1859 Untold

Far away and beyond reach, a vast expanse of rolling water was glistening under the starlit sky. Black clouds were flowing like tattered banners, torn apart by the violent winds.

Colossal waves were rising and falling, each taller than a fortress wall. Countless bolts of lightning were flashing, branching as they struck the restless surface of the water.

Illuminated by the veil of lightning that connected its numerous masts to the stars, a titanic ship was waging a war against the storm.

The ship was at least a kilometer across from port to starboard, but seemed narrow because of its great length. Its ancient hull was made of wood, but had no seams — it was as if the entire vessel had been created by hollowing out a single branch that spanned more than a dozen kilometers from end to end.

Although, if there was a tree with branches so immense, severing one would not have been an easy feat. Fashioning a ship out of it would not have been a task for mortals, either.

The titanic ship was like a city in and of itself. There were dozens of decks, beautiful palaces and tall pagodas built on its surface, and great mysteries hiding in its boundless holds. There were wild groves, rushing streams, and deep lakes.

And people.

This was Night Garden, the great Citadel of the House of Night.

Despite the furious force of the storm, which would have destroyed any other vessel, the Night Garden was moving through turbulent waters with daunting, unstoppable ease. The colossal waves were cut apart by its proud bow and broke powerlessly against its indestructible hull. The branching bolts of lightning struck its masts and were absorbed by them, empowering the ancient ship.

The terrible abominations that rose from unfathomable depths from time to time to attack the great vessel were consumed by it, becoming parts of its living hull.

Even in a region of the Dream Realm as strange and deadly as the Stormsea, the people populating the Night Garden were relatively safe.

Tonight, however…

Human blood was spilled on its deck, flowing like a river.

The blood was absorbed by the ancient ship, as well.

"What… what are you doing…"

Close to the bow of the ship, an old man was crawling across the deck, leaving a bloody trail in his wake. His voice was full of pain, confusion, and sorrowful disbelief.

There was a younger man following him with unhurried steps, holding a bloodied knife in his hand.

There was no emotion on the younger man's face, and no mercy in his eyes.

He shrugged.

"You didn't have to be stubborn, old man. This could all have been avoided."

Behind him, a desperate scream tore apart the howling of the storm, and then stopped abruptly. There were more screams further away, some of them full of fear, some of them full of rage.

But with each minute, there were less and less of them.

The old man gritted his teeth.

"You've lost your mind!"

His killer sighed, then rubbed his face tiredly with a bloodied hand. For a moment, he seemed incredibly exhausted, a spark of some unknown emotion finally finding its way into his eyes.

"Have I? Ah, I'll admit… there might be some merit to your argument."

With that, he leaned down, grabbed the old man by the ankle, and dragged him back while raising the knife.

"...But then again, who hasn't?"

The old man looked at him with horror.

His lips trembled.

"You! You are not my son!"

The younger man froze for a moment, then suddenly chuckled.

The hint of emotion drained from his eyes, leaving only terrible coldness.

"Aye. I've heard that one before…"

The knife fell down like the guillotine's blade.

The storm raged on.

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[Wake up, Sunny!]

Sunny couldn't help but flinch, overcome by a strong sense of déjà vu.

There was a voice in his head, telling him to wake up… thankfully, it was not the voice of the Nightmare Spell. It was Cassie's voice, albeit at that moment, the two sounded eerily similar.

'Why is she…'

He was confused for a moment, but then remembered that not everyone was truly familiar with the strange nature of his existence. His original body in Godgrave was asleep, so Cassie must have assumed that she needed to wake him.

His over two incarnations, however, very rarely slept — so, there was no need for her to bother.

[What is it?]

There were a few moments of silence, as if Cassie was confused. Then, she responded, a sense of urgency in her voice:

[You need to return to the camp.]

Standing in the great hall of the Nameless Temple, Sunny frowned.

The avatar hiding in Rain's shadow was momentarily disturbed, as well.

When was the last time Cassie had lost her composure like that?

He could barely remember.

[What are you talking about? I am in the camp.]

She answered almost immediately:

[The Lord of Shadow has to return. Something strange is happening.]

Sunny looked at the gates of the temple.

It was a long way from the southern edge of the dead god's breastbone to the eastern reaches of the collarbone. He could make it relatively fast by abusing Shadow Step, but it would still take considerable time, and drain his reserves of essence.

Still, Cassie would not have called him back without a reason.

[What exactly is happening?]

There was a moment of silence, and then she answered in a tense voice:

[The House of Night is on the move. The king has summoned Nephis and Morgan. I'll tell you more the moment I learn it, so hurry… no, wait…]

Cassie hesitated a little.

[There is no time. Return to NQSC. I'll pick you up and bring you back to the camp. That will be faster.]

Sunny raised an eyebrow behind the mask.

'So, they finally decided to act. I wondered when they would.'

He had a suspicion that the House of Night would not remain on the sidelines of the war despite their desperate efforts to claim neutrality… a suspicion strong enough that it could very well be called certainty. He had known that something like this would happen ever since that clash with the Skinwalker outside Ravenheart.

Cassie and Nephis knew, as well. In fact, they had accounted for this eventuality in their plans. At the end of the day, it did not really matter to them which side gained an advantage in the war — because, eventually, both sides would have to be destroyed.

But Cassie still sounded tense.

Why?

Suddenly, he regretted his caution. Maybe he should have tried to infiltrate the command pavilion of the Song Army, after all. Or pressed Rain to share military secrets with her usually disinterested teacher.

'There is only one way to find out.'

Actually, there were many ways to find out. But that was neither here nor there.

Frowning deeply, Sunny reached into his soul and pulled on the tether.