

Chapter XCI: Euryale's Woe

If Stheno was a bitch, then Euryale was a brat.

Our group backtracked out of the Labyrinth, following the yarn thread we'd left as a trail behind us, with Asterios the Minotaur and Euryale at the front of the group so that we could keep an eye on them, and even when we stepped out of the dark maze and into the sunlight again, she still refused to talk about who was after her and why. She seemed to have a thousand excuses for putting it off — first, that the Labyrinth was a gloomy and depressing place, and then that her dress would soak through if we stood about at the edge of that lake, and then that she wanted to see our ship first so that she could be absolutely certain we weren't on the side of the creep that was after her.

It was frustrating, having to accommodate her. Doubly so when Asterios continued to bleed and his wounds continued to slow us down, and no number of casts of our First Aid spell was enough to completely close the gaping hole in his chest from Emiya's nearly fatal blow.

Even Ritsuka, who was often the more even-tempered of the twins, looked like his patience was being tried. I wouldn't have blamed him for snapping at Euryale when she complained about being forced to walk the whole way back to the beach we'd come ashore on.

"If she thinks this is tough," Rika mumbled under her breath, "she'd have keeled over back in France!"

Silently, I agreed. There was no point in saying so aloud, though. Sometimes, you just had to put up with an asshole to get the job done, and there wasn't much you could do except grit your teeth and bear it.

Honestly? I wouldn't have been surprised if Euryale was doing it on purpose. Like she was testing how much we would let her get away with. Pushing the boundaries so she could figure out exactly how far she could go before we put our foot down. I could at least be happy that no one actually agreed when she demanded that someone carry her.

She was a Servant. None of us believed her when she said her legs were getting tired.

Finally, however, as the sun overhead was starting to creep down towards the horizon and the day loomed into midafternoon, we came out on the other side of the forest and onto the slope that overlooked the bay. The rising ramp that we'd climbed on the way to the Labyrinth descended before us, leading down onto the sandy beach, where puffs of smoke rose from the camp of canvas tents Drake's crew had set up.

"There!" Drake pointed, jabbing an index finger towards the bay and the motionless galleon that sat in it. "That's my Golden Hind over there! Ain't nothing like what this creepy stalker o' yours is sailing around in, is it?"

Euryale's brow furrowed, and her eyes narrowed as she looked out at the *Golden Hind*, looking over the red and black and gold paint that made it so distinctive. For a moment, she was silent, and then, almost reluctantly, she sighed and admitted, "No, it really isn't."

Like she'd been hoping we were lying and we actually were in cahoots with whoever it was that was chasing her.

"Fine," she said, resigned. "Asterios, remove the bounded field, would you? It looks like these guys...*might* be trustworthy."

"Says *Stheno and Medusa's* sister," Rika grumbled.

Euryale said nothing to that as Asterios nodded, straightened (as much as he was able to), and took a deep breath somehow while still probably missing a lung.

It was easy to forget, sometimes, what with how human and alive they looked, but Servants weren't really either of those things anymore. They weren't really flesh and blood, so they weren't bound by the same limitations.

Then —

Mash squeaked and the twins yelped and Drake gave a shout, and I heard none of it as I did what they did and slapped my hands over my ears to try and drown out the torrent of sound that keened out of what I assumed was Asterios' mouth. A visible wave rippled out from him, much like the one that had trapped us on this island, and it washed out and over the grass, the sand, the water, and eventually, the ship, jostling it all on the way. The *Golden Hind* rocked and wobbled in the sudden surge of waves that buffeted it, free from the trap that bound it in place.

My ears were still ringing when that...whatever Asterios had just done ended, and it seemed like I wasn't the only one.

"What the hell?" Drake squawked.

"W-what was that?" Ritsuka asked.

"A little warning would've been nice, you know!" Rika shouted.

"Was that...really necessary?" I asked our newest "comrades."

"...Sorry," Asterios mumbled, so low that I almost didn't hear it over the fading tinnitus.

"Stop whining," Euryale told us without the slightest trace of irony. "The bounded field's gone, now. Shouldn't you be happy about that?"

