked as the tree pulled him closer.

Meanwhile, other trees started twisting and grabbing at the rest of

them, almost like hands.

“Mmmgg,” Silver moaned. “Whaaat’s happening?” Jax’s scream must have woken her up, though apparently not all the way.

Flynn knelt next to her. “Jax is in trouble, and soon the rest of us will be too,” she said, propping the drowsy Silver up and snapping her fingers in front of her face.

That got her attention. Silver opened her eyes, which widened as she took in what was happening. “Oh,” Silver said, like trees attacking people was the most normal thing in the world. “That might be a slight problem.”

Butterscotch swatted away one of the branches, seeming only mildly annoyed.

Elodie grabbed her sword and got ready to fight. She tried cutting through the trees that were grabbing at them.

“Do you know how to use that thing?” Flynn asked nervously. They had sprinkled the pac powder on their weapons while riding through Thunder Valley, but they hadn’t tested it until now.

“Pointy end goes toward the trees, right?” Elodie asked.

Flynn sighed but knew she couldn’t argue. “Fine. Let’s do this then.”

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Flynn didn’t know which was more embarrassing: the fact that they

were fighting trees, or that they seemed to be losing.

Elodie chopped at the branches of the dead-alive trees, but they deflected her strikes easily.

“Elodie!” Silver called out to her. “You have to kind of twist the blade and pull up slightly when you’re attacking like that.”

Elodie tried it, and it worked; she chopped off a branch easily.

“You know how to sword fight?” Elodie asked Silver. “That might have been helpful to share earlier! When did you learn?”

Silver sighed. “It’s a long story involving a lot of free fried ice cream and purple poodles ... and my parents.” She muttered the last part.

“That’s sweet,” Jax said with a sarcastic smile. “BUT CAN YOU TELL THAT STORY LATER? I’M KIND OF BEING SQUEEZED TO DEATH HERE!” he shouted down at them, before a branch whipped over his mouth.

Flynn couldn’t really blame the tree for that. Sometimes she wished she could do the same thing.

“Sorry!” Elodie apologized. She kept cutting the branches back from Silver, Flynn, and herself—Silver shouting instructions as best she could.

Flynn started climbing the tree that held Jax but kept being thrown off by its flailing branches. Flynn was determined though, and on her third attempt, she was able to get to a sitting position on the branch that held Jax.

As she edged closer, she noticed that Jax's spear had reappeared. It made no difference though. The branch was holding him so tightly he could barely move.

With Silver's help, Elodie was doing a good job of keeping the branches away from Flynn and from strangling Jax. But Flynn was only faintly aware of that. Right now, the only thing that mattered to her was getting up and back down this tree alive.

Just then, a branch wrapped around her ankle and started pulling her down. "Aah!" Flynn cried out as she felt her fingers slip.

"Flynn!" Elodie cried as she sliced the branch in two with her sword.

"Thanks," Flynn panted, regaining her handholds.

Elodie grunted in response.

Flynn clung to the limb that held Jax captive, trying to move forward and not get shaken off at the same time. Theta felt heavy at her waist. As she scooted closer to Jax, she wondered how this was going to work.

"Uh, Flynn?" Silver peeped. "Could you hurry up, up there?"

Flynn glanced down. Even though Elodie and Silver (with the help of Butterscotch) were holding off the trees pretty well, more trees were joining in, and it seemed like the whole forest was against them now.

She wondered how they were ever going to get out of there, but put that thought aside and decided to focus on the task at hand. Flynn bit her lip

as she reached Jax. He had minor scratches and dirt all over, but aside from that, he looked unharmed.

“Hurry, please,” Jax urged. “I’m not sure what these trees want with us, but it can’t be good.”

“Maybe they want to suck our souls!” Elodie suggested.

“NOT HELPING!” Jax shouted down.

“Sorry, just a thought.”

Flynn took out Theta, its smooth blade almost glowing in the moonlight. She stabbed the dagger into the branches, then started sawing through them. The ogre tooth cut effortlessly through the dry wood, and soon only one vine was still holding Jax.

“Hold on!” Flynn warned. “I’m going to cut you free.”

Jax grabbed onto a branch, and Flynn cut away the last vine. Jax swung free, and he hung from the tree. His hands were scratched from the rough bark, and he struggled to hold on as the tree wriggled wildly, trying to reclaim its prize.

Flynn grabbed hold of Jax’s arms and pulled him up to the branch with her.

“Let’s get away from here,” Jax said breathlessly.

Flynn nodded in agreement. “These trees *do not* like us.”

“Ya think?” he said pointedly. “Now, let’s get down.”

Flynn didn't need to be told twice.

They scrambled down the tree like squirrels, Flynn's body going on autopilot. Step, swing, jump.

Flynn's feet hit the earth first, Jax right behind her. He held his spear so tightly that his knuckles had turned white.

Jax looked fine after the whole 'Almost getting strangled by a tree' thing, but still, Flynn felt the need to ask: "You okay?"

Jax raised an eyebrow. "Of course. But now, I'm ready to kick some tree butt."

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