

The Chaotic Addition
#15 - Genre: Fantasy (1,031 Words)
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As Henry led the way to the small house, Mary looked around to see a few people performing their everyday tasks. At first glance everything looked so beautiful and serene, but something felt wrong. Mary knew she shouldn't judge, but she hoped this dark feeling was new to them as well. She couldn't imagine a place like this, which seemed to be right out of a fairytale, make you feel you were in a dark empty pit.

Aronia noticed Mary's frown and guessed the reason behind her sudden emotional shift. "It's sad what this virus is doing to the emotional environment of the world," Aronia directed toward Mary.

Mary gave Aronia a look that read, "Tell me more."

Aronia sighed, but continued, "When we first met, I didn't tell you who we are. We're..."

Before she could finish, Mary blurred, "You're nature spirits. You already told me, you come to people in time of need."

"We are, but our job requires a lot more than Henry and I offered you. We..." Aronia paused to gather her thoughts. "We are the protectors of nature and balance. When things go awry in your world, our job is to correct it before the world and everyone in it gets destroyed. But sometimes, when a great catastrophe arises, it takes a huge amount of energy out of us. Especially when we are having difficulties in solving the problem."

"Like the COVID-19 virus," Mary realized.

"Yes. The virus is causing a shift in the balance of nature, but don't worry. We have always protected the balance and this time will be no different. Now, let's start walking before Henry gets agitated we're not following them." Mary gave Aronia a weak smile before they continued on.

She didn't know how it could be possible, but the back of the old man's house and yard was even more beautiful than the front. It looked like an oasis lost in the desert. She saw a huge garden with a variety of plants including different-colored flower bushes outlining a stone path which crossed through the garden and entered a forest of tall trees forming a border around the yard. On the edge of a meadow was a little creek which ran into a small pond with Lily pads and

a multitude of fish. On the other side of the property was a circular palapa with green vines spiraling up the wooden poles which supported the structure with a table and wooden chairs beneath it.

After they gazed a few minutes at the yard, Old Man came out of the back door with a glass carafe of some type of unknown liquid. She guessed it was the concoction he mentioned earlier.

“So,” Old Man began, “Who are your marvelous guests and what is the reason for their visit?”

Henry began the introductions.

“This is Mary and Forest. Forest recruited her to help save his mother-in-law.”

“I see. And I suppose they called you to help them figure it out. I wondered why you both vanished while helping me pick my potatoes.”

Everyone nodded and chuckled at his words but soon there was an awkward silence.

“We called Aronia and Henry because they had knowledge about the virus and the world's chaos, including information about Michael and the Golden Sassafras,” Mary inserted into the quiet.

Old Man nodded, “Under different circumstances, I would encourage them to help. However, my potatoes won't pick themselves. And as they are about to rot, I need Aronia and Henry to help. But don't fret, I won't leave you empty handed. Another extremely gifted friend of mine, whom I started mentoring recently, will help you with anything you need.” Old Man looked down at his watch. “As a matter of fact, she will arrive any moment now.”

Like clockwork, a loud thud followed with tiny footsteps was heard heading their way. They all looked in the direction of the noise, waiting. Mary knew it was a nature spirit, but the girl's appearance shocked her.

A girl, no older than 15, with a huge smile on her face was skipping as she made her way over to the group. She had taken the nature theme to a whole new level. She had wavy brown hair with small twigs intertwined in it and emerald green eyes. She wore a light-green, sleeveless dress, a leaf shaped upper arm bracelet, and black ankle boots. Yet, she made the overload of nature accessories work and somehow it added to her beauty. Looking at this girl's positivity and excitement, Mary almost forgot that the world was in chaos. Almost.

When the girl was close, she began bombarding Mary with words. “Oh my gosh, you are so pretty. What's your name? Where are you from? Do you have a boyfriend? I bet he's also pretty. I mean handsome. Boys don't like it when you call them pretty. At least not in my experience. Anyway, my name is Twix. People say my parents were crazy for naming me that, but I love it! It reminds me of my favorite candy. What's your favorite candy? It's most likely not as good as mine, but I would love to...”

“Twix!” Old Man interrupted the girl's raving.

“Sorry. People say I talk way too much. What's your name?” Twix was calmer.

“She's Mary and my name's Forest,” Forest answered.

“THE MARY? I heard so much about you from Linda. You know, Sylvia's mom. I still can't believe Linda married a human and decided to live in your world. I mean, she did fall in love

so that's a plus. I could never give up being a nature spirit. I'd miss it too much, but sometimes I hear stories from my friends about places like Paris. I would so love to live there. I mean it's the city of love, how could you get anything better than..."

"*Twix!*" Old Man once again had to interrupt the girl's ranting.

"Sorry." Twix apologized.

Old Man began lecturing the girl to stop ranting and running on, but Mary wasn't paying attention. She was caught completely off guard by what the girl had said.

Sylvia's mom used to be a nature spirit.