"I'm sure we'd all be a lot more appreciative if we didn't have to worry about permanent hearing loss," Emiya said dryly.

"You don't," said Euryale. "You're Servants, aren't you? Something like that won't happen even if Asterios spent the whole day screaming in your ear."

"Maybe not us," Arash allowed, "but our Masters are still very much human. Maybe show a little more care about that? After all, us Servants can't protect you without our Masters here to support us."

Euryale breathed out a put-upon sigh. “Fine. I guess we’ll have to be more careful in the future. Did you hear them, Asterios?”

“...Sorry,” Asterios mumbled again.

“Why are you still wearing that thing, anyway?” she asked him. “Asterios, take off that ugly mask, won’t you? I can barely hear you with it on.”

“Mask?” Rika parroted, echoing my thoughts.

As though to answer her, the skeletal visage of a bull evaporated off of Asterios’ head, and underneath it was a...surprisingly normal face. The long mane of tangled white hair wasn’t normal, of course, and neither were the curving black horns that jutted out of it nor the thick tuft that hung from under his chin like a beard, but of his face itself, the only thing really unusual was the menacing red of his eyes.

“Wow,” Rika said. “When you take off the scary bull mask, he’s actually kind of cute.”

Asterios looked away, a hint of red on his cheeks. He was actually *blushing*. The dreaded Minotaur that had slain almost three dozen children, said to be a bloodthirsty monster so violent and dangerous that it had to be locked away in an inescapable labyrinth, was *actually* embarrassed to be called cute by a teenage girl.

I’d thought I was done being surprised by this stuff, but it looked like I was wrong.

“That aside,” I said, choosing deliberately not to think about it too deeply, “we’ve held up our end of the bargain. I think it’s about time you start explaining who’s after you and why.”

“Ugh.” Euryale grunted. “Fine, fine. You want to know about the creep that’s chasing me around, right? Like I said, he’s a creep who doesn’t know how to take no for an answer. It’s nothing that unusual for me, not when I’m as cute and pretty as I am. Men have been chasing me for as long as I can remember because I’m just so charming.”

“Not to mention humble,” Rika added dryly.

“It goes without saying,” Euryale agreed, either missing or completely ignoring the sarcasm. “This one, however, is a little bit different. He’s a pirate, like your friend over here.”

She gestured at Drake, who blinked back at her.

“A pirate?” said Drake. “Well, can’t say I haven’t known a few here and there who go out kidnapping pretty girls.”

“Even that part isn’t so strange,” Euryale said. “After all, men of all kinds came to my island, hoping to ‘rescue’ Stheno and me from the terror of our sister.” She rolled her eyes, like she thought they were all dumb. “They never seemed to realize that the ones we needed rescuing from were *them*. A bunch of fools who would have lived a lot longer if they’d just learned to leave well enough alone, but a pretty face makes idiots of even the smartest and the bravest, doesn’t it?”

My cheek twitched, but I didn't say anything. She wasn't entirely wrong. I'd learned that lesson a long time ago.

"So what makes this pirate creep special, then?" Rika asked. "You just said pirates and men coming after you for, uh, *reasons* —" she tried to avoid the obvious — "isn't all that out there, right?"

"Because he's a pirate *Servant*," said Euryale, confirming my suspicions. "A nasty piece of work. Honestly, calling him a creep doesn't even really do justice to how much of a creep he is. Just imagining his eyes on me is enough to make me feel unclean."

She suddenly scrubbed her hands on her dress, lip curling in disgust, like she'd just set them down in something vile.

"Ugh. It *still* creeps me out. That pervert isn't even here and I want to throw myself into the nearest hot spring and spend an hour washing off!"

Mash and Ritsuka traded a look, like they weren't sure whether they were supposed to offer to help her or not.

"Does this creep have a name?" I asked.

Euryale's lips pursed. "He didn't say, and I didn't ask, so I couldn't tell you what it was."

Of course not, because that would be too convenient, wouldn't it? We were just going to have to wait until he inevitably showed up to figure out just who it was who was chasing her.

