

The Guardian

“As you look around at the beauty of our school’s very own forest, remember to watch your step.” Lynn’s teacher turned to look at everyone, “And everyone has their emergency backpack, correct?”

Everyone yelled “YES!” Before the teacher nodded and said,

“Good, now, ONWARD! Lynn grinned. She really liked Mr. Skarrie. “Now,” he announced as he continued the tour of the forest, “Is this anyone’s first time in the forest?” Only Lynn raised her hand. Mr. Skarrie smiled at her. “Well, is there anything you can see that makes our forest unique?” Lynn looked around for a minute.

“The forest seems to have a large amount of Green Bearded Chickadees.” She finally stated, quietly. Mr. Skarrie gave everyone a wide-toothed smirk.

“Exactly! Our school’s forest is home to 50% of the population of Green Bearded Chickadees!”

“Snoozefest,” one of the boys in Lynn’s class muttered to another of his goon-looking friends, “and it looks like That One Girl is at it again. The Outside One is such a teacher’s pet.” Lynn felt her face grow hot. All she had done was answer Mr. Skarrie’s question. What was criminal in that?

“Don’t mind what they say,” someone said from next to her, very nearly giving her a heart attack. “It doesn’t really matter in the long run.” Lynn smiled at her friend Cyrah, who had materialized next to her, but she couldn’t shake the feeling that she had done something wrong. By her classmates standards anyway.

“Remember to stay with me, class.” Mr. Skarrie called back to them from the front of the trail. “I hear that there’s a storm coming in.” Lynn stopped in her tracks. She almost felt an aura of alive-ness coming from off the trail. She stopped and stared into the brush for a minute, until someone called, “Hey, stay with the class.” Lynn ran to catch up, but couldn’t shake the feeling that someone was THERE, and could see all of them. Kinda freaky.

“Thank you for joining the class, Ms. Marvelle,” Mr. Skarrie said from the top of the hill she was climbing, “I take it that something caught your attention?” Lynn flushed, and nodded. “Then by all means, follow through on that adventure. Well,” he stated, “unless you don’t want to use Your emergency backpack, that is.” Mr. Skarrie gave her an apologetic smile before whispering in her ear, “Did you actually see something worthwhile?” Lynn stared at him for a minute.

“I... don’t know. Maybe.” Lynn murmured to him. “If I did, I have no idea what it was.” Mr. Skarrie’s gaze was glued to a single tree for about the next five minutes of the hike, which led Lynn to believe that he was done with the whole conversation. Which he wasn’t. In fact, he told, the most terrifying piece of the puzzle right then. Mainly the fact that it could be an evil spell-binding warlock. I know, silly right? But in that moment, surrounded by trees, and no civilization in sight, it was definitely scary. Heart-clenching jump scare level, even. And he told her the whole story. Not even the Younger Kids version. It was the plain black and white version. And it was terrifying. He told a story that his Great Grandpa had told him; a story about an ancient mage whose hunger for knowledge and power had led him to become- The Enchanter of Wisdom. He was evil, and commanded a bunch of monsters. Pretty much a recipe for terror on Lynn’s part.

There was one interesting part, though. Apparently, he couldn't leave the forest, for all time. Unless, he was set free.

Mr. Skarrie must have seen her shaking, because he embraced her and said warmly, "Oh, child, I did not mean to frighten you." There was something about the way that he said the words that made Lynn think that Mr. Skarrie was much older than how he chose to present himself. Sure, he looked thirty or less, but maybe he was older... After all, who said "child" anymore? "Come," he patted her shoulder, "We should be returning to the schoolhouse." Schoolhouse? He turned abruptly and started back down the path, with everyone following, and Lynn staring at the line in surprise. She tried to move forward, but was held back, by her own backpack. And behind holding on to the backpack loop, was Tom, (the earlier heckler), and Lexi, the annoying fashion fanatic,.

"So, the high and mighty Nobody has to show off her skills." Lexi sneered.

"Well let me tell you something." Tom snarled "Don't come to OUR school and expect to overthrow OUR terms with the teachers." Lynn stared blankly at him.

"Oh, don't play innocent with us." Lexi hissed. "As soon as you got here all the teachers graded all the homework harder, Unforgivable."

"Besides," Tom told her "It'll be a bit harder to get in good with teachers when you're responsible for their IRREPLACEABLE emergency backpack being lost in the woods." With that, Lexi ripped the backpack off of Lynn and handed it to Tom. Lynn screamed in pain as her arms flew backward. Tom grinned in fiendish delight at her cries, before launching the pack through the air, off the trail, and into the underbrush. Tom crowed in ecstatic jubilation, "Now how do you save yourself Nobody!" Lynn blanched. How was she supposed to get it back? Tom and Lexi looked on and cackled

arrogantly as she struggled to descend down the rock face of the hill and into the foliage below. All of a sudden Lynn heard the sound of feet running above her. Tom and Lexi were retreating. She struggled to find the backpack, and a nearly transparent piece of cloth rained down from the cliff side and landed near her foot. Thinking that it was going to continue its joyride of the forest, Lynn stomped her foot on it, while FINALLY finding the backpack and putting it on her shoulders.

