

THE MACGUILLEE CHRONICLES

PART 1 THE JOURNEY BEFORE THE JOURNEY

Following in Grandpa's Footsteps

Two years ago

"I kind of expected a smoke hut, and suffocating in a pool of my own sweat"

In all of the tales Callum had encountered regarding meeting gods and forging alliances with spirit animals, that's usually how it happened. So when it happened that his grandfather brought him to an old sailing vessel, he was pleasantly surprised.

"That's funny", the old Tengu replied, stretching and cracking several of his bones. "I can do that if you want, but it's probably not going to help you contacting the Goddess. She's the Goddess of the Sea and the Winds", Grandpa laughed. "Not the Goddess of the heat exhaustion."

Callum climbed aboard and helped with the rigging, and before long the two of them were far off the coast, Murduin just a speck on the horizon. The day was partly cloudy, gusts of wind blowing the temperate air over his feathers. He was glad that it wasn't sunny; his black feathers would make traveling in such a day, miserable.

"I want you to catch some fish", said Grandpa. "Any fish you would like. Once you've caught them, get 'em cleaned up, descaled and de-boned."

"And this is suppose to help us, how?"

"She's the Goddess of the Sea and the Winds. You worship her and gain her attention by doing what she loves. So", Grandpa said with a laugh. "You're going to catch some fish and we are going to eat."

Callum cocked his head to the side and stared at the old bird. "And here I was expecting us to give it to the Goddess as an offering" This elicited a much louder outburst by his Grandpa.

"The Goddess doesn't eat, Cal. Thought I taught you more common sense. She doesn't eat, but we do. And since we are of her, the best thing we can do for her is keep ourselves fed.

Callum got a fishing rod and cast off to starboard. A content smile spread across his face, and he felt a contentment. Fishing had always come naturally to him, even if working for his parents hadn't. The sun poked it's way out of the clouds and a gust of fresh sea air blew past him. The boat bobbed a little from the waves. He looked to the side and saw his grandpa beside him with his own fishing rod. "Don't I have to do this alone", he asked.

"Of course you don't. She won't mind", he said, raising his feathered arm to the sky. "Besides", he said as he paused. "We're family".

It wasn't before long that both Callum and his Grandfather caught three Yellow Tail. Callum got to work with his knife. He grabbed the fish by the head and began running the instrument several times from tail to head. He then sliced into it beneath the pectoral fin, running his knife along the ribs to the base of the tail. The filets he seasoned with some olive oil, salt and pepper. Grandpa added some herbs to the mix that Callum assumed to be basil. The boat had a small galley with a stone lined pit for cooking.

An hour later, both Cal and his Grandpa were leaning against the rail, having now filled their stomachs. "Good job", said his Grandfather. "The Goddess should be pleased with such an offering." He chuckled to himself and put on a hand on Cal's shoulder. "Are you feeling anything yet, lad?"

"From what", asked Cal as he got up, intending to toss the bones and guts off the side of the ship. His legs felt wobbly and he leaned back against the rail, and then shot his Grandpa a look.

“Grandpa”, he heard himself say, “I think something's wrong”

His Grandpa was up beside him in an instant, helping to steady him. “Nothing is wrong, lad. Can't commune with the Goddess as we are. I needed to weaken your grip on the physical realm enough for her to make contact with you”.

“Aw, Butts”, he heard himself say as he slumped against the rail and blackness overtook him.

When he awoke it was night. Above him, he could see the swirling pinks and greens of the aurora borealis. He looks around him and noticed that he was on an islet. It couldn't have been more than 20 meters from side to side. It was made up of a small batch of trees on a hill, with some grass underneath him. He could vaguely make out several other islets in the distance. Grandpa was no where in sight in he had no recollection of how he'd gotten here. The last thing he remembered was eating the fish, and.. *did Grandpa drug me?*

He sat against a tree, feeling very small and wishing that he could just take to the skies and fly himself to safety. Of course, even if he could fly, he couldn't be certain about which direction was land. He couldn't have gotten too far from home. But what happened to Grandpa? *He drugged me so I could talk to the Goddess. Something must have gone wrong.*

A falling star caught Callum's eye, interrupting his contemplations. It seemed to be falling in his direction – a brilliant spark of blue and white, growing in intensity by the second so now it could be seen clearly through the light show. It got bigger and bigger, and as it got closer, it also appeared to be slowing. Callum got up from the tree and squinted and was able to see the figure of a person within it. He could now see the figure, whoever or whatever it was – they were in the form of a female. The features of her face were smoothed. She had tendrils in place of her – extensions of herself – that were streaming behind her and fanned out to her sides. She slowed to a hover about six meters in front of him; the intense brightness reverting to a soft glow. Now that it had and he could see her better, Callum averted his gaze as he realized that she wasn't wearing any clothes.

“Don't be silly, Callum”, she said with a soft voice as soothing as the warm ocean breeze.

“Propriety is for mortals, not Gods.”

Slowly he looked back toward her, noting the smooth, pale blue, shimmering body, with specks of blue trailing down her sides. “Of course!”, he replied, excitedly. “This is all a dream. I'm still safely aboard the ship with Grandpa. And you must be the Goddess of Sea and Winds. I thought you would be a giant, with glowing eyes and a voice like thunder. That's how all the encounters with Gods are described in stories”.

