

The cold fog bit into my skin, and the moonlight offered no warmth.
I pushed a branch out of my way, walking deeper into the forest.

I needed a spark.

My whole life, I had been controlled, made to feel small. Now, the one person who cared for me was gone, and my parents were erasing him.

I watched the house's "discard" box fill with my grandfather's memories until nothing was left.

But when my parents dragged me along on our family mountain vacation, I secretly brought his old passport. While they unpacked, back at the cabin, I sat on the floor, holding the book which still smelled of incense and old paper.

On the final page, underneath a hand-drawn map of this forest, he had written a cryptic clue: *"When the world feels too heavy to touch, go to where the wind meets the water. Look for the frost. Look for the voice. They will remind you how to breathe."*

Determined to solve his final mystery, I slipped out into the dark. I was nearly four hours into the forest, tracking his map.

Suddenly, the air died. My breath bloomed in an unnatural frost. The air rippled, and a voice like distant chimes rang through the trees.

The singing... It was like a myth my grandfather used to tell me.

Two guardians.

A child of the deep tide with skin of moonlight, the Water Guardian and a child of the high gales with eyes of glittering jade. The Wind Guardian,

He said the Water's song was sung only for the Wind, and the Wind's light shone only for the Water.

It's just a legend.

Then who's singing?

I ran toward the melody. The trees parted, revealing a lake catching a bioluminescent glow. On the shore stood the Water Guardian, silver hair woven with pearls, an indigo kimono draped over moonlight skin. On the dock stood the Wind Guardian, their glowing white hair dipped in green, eyes a startling jade.

“You’re real...?”

I say out loud.

The music stopped, leaving a sudden silence. The Wind Guardian stepped forward. “You should not be here,” they said.

“Why?” My voice fractured. “Why do you get to be free while I'm hollow?”

“We are free because our books are closed,” the Wind Guardian replied. “Ink stains our skin. The storms are over. You feel hollow because your chapters are blank.”

The Water Guardian stepped forward beside the Wind.

“The hollow fills... The water ripples. Live. Feel. Breathe. *Inhale*. The tide rises. *Exhale*. Let the shore catch it.”

I took a deep breath. As the cold air filled my lungs, the numbness shattered. The grief and the quiet beauty of the world rushed back into me all at once. My curiosity and courage I couldn't feel before had led me to the truth. I had solved my grandfather's final mystery on this trip.

I felt calm.

I was finally breathing.

My Grandfather's last words... “*Live, Nova.*” rush back to me.

“I will...”