

*What would your heart taste like?*

You carelessly disturbed me from my slumber, wandered into my perfect little section of the forest. I will forgive you as it's been so long since I've had company. I am delighted to have human guests, I always am.

Elves are light footed, vile little hypocrites. They claim a love of all life, yet warn any who will listen to turn their back to me. The dwarves know nothing of beauty and have no appreciation for my charms. Humans though, you are lovely. Kind, brave, enchanting creatures. Some, like the harpies, laugh at you, call you stupid and gullible. I never talk to the harpies though, they can't see your beauty the way I can. You are so hopeful, so eager for adventure, for something to believe in.

The elves see themselves as gods, the dwarves have no interest in hierarchy, but humans are the only creature I've ever seen that want so desperately to believe in something bigger than themselves. Blind, loving hope seems to be distinctly human and I want nothing more than to bask in the purity of human emotion. I want to absorb it, to feel what you feel.

Ah, you've stopped by the river now. Do you intend to make camp there? I would love for you to rest here, to keep me company, though the sun is still high so I doubt it. God rays peer between the branches of the tree, illuminating your cheeks, flushed and slightly sunburnt.

Do you like my field; my little clearing? It is my pride and joy, this small yard of bright green grass and hundreds of tiny wildflowers. I'm careful to keep stinging insects away, I always want to be ready to make a good impression on my unexpected guests.

The river water leaps up and splashes you in the face, making you fall back. It's out of surprise, not the force of the water; these water sprites here are not nearly strong enough for that.

Only young sprites are allowed in my garden, the older ones know better than to challenge my authority. Your eyes, at first widen in shock, are soon wide with delight as the sprites take form. They climb up onto the smooth river rocks beside you just to jump back into their home. Small and unsteady, many teeter too much and fall rather than just into the river. Their dreamy translucent bodies plunge into the water and dissolve in giggling ripples of foam.

They are charming I suppose. You humans tend to think so anyway, so I let them stick around.

A light breeze rustles around us and I see your head tilt up, distracted from the show in front of you. For the first time since you stepped into my home, you look right at me. Your smile when you lay eyes on me is wide and genuine and I know that you must be the one I've been waiting for. Your eyes are green, I see for the first time. A beautiful fresh shade, the color of a newly sprouted petal. As you make your way over to greet me, I marvel at your beauty. Your skin is sun soaked and deeply tanned. There's dirt under your fingernails, you've been away from home for so long, dear child. Do I remind you of your mother's garden?

"Hello there," you say to me as you approach.

*Hello, I want to say back, come closer. I want to see you, to feel your warmth near me. I've been so lonely; so alone for so long. I'm so happy you've come.*

Somehow you must understand what I can not say because you come closer until you are right in front of me, standing just before me.

*Hello, human. Stay here, stay with me, stay forever,* I try to implore, and yes! You reach out and touch me, trace a finger along a silky petal and I have the opportunity to bathe in the heat from your sun kissed skin.

“What’s a rose bush doing in the middle of the woods? The soil shouldn’t be rich enough for you to thrive. Enchanted perhaps?” You run a finger down my stem and prick yourself slightly on one of the almost invisible thorns at the base of my neck. A dew drop of blood blooms on your finger before you can pull back and suck at the wound. I yearn to lean forward, follow that delicious warmth, that tempting coppery smell.

“Ow. Damn, that’s what I get for being careless in the forest I guess. You truly are lovely though, I don’t think I’ve ever seen a bloom so big; it must be bigger than my face. Such a deep wine color too.” You gaze at me with loving admiration and I know, this time finally, I have found something special. You understand me, you see the beauty in me that so many others have failed to see. I stretch my leaves out to let you further admire me.

“Magic must have had something to do with it, though I can’t tell its purpose. Who would grow something so beautiful just to leave it in the middle of nowhere?” That’s a little hurtful, my home is lovely and I don’t know why I would ever want to be anywhere else. But I will forgive you, you humans always say whatever comes to your mind. So honest and trusting of others.

“Fascinating,” you hum to yourself as you examine one of my newer buds — a tiny thing, still tightly wound and mostly covered by green sepal leaves. “I wasn’t planning on coming back this way, but I think I’ll have to. The Conclave would love this. I’ll have to get a sample to bring to them.” From your waist, metal glints menacingly. My leaves shudder and close in on themselves, pulling away from you. You’re being foolish, this isn’t what you want to do.

I try to warn you, try to tell you to stop, but you just don’t listen. You pull my bud taught and start swiping your dull blade across its neck. You hack at me like an unskilled hunter cruelly taking down prey, slow and torturous. I snap back at you, I can’t help it, I have to. The blossom

you so admired earlier grows, but your attention is still fixed on maiming me. It's not until I am as big as your torso do you take any notice.

You fall back for the second time today, but the widening of your eyes looks nothing like it did previously. You dare to look at me with horror, as if I am the one who has revealed myself to be a monster, not you. This is your fault, I only want to protect myself.

I bring my roots up from the ground to hold you still, keep you from worming away. You have no right to leave me after you tried so brutally to attack me. It's only when I open my mouth at the center of the blossom do you remember to scream.

I must have still had some hope for you, that there was something redeemable about you, because as I swallow you whole I find myself... disappointed. You don't taste like sunshine after all. You've spoiled yourself with your terror. I hate that, it's so unfair of you, ruining our perfect moment together. It is on me really, after all I am the one who misjudged you. I thought you were wonderful and kind, but now I see you for what you really are. Selfish. But I shall not waste you as you would have me, the best nutrients are always found in blood and bones after all.

I'm so upset with you, I almost miss the rustling to my left. I turn my attention to the new person in the clearing. They are slender, young and have a head the color of leaves right before they fall. They're at the river, having already made it across the clearing while I was distracted by your hurtfulness.

"Elmer?" They call, looking around. "Are you there? I thought I heard something." Crossing their arms in a huff, they mutter to themselves, "I knew leaving the path was a bad idea. It's only an hour from town; you could have waited to get a drink."

Poor child, so distressed. I hope they find whatever they are looking for.

Clouds drift across the sky and move out of the way at just the right moment for the afternoon sun to glint off the knife you so carelessly dropped in front of me. Their attention is drawn to the knife on the ground and they turn to face me. Their eyes are the color of the ground fresh after rainfall, lovely and nurturing. Beautiful and perfect.

*Does your heart taste like hope?*