1546 Raised by Wolves

Although Effie had gone into labor prematurely, both she and her infant son were alright.

The worst fear of the cohort had not come true, either. Perhaps because the child had been conceived in the waking world, or perhaps because he was born in the black void outside the currents of the Great River, at the very heart of Ariel's Tomb, he was not Riverborn.

At least that was what they surmised after cautiously setting the Chain Breaker in motion and observing no change in the appearance of the baby.

It was an immense relief.

Even Sunny, who always expected the worst and was usually prepared to receive painful blows from fortune, felt like an incredible burden had been lifted from his heart.

The immediate danger had passed. Of course, the future was still uncertain. They still had to fight Torment and destroy the First Seeker. The child's life still hung in a fragile balance, because it was unknown what would happen to his soul after the end of the Nightmare.

But, somehow, Sunny felt hopeful..

After everything had been said and done, the Chain Breaker continued sailing through the dark abyss. The members of the cohort took turns spending time with Effie and her newborn, full of contradictory emotions.

The huntress herself had been exhausted by the prolonged labor, but was regaining her vigor and vitality at an incredible rate.

She still looked tired and drained, though, when Sunny came to see her.

Effie was in her cabin, sitting in a comfortable chair. She was wrapped in a blanket, and holding a sizable bundle in her arms, looking at it tenderly. Sunny was actually startled by that gaze, unaccustomed to seeing his friend so… openly vulnerable.

And strangely content.

Hearing him enter, Effie looked up and smiled tiredly.

"Ah… Uncle Doofus. Welcome, welcome."

He approached and looked at the bundle, finally laying his eyes on the newborn.

Effie's child… looked pretty much like all infants did, with the exception of the fact that he was entirely too large to have been born mere hours ago, at least twice the size of a normal baby.

'That poor woman…'

Sunny looked at the huntress with pity. Effie had always been unreasonably tall, and her son would grow up to be a real giant, from the looks of it.

Internally, Sunny sighed.

'Another beanpole. Gods. That brat is going to be taller than me in no time, won't he? Well... he might just grow up to be taller than anyone. That's a relief.'

Effie's smile grew wider.

"He's beautiful, isn't he?"

Sunny stared at her in confusion.

She… had really chosen the wrong person to ask that question.

"What are you talking about? He's absolutely ugly. All infants are. And don't give me that look… you know I can't lie!"

The huntress stared at him for a couple moments, then laughed and gently stroked the sleeping infant's soft head.

"Well, I think he's beautiful. Almost as much as his mom is, eh?"

Sunny shook his head, wondering if all parents were a little sick in the head. Well, they had to be. Otherwise, what would make them care for the poor infants? A bit of unreasonable affection went a long way...

He hesitated for a while, thinking about the little life in front of him. The infant… actually, it was not very convenient to keep calling him the infant. Glancing at Effie, he asked:

"What are you going to name him?"

She remained silent for a bit, smiling. Letting out a quiet sigh, Effie shrugged.

"I can't just go and name him right away. I need to consult his dad first."

There was a moment of somber silence, with both of them refusing to mention the fact that the baby's father was most likely long dead.

Effie looked back at her son and smiled again.

"Ah! But… look at him. He looks like a little dumpling, doesn't he?"

Sunny's eyes widened a little.

'I knew it!'

He shook his head energetically.

"No… bad Effie, bad! You can't name your son Dumpling! That's a very bad idea!

She giggled.

"He-he. Well… I'll just call him Little Dumpling for now. We'll come up with a proper name after getting out of the Nightmare."

Sunny just stared at her for a while, then shook his head again, this time slowly.

"Whatever… do what you want. Don't come complaining to me later, though."

Effie gave him a mischievous look.

"Sunny… you, of all people, should know better. I mean, did you mom not name you Sunless? And look at you! You turned out… well…"

Her voice gradually turned doubtful. Then, she grinned.

"Actually, never mind. I think you might be right."

Hearing her laugh, he hesitated for a moment, then asked tentatively:

"How are you feeling?"

Effie looked at her son again, her smile turning slightly solemn. Eventually, she shrugged:

"Like I've been run over by a pack of Nightmare Creatures. But don't worry. Nephis healed me up pretty well. I'll be good as new, soon."

She caressed the infant's soft cheek and added, her voice hiding a somber undertone:

"Maybe… maybe it's for the best. At least this way, I'll be able to participate in the final battle. I've been drowning in self-loathing because of being so useless, you know. Now… either we survive Verge, or not. In any case, we'll be together until the very end."

Sunny frowned, studying her face. Her eyes were sunken, and her gaze was dark… but, at the same time, fierce. It would be of great help to have the fearsome Raised by Wolves fight side by side with them, of course.

But…

"Are you sure? What about your son?"

Effie hesitated for a moment.

"...If we fail, he will die. So, I'll hide him in the Black Beast Locket. And do everything I can to make sure that we both get to live."

She remained silent for a while, looking at the sleeping baby.

Then, Effie turned to Sunny and suddenly looked him in the eyes.

"You know, Sunny… I once told you that the world we live in is dying. And I still believe that — no, I believe it even more, after experiencing the last few years."

A light smile slowly appeared on her face, and something fearsome suddenly ignited deep in her sunken, tired eyes.

"But, you know… now, I find myself in the mood to go and turn the entire world upside-down. Maybe even tear it down completely and rebuild it from scratch, if need be."

She took a measured breath.

"Just to make sure that there's enough space in that world for this little guy to live a life that is worth living."

Effie looked at Sunny for a few moments, and then laughed.

"Someone has to, after all. And if we won't… then who the hell will?"