1554 Familiar Face

The words had been said, echoing in the beautiful darkness of the glowing night. Devoid of the wind, the sails of the ketch fell down. The boat slowly came to a stop, drifting in the current.

Cassie remained silent for a few moments, as motionless as the Echo of the Defiled sybil sitting by her side. Then, she asked, her voice tinged with a hint of amusement:

"Should I call you the Mad Prince, then?"

As Sunny's expression changed, she chuckled lightly.

"Gods… come now. I know that you only asked that question to probe me for a reaction, but how does it make sense? I'm not Torment."

Sunny frowned, disappointed at the fact that he had not been able to get more out of Cassie. He was considering his next question silently when she turned to face her Echo and said, throwing his thoughts into disarray:

"She is.".

He froze, stunned by those words.

Then, Sunny slowly moved his gaze to the silent Echo.

The red garment, the empty gaze, the veil hiding her face…

'How?'

Back when they met in Fallen Grace, Cassie said that she come to possess this Echo after slaying the sybil who had succumbed to the Defilement on the day of her entering the Nightmare. The two looked alike, true… but both Sunny and Nephis simply assumed that it was because both the slain woman and Dusk had been sybils ruling the same city.

The Echo was too eerie and revolting, making Sunny unwilling to learn what was hiding behind the red veil. Therefore, he had never tried to look at the creature's face.

The most he had done was glance at its weave, but even then, most of his attention had been focused on the artificial Echo created by the enchanters of Clan Valor — the long destroyed blade mannequin.

Now, however…

Cassie raised her hand and pulled on the Echo's veil, removing it.

Underneath it, an exquisitely beautiful face was revealed… one identical to her own, but devoid of life. The Echo of the sybil… of Torment… was hollow and expressionless, like all Echoes were.

There was a subtle expression on Cassie's face, though. A strange mix of revulsion, sorrow, and even a hint of tenderness.

It was not every day that one chanced to look upon a soulless copy of their own dead self, after all.

Gears were spinning in Sunny's head at impossible speed, trying to digest the stunning revelation of the eerie Echo's true nature.

'Torment… is dead.'

She had been dead all along.

Of course, he had suspected that something like that was the case.

That suspicion was a recent one, and had only entered his mind after they landed near Verge. Sunny could not accept that the fearsome oracle of the Defilement was not aware of their approach. It would have been fine if it was just Mordret and him, wearing Weaver's Mask — both of them could hide themselves from divination.

But the other members of the cohort had no defense against those who were attuned to fate, which made any attempts at hiding useless.

Nevertheless, the Chain Breaker had not been ambushed as it left the black void. The forces of the Defilement had not descended upon them once they reached the vast island of ice, either.

It was as though Torment had somehow been prevented them from acting against them… or was not in Verge at all. Which was strange, considering that she had successfully gotten rid of the Dread Lord and was supposed to be the new tyrant of Defiled City.

He contemplated the thought that the Mad Prince had schemed against the Last Plague, as well.

But the truth was much more stunning.

Cassie had never received an Echo for slaying the Defiled sybil. There was no Echo of a sybil…

Instead, she had received this Echo for slaying Torment herself. Cassie had killed her Defiled copy long before Sunny and Nephis even arrived at Fallen Grace.

He shivered.

Why keep it a secret, then?

Cassie studied the Echo's face for a while, then sighed and turned away. After a short pause, she said in a slightly stifled tone:

"I… suggest you don't look her in the eyes for too long. It's rather unpleasant."

The Sin of Solace hurriedly looked away.

Sunny slowly gathered his thoughts, still reeling from the shock. He was struggling to grasp the new information… it was too staggering, changing everything he had known about the Nightmare.

Eventually, he asked, his voice even:

"...When?"

Cassie shrugged.

"It was… about six months after I became Dusk, I think? Of course, that was not the first time we met, just the last."

Sunny remembered the chamber hidden under the Temple of Dusk, with a breach in its floor leading to the depths of the Great River. Was that how Torment had entered Fallen Grace and come into contact with Cassie? Was that where they had fought, and where the Defiled oracle died?

But how could it be possible? How could Cassie have defeated a harrowing Plague alone, despite all the time Torment should have had to accumulate power and information to prepare for their eventual clash?

Staring at two identical, beautiful faces — one familiar and full of life, the other alien and empty — he suddenly felt very uncomfortable.

"Can you… put that veil back on?"

He hated human Echoes, and he hated to see the Echo of one of his closest friends even more. Looking at the soulless copy of Torment was like looking at Cassie's corpse, which made him feel disgusted.

The blind girl hesitated for a moment, then put the veil back on, hiding the Echo's face behind it. Torment's empty eyes, however, remained visible, staring at Sunny without any emotion.

Cassie sighed.

"At least… she is at peace now. That is a mercy."

Sunny shifted his gaze, studied her for a few moments, and then asked his next question:

"How?"

The blind girl smiled.

"How else? Of course, it was arranged by the Mad Prince."

She fell silent for a second, and then added, her voice wistful:

"...By the Mad Prince and Torment herself, to be precise. The two of them, you see, were behind all of this together."