The piece of fabric snagged itself around both her legs, before sending something prickly and cold into them. As the chill settled in her bones, she saw some movement in the forest. It was too large to be any rodents or birds, yet too large to be any type of hooved or clawed creature. As she struggled against the rag that was engulfing her, Lynn realized that she could no longer move her legs, and that it was spreading fast. Finally, she spotted it, a splotch of red around the trees of the forest, as a boy that looked about 15 or 16 emerged from the underbrush. By now, Lynn could barely see as the boy hacked at the monstrous tablecloth and the fabric loosened its grip, and released her. Her head ached and her vision swam as she toppled forward, and her world turned black.

Lynn's world was a mix of fact and fiction, and the haze in her mind wouldn't cease. Rational thinking was not an option. Honestly, she couldn't tell if she was alive or dead, and didn't necessarily care. Reality had no meaning, and neither did time. Had she been there for days? It could have been weeks, or months. She lay there, asleep, and oblivious. That was just fine with Lynn. The darkness was her friend and the more she wrapped herself in it, the safer she became. Reality was a lovely place, but she

didn't want to live there. All of a sudden, a scarlet light pierced the shadow, and wrapped itself around her. She fought against it, and old memories of pain resurfaced. She took one gasping breath and then another. She couldn't see, but she could think, and it made all the difference. The cloth. The backpack. The Boy. Her head lost some of its fuzziness, and instead of fighting the light, she just held on to it. She recovered her sight little by little, and could finally make out a red scarf on the neck of the Boy.

He was looking at something behind her, but he was bending over with his hands on the sides of Lynn's bed- Wait, when had she gotten here? His face was calm, but had an underlining of fierceness that she had never seen on any other human face. His hair was caramel at the tips that faded into a respective brown. It had a weird wavy spike-like texture to it, and Lynn couldn't tell if he styled it, or if it was natural. He had midnight eyes, and all in all, he was impressive, in every way. Lynn reached up and tried to put her hand on his shoulder, but learned one second too late that she was too weak to reach all the way up there. Her hand fell back, and she grabbed on to the closest thing to her. Which just so happened to be his arm. His gaze finally wavered from whatever it was in the distance, and to her. He gazed at her for a long moment. Lynn wanted to hide, but she couldn't stop looking in his eyes. They were so full of sadness, and mystery that she couldn't quite look away.

"Excuse me." He said. Lynn stared at him. What did he want? "Miss, my arm." It was only then that Lynn realized that she hadn't let go, and was still gripping him. She blushed and released him from her own grasp. "Thank you." And then he turned and left. Lynn had to admit, she wanted to see him again. It wasn't like it was because he was not carrying for her, because a tray with some kind of food, and water appeared at

mealtimes. The Boy, one day, finally came to visit. He walked into the room and sat down- on solid air. "Sorry I didn't come earlier, I shall try not to do so in the nearest future. You see, I have had quite a few things to do of late." Lynn stared at him blankly. Why would anyone talk like that? "I am making you uncomfortable, correct?" Almost on its own, Lynn's head nodded. He shook his own head. "May I?" He questioned. Apparently she had currently no control over her body, because she nodded again. He put his fingers on her forehead, and Lynn felt a cool sensation move through her body.

"Well," he relayed to her, "the times have definitely changed, but is this better?"

"What did you do?" Lynn intoned. He glanced at her before telling her almost causally,

"I siphoned off your memories."

"YOU WHAT!" Lynn shouted her voice echoing in the dense forest outside the window.

"Don't worry," he calmed "All it does is let me know what the culture of the present is like. Now I can talk like a normal person. By your definition anyway."

"Oh." Lynn whispered. It sounded pathetic, even to her. "Where am I? Who are you? Why can't I move my legs? CAN I EVEN LEAVE THIS PLACE!?" Despite her nervous breakdown, The Boy looked on in a calm, relaxed manner.

"Well, you're in Silverwood, or, as others call it, Everglade. I'm Blaydeborn. Mer Blayeborn. Also known as The Guardian. Spirit of Protection. The Rescuer, among others." Lynn couldn't help but stare at him.

"You're what?"

“The Guardian.” Lynn couldn’t quite wrap her head around it. “You can’t move your legs because they’re paralyzed. Product of a Wraith bite. It should be gone by tomorrow, but until then, you just have to wait.”

“So I can’t move my legs?” Lynn’s voice quavered.

“Oh, Poison Pine and Ticks. I’m not trying to scare you. In fact, you’re incredibly lucky. Any longer and it probably would have been your whole body and permanent.”

“Permanent?!” Lynn yelled “How would a couple of seconds make that much difference? After all, you said I would be fine by tomorrow, right?”

Well, you have been asleep for two weeks...”

