2137 A Blind Girl Walks Into a Bar  
  
Cassie was walking through the vast, abominable expanse of the monstrous jungle while keeping her hand on the hilt of the Quiet Dancer. A thousand scents assaulted her sensitive nose, and a thousand noises assaulted her ringing ears.  
  
The humid air stuck to her skin, making her feel dirty.  
  
She disliked the jungle a great deal.  
  
For someone like her, who lacked sight but made up for it — somewhat — with enhanced senses, the sprawling, swarming, slithering depths of Godgrave were a burden. There were no straight lines anywhere here, no predictable patterns, no orderly spaces… no safety. Only chaos and appalling abundance, which threatened to overwhelm her.  
  
Her Awakened Ability was not omnipotent, either. Shе could navigate the world with a level of confidence in places both strange and familiar, or even on a battlefield — at least for a while. But here, every step was a trial. There were bulging roots, thick vines, and old bones protruding from the ground. There were revolting spiderwebs, hanging branches, and swaying leaves…  
  
And those were merely the mundane obstacles. There were swarms of pests with fatal bite, pits of digestive acid hiding beneath thin layers of scarlet moss, rotting trees that reached for prey with vermilion tendrils and pulled living beings into dreadful maws, and countless other horrors as well.  
  
All in all, it was the worst possible place for a blind person to find themselves in… and for her especially, it was no different from hell.  
  
But Cassie did find herself braving the depths of the abominable jungle, sent here by the order of the King of Swords. She remained silent and did not complain.   
  
At least she wasn't alone.  
  
Two other Saints were accompanying her on this mission, both suited for it far better — Cassie was able to navigate the jungle by borrowing their senses.   
  
One of them was Saint Helie,  
  
who moved a few steps ahead in her human form while clearing the underbrush with the sharp blade of her xiphos — something that Cassie, to her embarrassment, was unable to do.  
  
It was not that she could not swing her weapon at the hanging vines and the bristling branches. It was just that the Quiet Dancer often failed to cut them — not because the slender rapier was not sharp enough, but simply because the jungle surrounding them was too ancient and too potent, resisting the blade of a mere Awakened Echo… even when it was augmented by a powerful Memory.  
  
Cassie sighed quietly. Even the weight of her armor felt unfamiliar — she had spent most of the last few years away from combat, wearing elegant gowns and enchanted tunics in opulent halls instead of donning chainmail shirts and steel cuirasses on the battlefield. So, she had neglected her soul arsenal, never bothering to assemble a set of combat Memories worthy of a Saint.  
  
But one had to wear pants when entering the jungle. So, she was paying for her negligence now, feeling burdened by the armor.  
  
The third member of their group was none other than the amicable old Saint, Jest of Dagonet, who walked behind her while using his cane to swat away the branches.  
  
The three of them had been sent to scout the most distant and dangerous stretch of the Hollows — the interior of the First Rib. The King had already passed here once, subduing the most dangerous Nightmare Creatures like a natural disaster, but there was still some work to be done before the soldiers establishing a secure route to the surface reached this finishing line.  
  
Additionally, this place belonged to neither the Sword Domain nor the Song Domain. It was no man's land in the truest sense, making it the most perilous — if something happened to the three Saints here, the King would not be able to help them. He might not even sense that deadly danger had befallen his champions.   
  
Cassie had other means of asking for help should something happen, of course. But Nephis was too far away, commanding the siege of the Greater Crossing… the Lord of Shadows was far away, too, back at Vanishing Lake. It would take him some time to arrive if she called, but simply knowing that there was someone she could call made her feel better.   
  
Swatting a scarlet vine away with his cane, Saint Jest sighed behind hеr.   
  
Then, seemingly bored, he asked in a mischievous tone:  
  
"Her, lass… Lady Cassia."  
  
Cassie turned her head slightly, like someone who could see would. These gestures were meaningless to her, but they mde others feel more at ease around her.   
  
"Yes, Saint Jest?"  
  
The old man smiled. She knеw it because she was sharing his senses, and could feel his lips stretch.   
  
"...What did a blind girl say after walking into a bar?"  
  
Cassie blinked a couple of times... which went unnoticed due to her blindfold.   
  
'No… he wouldn't. Would he?'  
  
She cleared her throat.   
  
"I am afraid I don't know."  
  
The old man smiled wider and suppressed a laugh.  
  
"...Ouch."  
  
'He did!'  
  
Cassie remained silent, not knowing how to react.  
  
Old Jest, meanwhile, let out a stifled laugh.  
  
"Ouch. Get it?"  
  
Cassie forced out a smile.  
  
"Oh…"  
  
Up ahead, Saint Helie let out a heavy sigh and looked down, covering her face with a palm.  
  
Jest stared at them for a few moments, then shook his head in dismay.  
  
"Ah. You girls are no fun!"  
  
Cassie briefly considered if his joke had been rude… but even if it was, she secretly enjoyed it.  
  
Turning away to continue walking, she concentrated on the old man's perspective.  
  
Saint Jest was indeed old — older than most Awakened, at least, being a member of the First Generation. However, he was as healthy and hale as a man in his prime. His body brimmed with ferocious strength, tempered into a flawless tool of murder by decades of relentless training. He was more imposing than almost any Saint she had ever met, even, as far as physique went.  
  
His cane was just for show, as well. He did not have a limp, and all his bones were in stellar state.  
  
…Which was a bit of a shame.  
  
Because Cassie was almost certain that Saint Jest was planning to kill her today.