

I stare out onto the golden and green horizon, inhaling the fresh morning air. Cracks and movements surround me as branches wrap me in a bundle of leafy cords. I paste a smile onto my face while the trees stretch out their limbs towards the heart of the secluded forest.

Dark invades, wrapping its ugly, cold fingers around my body. Here we go again. Haunting, ghostlike whispers fill my mind, clouding every inch of my freedom with a crinkly voice.

“You’ve trespassed into my territory for the twenty-third time! I will teach you a lesson you won’t forget.”

I sheepishly smile as her voice leaves my mind, knowing that she will forgive me. My twin sister acts like she is my mother, even though she was born two minutes earlier. Still, she has a soft spot for me, as long as it is the truth.

Suddenly, the branches thrust me forward, making me land on the crusty dirt face-first. I push myself up with both hands, brushing off leaves that coated my clothes. Out of nowhere, grass and trees form a cage around me, constricting me in a rigid position.

“Hah. You thought I would give up easily. I got Mother Nature to side with me.”

She appears almost instantly after that taunt, a mischievous grin playing out on her face. Nature usually was on my side since she is my mentor but this time, she was a traitor. Maybe I can win back her favor, but first I have to get out. I can’t help but grunt in frustration, even though I know that Dusty will relent. My sister steps toward me, breaking into my thoughts.

“Why did you steal my gift from Mother Nature? Oceana, you know you can’t use it for other purposes than what she told me, otherwise it will anger her. Plus, it’s my gift.”

Dusty stares at me with wide eyes, the fringes of her hair starting to blow in many directions. One look at her makes me tell the truth.

“I wanted to use Mother Nature’s magic to help with the construction failure. It worked but I should have asked before taking it and using her power for other purposes.”

Branches and leaves were losing their grip on me.

Dusty looks at me. “And. . .”

“I’m sorry for trespassing into your territory and using your gifts from Mother Nature.”

Dusty lets loose a breath slowly, as if she had been holding it for a while. Her expression softens, just like I knew would happen. My apologies are sincere, which probably is what gets me in her graces.

With a snap of her finger, the bonds loosen and I free myself.

“I forgive you. I’m actually glad you are here. I need some help with a mission from Mother Nature.”

“Huh?”

My sister had a different mentor who gave her missions as lessons. Dusty looks at my confused face.

“I know what you are thinking but Mom asked Mother Nature to give me this assignment for Girl Scouts to get my Gold Award. The thing is, I did not get it and Mom wants me to be working on it.”

Questions plague my mind. Why did she need my help if she was going to receive her assignment? I opened my mouth to speak, but I was stopped by the sound of branches cracking like fireworks to announce Mother Nature’s arrival. Flowers, leaves, and branches adorned her body and her beautiful smile danced from each cheek’s corner.

“I sided with Dusty because I want to give you your Gold Award assignment too. I know you took Dusty’s gift, but it will never be enough to make me trap you since I am slightly angered.”

My sister and I share eye contact. This could only mean one thing.

“I want you to work together to solve an issue that continuously weakens my power.”

This did not sound good.

“Many steal from me and cut down wildlife, taking portions of me to the Dump.”

I shuddered, a shiver crawling down my spine. I thought my teacher was undefeatable. Humans were severely damaging her. I know I can't just sit and let this happen.

"I need your help to stop them, to make them see that they are destroying me. I think that witnessing the destruction will show you how much I am suffering."

A path opens up as trees move, with branches hanging overhead. A light is in the middle, beckoning my sister and I to come closer.

"Go on. What are you waiting for?"

I look at Dusty and she stares right back.

"Ready?" I say.

Dusty forces a smile. "Ready when you are."

I nod my head and we jump into the light hand in hand. My vision spins, then goes pitch black.