"What about what he wanted from you?" I asked. "What does this guy want that he's willing to chase you so far and so persistently that you decided to hide out on this island with Asterios?"

Euryale looked at me like I was stupid. "I know a girl like you might not understand," she said snidely, "but it should be obvious what he wants with a woman as pretty as I am. Of course he wants to do unspeakable things with my body!"

"Ouch," Rika said. "*I* felt that one, and it wasn't even directed at me."

I didn't react to Euryale's blatant insult — I gave it a six out of ten, honestly, because I'd heard a lot worse — and paid more attention to what she had basically admitted: she didn't actually know what this mystery man wanted out of her. I seriously doubted it was just some horny guy looking to slake his lusts, for a number of reasons, but chief among them was the fact that this might be the guy with the Grail.

If he had the Grail, what did he need Euryale for? Gilles had proven that a wish on a Grail could make a person from whole cloth. Chasing the real Euryale was pointless.

Maybe it was *because* she was the real one. He didn't want a cheap fake conjured up from his imagination, unlike Gilles, who had rejected the real Jeanne because she didn't fit how he imagined her in his head. For whatever value "real" had when it came to Servants that only captured a snapshot of the original person.

Of course, it might also just be a pirate Servant who had gotten sucked up in this Singularity, too. Him chasing her made a bit more sense then. That *also* wasn't something we could find out until we met him.

"Did you happen to get a good look at him?" Arash asked before I could. "So we know what this creep looks like and we're not just firing at any Servant who shows up."

"Not really." Euryale sighed, frowning thoughtfully. "I guess he had black hair and a beard? And he was a pirate, like I said, so he has a ship. A really big one. Bigger than yours."

She nodded towards the *Golden Hind*, so it was another galleon. If it was bigger, then that meant it was probably newer, so it was probably something from the Golden Age of Piracy. Unfortunately, black hair and a beard didn't really narrow the list down, because those weren't terribly uncommon traits, although it *did* mean we could cross Barbarossa off the list.

"Hey, now," Drake said. "It doesn't matter if it's bigger! My Golden Hind is the best ship you'll ever see!"

"It's all about the motion of the ocean!" Rika agreed, even though what she was referencing didn't actually have anything to do with actual ships.

"You don't know anything about ships," her brother pointed out dryly. "Or sailing."

"I don't have to!" she told him. "Captain Pillows here is the greatest pirate to sail the seas! That's all I need to know!"

And there it was, the Rika branded nickname. I deliberately avoided looking in the direction of her, uh, *generous endowments* for which she had earned a nickname like "Pillows."

"Pillows?" both Euryale and Drake echoed, confused.

"Congratulations," Ritsuka told Drake. "You've officially received a nickname from Rika. Welcome to a very exclusive club."

"I don't just hand them out to anybody!" Rika agreed.

Except she had literally given one to almost everyone we'd met, so far. That was almost the opposite of exclusive.

Unless she was being silly and including the rest of humanity and all of the people we *hadn't* met yet, and knowing Rika, it was entirely possible that she was.

Whatever. I wasn't going to argue this one. I recognized a pointless battle when I saw it.

"Unfortunately," I said, attempting to drag the conversation back, "that description doesn't really narrow our list down. It's too vague. There's almost two-hundred years' worth of pirates of one stripe or another in this era alone, and a fair number of them would have had black hair."

Including, technically, that guy with seaweed for hair we'd met a few days ago. Damn. Could he have been searching for Euryale and that's why he stopped us and looked us over? It might explain the entirety of that encounter, and I'd definitely go so far as to call that guy "creepy."

I didn't know that I could believe that his interests were...prurient, so to speak. That bath we'd taken with Aífe back in Septem proved that Servants had all the proper anatomy, but even still, with how decrepit he'd been, it was a bit harder to believe that he had all of the necessary parts to...“enjoy pleasurable company.”

And now *I* was making references to those movies.

“It's all the more I have,” Euryale said defensively.

