

Ivy

CHARACTER BIO

- Dragonborn (Green Ancestry)
- Druid of the Moon
- Alignment: Neutral Good with rebel tendencies

"The elders of the Nannachuak grant unto this child a name after the land in which our clan thrives. A name which represents the garden of our home forest. In her name, may she bind the roots that give life to the land."

Elder Dracaena held me above her head in her strong arms. I let out a giggle and cooed as a toddler would.

"We name this child," she continued, "Ivy."

The elder passed me into my mother's arms. My tiny claws grasped at her chin, and she smiled deeply in return. She spoke the words that complete the naming ritual, sealing my name in the clan record.

"May our moon shine this child's path through the night."

"You were there when my father died?" I asked, just old enough to understand death now. It never came easy for the young ones of the Green Moon – the Nannachuak in our Draconic language. While other children learned of loss from pets and animals, our ancient ways forbade keeping them.

No, we learned of death first hand.

"I was, young one," Hyssop said, propping me on his knee. His face reminded me of a bear's with thick scales that looked like fur, but in shades of green. Behind his kind eyes, I saw the resolute strength of a noble beast.

"He fought bravely against the orc raiders," Hyssop continued. "His last act was to save your and your mother's life. He died a hero. You should be proud of him."

I was too young at the time to know what to think. We always believed what our clan's doctrine taught us, even before we were able to wield staff or blade. We had no reason to doubt it.

"This is Hyssop's last day with us, Ivy," Mother said with a sad smile. "He'll be leaving during the ceremony this afternoon."

"How come?" I wondered.

"Because I broke the clan's greatest taboo, young one," he explained, rocking his knee with me on it. "I used our connection to the land and its animals to become one of them."

I looked at him blankly, not understanding. "Why'd you do that?"

"Because someone needed saving, and it was worth the price," he told me.

"The reason doesn't matter, Ivy," Mother interrupted, her tone soft. "It's forbidden. It's something we don't even speak of."



CREST OF CLAN NANNACHUAK

"You see," Hyssop explained, "the world can be a cruel place. There are those who eat the flesh of animals and use them for labor. There are others who hunt them for sport. Our clan believes that if you do any of these things, you belong with those people. And so you're exiled to their world, away from the forest."

"But you didn't do any of that," I said, still trying to grasp his words.

"I know," he said with tenderness. "But to steal the image of an animal is akin to taking their spirit in slavery. We so revere our brothers and sisters in the wilds that to use their form, especially to kill, is the most heinous of acts. I did this, and so I gladly accept my punishment. I will go to live with the heathens beyond the forest."

"Even if you saved someone doing it," I said, finally understanding.

"Even if I saved someone." Hyssop picked me up off his knee and sat me on the ground to play within the garden.

He and mother exchanged a few more words while I played with a wooden trowel, innocent as yesterday.

"Let's get you cleaned up, Ivy." Mother picked me up to wash for the ceremony. "Goodbye, Hyssop. We may yet meet again under a distant moon."

Hours later, the man who fought alongside my father and saved a clansman's life was exiled from our village, never to be seen again in these woods.

"You must feel the veins of the vine," Elder Dracaena instructed. "Feel the life flow through it, then urge the plant to grow."

She touched the flower bud, and it bloomed in the moonlight before our eyes. Gasps of amazement left the jaws of every initiate within sight, mine included.

"We born of dragons are uniquely tuned to this forest," the elder preached. "This is our only worldly home under the moon, and so we must be stewards of the land."

I practiced the spell as she instructed. It was second nature, but then I'd always been an avid student. I felt a preternatural connection to the wilds that others seemed to lack, as though the teachings were forced upon them instead of internalized.

A small flower, not yet opened, grew at my feet. I knelt and took it between my fingers, feeling the flow of life through its stem. I asked it to bloom for me, and it did. A smile crossed my mouth.

"Well done, Ivy," Elder Dracaena said, turning her attention to one of my peers.

Elated by the moment, I turned my attention to the sky above the trees. A small squirrel met eyes with me, and it followed a branch down to my shoulder. The tiny creature chirped lightly for me. Lost in the sound, I reached a claw up to touch it gently on the tail, feeling its fur and the thrum of life that flowed through it. It was oddly similar to that of the flower, brimming with vigor.

I felt my claw begin to change. It elongated into what seemed like a talon for grasping at bark, curving. I suddenly grew fur on the back of my hand in a strange color that stretched onto my fingers. It left me with an abnormally large squirrel's claw for a hand.

My eyes went wide in disbelief and my pulse raced, flushing my scales. The squirrel fled at my dismay.

