

Backstory (Paladin)

It's hard not to think about your dad. In quiet moments your mind often wanders back to that small apartment full of song and happy memories. He was a bard, and a good one. It wasn't uncommon to hear passersby whistling a tune he'd debuted only nights before at the Sorcerous Souse, or humming words you'd heard him practising for hours on end, sometimes even ones you'd helped him write. He could burn a barn with the best of 'em, tear the roof off any tavern, and legend had it that his version of "When I See My Home Again" once grew a heart in a Hell Hound.

Sure his artist's life sometimes meant late nights that rolled into late mornings, but it never took away from the time you spent together. All it meant was that every new day was its own adventure, guided by whatever hour you happened to be stepping out into the bustling streets of Rookroost. Plus, whenever he had to leave for an out-of-town gig, or make a local appearance somewhere you weren't quite tall enough to reach the bar at, it meant getting to spend time with one of your other most favourite people.

Just a couple floors and a few doors down from you and dad's apartment was Granma Bette, the retired widow whose kindness somehow managed to dwarf her (literally) Goliath stature. She famously loved children, and even before her husband Don had passed, or her own Laura, Linda, and Daniel had set out on their own adventures, she opened the doors of their apartment as a sort of day(-and-night-)care where the many working-class parents of the building could leave their own pups and poopers. You'll never forget the first time you toddled through her door, and how she knelt down to give you a smile you could feel all the way down to your feet.

"Well hello there little darling." *Gasp!* "And my word if those aren't just the most beautiful scales I ever did see!"

Every so often a kid who was new to Granma Bette's apartment might start or snicker at the red ripples of scale dappling your skin here and there, but she never wasted any time setting them straight: "Come now don't be startled by my little sapphire, he's just as sweet as can be."

You loved that name - "little sapphire" - but you never thought of your scales as anything but beautiful, because your mother never missed a chance to tell you so herself, and she would know. She was covered in them. Even though you rarely saw her – and when you did, it was only ever at night – you never doubted that she loved you and your dad.

Even though the three of you never had much, you never wanted for anything, and your dad was never shy about telling you that that was almost entirely thanks to her. She always brought tales and songs of far-off lands, and left behind the books and parchments that helped you remember them. Whenever she visited, your dad would start to drool in anticipation of the culinary experiments he would attempt with whatever strange treats she'd found during her travels, and as your mind recalls the scents that wafted from his kitchen laboratory, you begin to remember why you usually try not to remember.

The knocks shatter the peaceful bliss of your memories.

"Duchess, we know you're in there."

The knocks again as you look into your mother's panic-stricken face.

“Duchess, open the door.”

Out of the corner of your eye, you see your father's hand extend across the table to cover your mother's. Her eyes shift to his, which guides yours to the calming gaze he extends to both of you as you feel his other hand reach your shoulder.

The door explodes.

Your father's eyes widen as his hand leaves your shoulder to reach for the crossbow bolt that has just appeared in his throat. Your mother's scream masks the sound of his collapse, but is quickly muffled by the gloved hand stretched across her mouth as her eyelids struggle to stay open, and her legs go slack. As she glides, borne by a shadow, out of the apartment, you feel cold leather grip your forearm as you look up at the assassin's raised dagger, and close your eyes to prepare for the end.

You hear a sickening crunch and the snap and groan of strained timber beams. You open your eyes and the assassin has vanished. The high ring, whoosh and flash of flying steel draws your eye to the wall where the cloaked figure now struggles - pinned between the prongs of a trident - before heaving forward with a cough that spews blood across the room as the prongs sink deeper into their chest. The gleaming mass of full-plate armour that has just appeared beside you heaves back on the trident's handle as a shadow lunges from the adjoining room. A bell rings out, and the shadow stumbles backward as the armoured-figure's shield completes the arc of the parry that deflected the blade. The trident sings again, and fails to find purchase in the attacker's leg as it glides straight through the assassin's knee, bringing them to the ground in a pile of bloody cloth.

As your protector moves toward the fallen killer to finish the job, they suddenly stop. You see an arm move swiftly from the soon-to-be-corpse's side, and can just make out the line of thread dangling in it's clenched fist. As you're cloaked by the shade of your saviour crouching above you, hosting their shield between you and the now-soon-to-be-crater, your eyes fail to meet those of your guardian angel, as you look instead at the strangely soothing material of the mask that completely covers and obscures their face.

Then everything goes white, and the world ends.

The next thing you remember is warmth, and the sound of birds.

You've died and gone to heaven.

You open your eyes to the green boughs of Elysium...but...what's that noise?

A raspy, scratchy, wet sound like...you turn your head and see a suit of full plate slowly rising and falling with the sound of rattling breath, muffled by a mask. Blood trickles from the armour and you quickly run over “Oh my little sapphire...thank the gods...”

An armoured hand pulls away the mask, and you look into the warm grey eyes of Granma Betty.

“I don't have long child. Quickly...take Triana”

She hands you the trident.

“and Brutus”

The shield.

“We're nearly there, but you'll need to go the rest alone. Follow the river, and when you find them, show them this.”

She hands you the mask, and as you grip it, her hand falls away with her final breath.

Though your tears flow as fast as the river you follow, you do as she says, and when you arrive at the waterfall to which it leads, you show Bette's gifts to the masked figures who emerge from behind the wall of water. You walk them back to her body, and help with the quick burial, but they don't call her “Granma,” or even “Bette”. They call her by a different name. It's the same name you call them, and they one another; the same name they give you when you take the oath, take up Triana and Brutus, and put on the mask; the same name everyone has called you for years now, and the same name you've given to anyone whose path you've shared on your current journey West from the Duchy of Urnst to the Kingdom of Furyondy.

They call her “Faceless”.