She hummed to herself and her eyes closed for a moment. “Your body is safe in your realm. Muirne, your Grandfather, is watching over you. But this is not a dream. Your spirit is in my realm, and unlike yours, power here is not represented by size or how loud one in. I could have appeared to you as a small cricket, and yet it would still be me; no more, no less.” She paused for a few moments and Callum wondered if she was waiting on him to say something. He was about to open his beak when she spoke again. “Why have you come seeking me?”

“Um, well”, he began, rubbing the back of his neck. “I know what everyone else wants me to be, but it doesn't feel right. I want to know more about the dragons. I want to learn and travel and find out what happened to the Elves. I want to know what happened to my sister. Speaking of, can you tell me if she's still alive?”. The Goddess began to grow uncomfortably bright. The waters suddenly got choppy, waves lapping up the shoreline. The wind picked up and the trees rustled loudly. It was now that Callum began to understand the meaning behind the Goddess's words. *All of this is the Goddess.*

A few moments later and the bright glow diminished, the atmosphere becoming more calm. “The knowledge of your sister is forbidden. You ask to know the outcome of the game before it's been played. The pieces are now being set and your part in it will not be insignificant. I can influence, as I have many times before, but nothing more. You must play your part as you understand it.”

Callum scratched his head feathers. “Can you be less cryptic?”

The wind stirred briefly before steadying. “You will undertake an important journey, and so to assist you, I will grant you a boon”, she floated closer to him, reaching out and touching his forehead with her fingers. “I will grant you access to some of my powers. However, for this connection to work, a part of you must stay here with me in my realm”

“I accept the terms of this arrangement”

The Goddess hummed “I have never known you to be so formal, Callum MacGuilee. Don't start now”

“My apologies Ma'am”, Callum replied awkwardly as he gave a wobbly bow. “I'm not used to speaking with Gods.”

“We will work on that, you and I”, she responded evenly. “I need one of your senses to stay with me, in order to cement the connection. Through this bond, you will be able to channel parts of me to the physical realm.”

“My senses?”, Callum asked, a note of anxiety creeping into his voice.

“Some mortals decide to leave their sense of sound here, so that they may hear my words.”

“But that would make me deaf”

“You would still be able to hear in your realm, but the volume would be much lower, more distant.”

Callum considered, turning and walking a few steps away from the Goddess, and pacing several times before stopping and turning back towards her. “What did Grandpa choose?”

“Muirne chose sight.”

“But he can still see. He gets around just fine”

“He sees as well as he needs to”

What's that suppose to mean? Callum had a feeling that that was as much information as he was going to get out of her. He closed his eyes. *What about my sense of smell? That wouldn't be too horrible to lose?*

“Your sense of smell is too limited to make a good connection. Pick another.”

“My sense of touch?”

“Not advisable”, the Goddess responded. “The physical realm presents many dangers, and you mortals are clumsy.”

“So really”, Callum began with a mild level of irritation in his voice, “what you're saying is that my choices are either sight or sound?”

To that, she simply stated, “Essentially”

Wonderful. “If taking my sight means that I can still see, like Grandpa, then take it”

She floated beside him and extended both hands to the sides of his head. Her touch felt warm and soothing, and he found all of his cares drifted away. He closed his eyes and yawned, and then he dropped to the sandy shore of the islet, and then fell through it.

He awoke with a start, short of breath, leaning forward from where he lay on the deck. Grandpa was on his knees beside him, a hand on his shoulder. “Steady, lad. Steady. Take your time getting up. Your bound to be disoriented.”

“Yes”, responded Callum grumpily, glaring at him and swatting his hand away. “That's because somebody drugged me against my will.”

“It wasn't against your will. You wanted to commune with the Goddess.”

“I didn't know I'd need to be drugged to do it.”

Grandpa clapped him on the back. “Next time I decide to drug you, I'll be sure to let you know beforehand.” He stood up and extending his hands to Callum, and Callum, despite his annoyance, found himself laughing and taking his Grandpa's hands, being hauled to his feet. He looks past his Grandpa, at the shoreline in the distance. He could see it crystal clear, in fact, he seemed to be able to see it with more clarity; colors becoming more vivid.

“I don't understand”, Callum said, hands on the rail, looking out on the horizon. “The Goddess

took my sight. So how is it that I am able to see so clearly?"

The older Tengu took a spot next to him, his gaze matching Cal's. "She gave you eyes like an Eagle. You'll be able to spot details at hundreds of meters away that you would have never been able to notice. Unfortunately you will find that this effect only works on nature, or things created from it. You will find that people on the other hand, people will be out of focus – at least at a distance."

"So like being nearsighted", Callum asked, eyes still off in the distance.

"Yes, but only in regards to people. But it gets more complicated than just that. Your sight seems to be linked to the alignment of the world around you; most of which is completely neutral in nature. The farther a person strays from this alignment, the more difficult it is for you to focus on them at range."

Callum turned back to his Grandpa excitedly, practically bouncing with excitement. "When can you teach me to do magic?"

His Grandfather smiled and chuckled, patting his shoulder. "All in due time."