"What is it, Ivy?" Elder Dracaena asked as the other initiates stared.

"Nothing. Nothing at all." I hid my hand behind my back, turning to ensure none of them would see. "I must go, Elder. I apologize. I'm not feeling well."

She looked at me with a worried glance, but nodded. "Yes. We're just about done for the evening, regardless. Go home and rest, child."

I managed a wry smile and fled into a run, hoping no one had noticed.

When I looked at my hand again, it had half returned to normal. I closed my eyes and concentrated, and by some miracle I was wholly me again.

My panic settled as I returned home, but a thought came to mind before I stepped in.

My focus couldn't escape the feeling I'd gotten. That strange unity. The similarity in life essence between the squirrel and the budding flower.

I had to test it.

It had been three years since I first changed that night in our teaching grove. The discovery altered more than just my form. It changed my sense of self. Something within me understood the nature of life on a deeper level because I had shared the form of the beasts we so revered.

And so every night after our daily druidic training, I went into the forest and took on the shapes of the creatures I found there. I became the gray wolf of our High Forest, embracing its keen sense of smell and joining the pack for a time to feel their camaraderie and kinship. I became a spider, alone and waiting in the

night, able to spin webs of my own design. I became the noble elk, free and fast as I rushed through the trees.

On this evening, I took the form of a panther for the first time.

My hands grew sideways and thickened, forming flat leather pads on the bottom as my claws retracted into them, sharpening. My arms sprouted black fur over my scales, overtaking my tunic as the fur travelled up through my torso and over my entire self. My bones crunched as they reformed in an instant, legs bending backward and arms shortening. I stooped over onto all fours and noticed my ears migrate up to the top of my head. My eyes became sharper than my claws, narrowing as my pupils expanded.

The night brightened as a sunlit day. I could see everything. *Everything.*

And the smells. The sweet scent of flowers blooming in spring, the acrid taste of insects in the air, and the disorienting odor of prey calling to me. Nothing was hidden from my nose.

I understood what the elders feared about this power. It flowed through my arms and legs as I ran. The grace and speed of the cat were my confidence and strength. It told a timeless story of predator and prey. One incompatible with the ethics of a culture living in the past.

I resisted the panther's urge to hunt. I'd had enough experience transforming into predator animals that I could control it now. The animal mind was powerful, but my reality was determined by my focus in this form.

Soaring through the trees and bushes, I leaped at breakneck speed before stopping to rest. The cat could catch anything in an instant, but it tired quickly.

This body was also an excellent climber. I scaled a tree in a single jump and hid in the branches, searching the forest as I waited.

I smelled them before I heard their clumsy steps through the brush. Under the full moon, the scent of something foul and dangerous marched forward, cutting the branches in their wake to clear.

Orcs.

A scream. One of the younger initiates in the distance.

I hurled myself down from the tree, sprinting as fast as my powerful legs would take me. Dodging through thick pines and birches, I found them. Three orcs, dressed for battle, cornered two of our clan younglings.

One of the orcs swung a vicious blade, stopping just short of striking Pothos, the older of the two. Heartleaf next to him cowered in fear, crying. He was the same age as me when I first learned of these monsters.

Monsters who'd slain my father in battle. They took him from me before I could meet him.

The panther's mind ignored the cold rage that threatened. This animal was a hunter and a tracker. It knew how to overwhelm its prey from the shadows.

I stalked close, taking care to stay as quiet as possible. Closer now, I saw Heartleaf injured from a fall. A broken leg running from the orcs. One of the

monsters had rope and bound the two boys at the hands and feet, eliciting tender cries from them.

One of the orcs let loose a chuckle, and I silenced it with a bite to the neck. He went down and called attention to the other two.

I snarled, bearing bloody fangs as I waited for them to act. The leader swung his sword toward me, but my graceful form was too agile for such a slow swing. I bit down on his hand and tore the blade from it before leaping onto the third orc to rake his eyes, blinding him.

The leader shouted, grabbing his sword from the ground with his good hand. He stabbed at me and missed, and I took the opening to rip that hand from his body. He called for retreat, and the crippled pair hobbled off while I growled.

The initiates tried to back away from the feral beast, but their binds kept them from getting far. I looked over Heartleaf's leg. The bone stuck out at a horrifying angle. He'd lose the limb without quick aid.

I was left with no choice. I shed the panther's form for my own.

"It's alright, boys," I said to them with as much calm as I could muster. "You're safe now."

The look of fear on their faces turned to utter confusion as they realized who had saved them.

"Ivy?" Pothos asked, shocked. I unbound his ties as his face went from surprise to terror. He pulled himself to his feet and sprinted off.