“I was what now?!” Mer and Lynn talked well into the night. It was past midnight when Lynn went to bed and Mer left the room. But the next morning, Lynn was in for a surprise. On the table next to the bed was a simple note from Mer that read;

‘There are clothes on the dresser in the door to the left. Yours, Mer’ But after she got dressed in the lavender and silver-grey dress, she noticed something. Her ears were now pointy and purple at the tips! Not only that, but her hair had changed color! The new peach-orange color stood out against the lilac of the dress. Still, she was hyperventilating. Someone knocked on the door, and she could barely get out a

“Come-come in,” out before her breathing intensified again. And in strode Mer, who took one look at her and uttered, “You look beautiful,” and “Are you okay?”

“No. Yes. I’m not. Probably.” So he led her over to the chair in the other room and explained everything with only five words.

“You are as I am.” And that was it. Apparently it entailed her having pointy, colored ears, strange hair colors, and powers. And not being able to leave the forest.

And being a monster magnet. Great. Not only that, but the story Mr. Skarrie had told her about the Enchanter of Wisdom was real, and he couldn't leave because Mer had trapped him. The only way for him to escape was for someone to wander too far off the path and be trapped by one of his monsters. Oops. However, he never showed his face until MANY days later, and after so many adventures, Lynn wasn't expecting it.

"Wait up!" Lynn yelled after Mer as they raced through the forest. After so many weeks there, she knew it like the back of her hand.

"Try and catch me!" Mer chuckled and ran faster, disappearing behind a tree. Lynn dashed forward, only to find him not there.

"Mer... Where are you?" Lynn called out. "Mer, where are you?" Horrible cackling echoed throughout the shadows.

"Didn't the Rescuer warn you of me, Small One?" And then it attacked. In seconds Lynn was off her feet. It was relentless, and that was when Mer came. He drew his sword and the fight began. By the end, Mer was bloody and bruised, and The Enchanter was drawing him away.

"Go!" He yelled "Leave! It's going to make me take your place, just leave!" With that, they were both gone. The Enchanter, and Mer. Mer failed to take into consideration one thing. Once again, Lynn couldn't move. Instead, she was ultimately ceasing to exist. Her heartbeat slowed down. Then stopped. But then something happened. A blinding ruby light erupted behind her eyes, covering everything. A person silhouetted by the light appeared in her mind. The person plunged the sword into the ground, flooding her

body with power. Lynn knew it was Mer, even as the vision faded. She climbed to her feet and closed her eyes. It was time to fight back.

Lynn squinted across the marshy ground, her enhanced eyesight tracking the smallest movement and sign that something was there. She didn't stop. In fact, she had been at it for days. She no longer needed rest, or nourishment. For a brief moment she allowed herself to wonder if this was how Mer always felt. Then it was back to the grind. She could tell she was getting closer. Lynn was DEEP inside the forest now, and advancing towards a large mountain in the middle. How had never been found? She crept closer, her nerves on high alert. This was it, her final stand. She was leaving the forest, and freeing Mer, or dying trying. What could go wrong?

Mer's head hurt. His bones ached. Every part of him wanted to shut down, and restart. But something deep inside of him warned that if he slept, it would be too late. He needed to leave. He needed to escape, before...

"Mercy." A voice boomed around him. Before THAT happened. "You needn't go on like this. I can save you." This sent Mer into a fit of hysterical laughter. HE was going to save the Spirit of Protection? "Honestly, the child isn't worth it. Come now, you must understand, she won't live through the day." Mer's face drained of color.

"I dare you to touch her, Smarty-pants, and face my wrath!" Mer said brashly into the darkness. He stood up and faced the Enchanter. "And I'm more than enough to take you down!" The manacles bit down on his arms, drawing more blood.

"It doesn't look like you're in much condition to fight, Rescuer. Let's see you get out of those chains."

“Yeah, let’s!” Someone’s voice cheered and with that, the chains on his hands broke, and he was free. It was long, and brutal, but soon it was finally over.

“Did he just turn into dust?” Lynn whispered. Mer chuckled.

“Let’s go, Lynn.” And so they left.

“Goodbye.” Mer murmured into the wind. “I’ll never forget you.” Lynn opened her mouth to say something, but Mer stopped her. He embraced her then turned away.

“Have a good life.” And then the forest swallowed him. Lynn stumbled, to the end of the tree line. To the edge of her new world. She emerged and ran toward the school, where a curious event was happening.

“And this, folks, is where the scene of a travesty has happened. Lynn Marvelle, a 7th grader has been missing for a day. After being left behind in a forest, and a storm leaving wreckage all around the county, there is no hope of survival.” And that was when Lynn stumbled forward and said, quite plainly,

“I’m alive!” Everyone stared at her for a moment before reporters swarmed her.

“Lynn how did you survive?”

“Lynn, Lynn, over here! What did you do when the storm hit?”

“STOP!” Lynn yelled. “I was saved.” The reporters stared at her.

“By who!” Lynn stared into the rising red sun. It looked like a scarf.

“The Guardian.”