"Just great," I sighed, untying Heartleaf as my own heart dropped. I only hoped Pothos wouldn't tell the elders, but I knew better.

"It hurts," the young one said, whimpering. I grabbed a straight branch and tied it to his leg as a splint, wrapping the rope around to hold it.

"It's okay. I've got you," I told him tenderly, pulling him up onto my back to carry him. "Let's get you to the village."

We trudged the half mile back as I carried him, stopping for breath halfway. Heartleaf looked deep in thought.

"You were the cat," Heartleaf said once while we sat.

I nodded and smiled, unsure what to say.

"That was so cool!" he said, ignoring his pain. "The way you took down all three of those orcs! You were awesome!"

"I was, wasn't I?" We laughed, and he winced at the pain in his leg. "You're gonna be okay," I reassured him.

"I won't tell anybody," Heartleaf said, trying to do the same for me.

I looked at him wistfully. He was only a few years younger than me, but he had his whole life awaiting him. Now he'd be able to live it because of what I'd done.

"Thanks, bud," I said.

We arrived at the village to a crowd awaiting us. Pothos stood in the center looking guilty next to Elder Dracaena. The old woman's scowl said everything.

One of the men took Heartleaf from me, carrying him to the healer's hut. We locked eyes one final time, and I could see in them a final thank you. I knew we'd likely never meet again.

There were no words from the elders. No admonishing. No anger. Only disappointment and shame in their faces.

I went home to my mother, and she cried. She knew it was unfair. She told me she loved me and accepted me, but it was the clan's way. There was nothing she could do.

"One day," she said, "when these elders have passed and a new generation leads our people, I believe that we can cast off these traditions that cause so much pain and distance. We can learn to be more accepting of those who show their love of nature in ways that our culture sees as taboo. We can change for the better."

The next morning, I gathered my things and said goodbye to my mother. I attended the ceremony, unable to speak in my defense. The elders couldn't risk words that might poison others against their will.

I was outcast from the only home I'd known, but instead of feeling the shame that the onlookers there did, I felt free. The forest was still my home, and I was free to experience it in ways that my village refused to accept. I only hoped that one day, I could return to celebrate a new time with my brothers and sisters when all those exiled were welcomed back.

I had made my choice, and it was worth the price.



MAP OF THE HIGH FOREST

IVY'S TALE

This young dragonborn druid had a childhood of indoctrination at the hands of a fundamentalist culture. While the village was full of peaceful, well-meaning druids who worshipped nature in their own way, their tenets were restrictive and founded in archaic ideas that anyone from the outside could see were more ritualistic than sensible.

When Ivy learned of the hero who fought alongside her father and helped save her and her mother's life from orcs, it likely instilled a sense of rebelliousness in her that made her question the precepts of her elders. Her mother, as well, seemed to take a pragmatic approach to this knowledge. She never knew about her daughter's kinship with the animals of the forest, but she accepted her anyway because that's what a loving parent does. She did this even knowing the consequences.

Ivy's morals and ethics stem from her upbringing and the tales of heroism in her blood. She's a good person at heart, always willing to jump in and help those in need. As well, druids have an innate understanding of nature and the balance required to maintain it. Because of this, she embodies a Neutral Good personality. However, she might question authority from time to time because of her history, giving her a bit of a rebellious edge.

As a druid raised in a peaceful clan that revered animals, she refuses to take part in eating their flesh, even while transformed as an animal that normally would. Her clan had many rules against speaking out and questioning authority, and this likely prevented her from honing her own social skills in her youth. However, she's incredibly wise beyond her years, understanding nature on a deep level. Having spent so much time in the forest, Ivy's survival skills and personal insight are unmatched.

Looking forward, it's quite likely that Ivy's mother would leave the village to track down her daughter, introducing a new ally into your campaign. There's a good chance that Ivy may meet Hyssop or other members of her clan that have been exiled, and it might be interesting if they had found each other and formed their own second clan of outcasts. It's also possible that new elders will take over the Nannachuak and allow the return of the exiled shapeshifters, bringing them home for a festival to celebrate the reuniting. Elder Dracaena may have been outcast herself by an uprising from the initiates as more children in the village take to embracing their shapeshifting powers. The possibility of introducing her as a villain is certainly there.

Ivy's tale is one of choosing freedom and goodness and accepting the consequences that come with that choice. Her steadfast kinship with nature and her kindness guide her, and because of her acceptance of herself, she's soon to become a force of nature.

DRUID IN WILD SHAPE
ROGIER VAN DE BEEK (ARTSTATION)