“So...what?” asked Rika. “Are we just supposed to hope he announces his name when we see him? Like, ‘My name is Captain McCreep. You have Euryale. Prepare to hand her over.’”

“Most of the Servants we've met so far *have* been fairly upfront about their identities,” Mash pointed out. “Perhaps...um, Captain McCreep will do the same?”

“Please don't encourage her,” Ritsuka said.

“Especially when she's ruining a classic,” I added. Changing back on topic, I went on, “It looks like we might not have a choice, all things considered.” To Euryale, I asked, “Will you recognize him when you see him again?”

She sniffed snootily. “What do you think you're even asking? Of course I would. I'll never forget that man's ugly face for the rest of eternity.”

I guess that was as good as we were going to get. It would have been more convenient if we'd been able to get something like a composite sketch of his face, but we were all out of sketch artists and she didn't have enough detail to go off of besides.

“Then let's —”

Beep-beep!

“Hebert!” Marie said immediately. “What happened? We lost contact with you for nearly an hour!”

Ah. Deliberately, I didn't look in Euryale's direction, although I could feel her eyes watching me. Fortunately, I'd had the foresight to keep things to audio only, so our new companions couldn't see Marie directly.

I wasn't sure I wanted her interacting with Euryale. I had a feeling things would deteriorate very rapidly.

“A moment, please, Director.” To the twins, I turned and said, “Why don't you two and Captain Drake show Euryale and Asterios to the camp and introduce them to the crew? I'll catch up after I've filled the Director in on everything that's happened.”

On the comms, Marie choked, and there was a sound in the background that could only have been her slapping a hand over Romani's mouth to keep him from flipping out.

"Oho?" said Euryale. "What's this? Are you trying to have a secret meeting with your boss behind my back? Well, at least it sounds like a woman, although she's probably an old hag. That's the type that likes to nag their subordinates."

"Who are you calling an old hag!" Marie squawked indignantly. "I-I'm only twenty-one! That's the very opposite of being an old hag! In fact, I'm in the prime of my youth!"

"That's...not really something you're supposed to go around bragging about, Boss Lady," Rika said awkwardly.

"Shut it!"

"Don't that make *me* feel old!" Drake laughed. "I'm already in my thirties! Shit! Does that make me the oldest person here? I'm not responsible enough for that!"

"A pirate like you, I'm not sure I'd call you responsible at all," Euryale said dryly.

Drake pulled out her Grail, lifted it as though in toast, and proclaimed, "I'll drink to that!"

And then she gulped down the rum that had appeared inside of it, throat bobbing with every swallow.

"Are you *actually* drinking right now?" Marie demanded. "Just how irresponsible can you get? This isn't the time to get intoxicated! You're no use to anyone if you pass out on the beach!"

"Ah!" Drake sighed, satisfied, once she'd drunk it all down. She waved off Marie's concerns. "Quit yer worrying, girl! I'm a lot of things, but I ain't stupid enough not to know my own limits! This much rum won't even make me tipsy!"

"Does she have a hollow leg?" Ritsuka muttered. "How can she just gulp it all down like that like it's nothing?"

"Perhaps she has extra storage space in those useless sacks attached to her chest," Euryale suggested snidely. "Why, they're big enough to hold a gallon of rum each, don't you think so?"

Drake just grinned. "Sounds an awful lot like jealousy there, little goddess."

"Please," said Euryale. "I'm the epitome of beauty. What do I have to be jealous of?"

This was starting to get out of hand.

"Ritsuka, Rika," I said, trying to take control of the conversation back, "we don't all need to be here to report what happened, and Captain Drake, I'm sure the crew would appreciate being told that everything was handled. As your crew, it should also be your responsibility to tell them that we're bringing Euryale and Asterios along for the foreseeable future."

“What?” Marie shrieked.

“I’ll catch up with you after I’ve informed the Director about what happened,” I went on. “It’ll be easier to get through without anyone distracting me or butting in.”

If they caught any of the subtext in my words, I couldn’t be anywhere near sure, but neither of them put up a fight about it. Ritsuka nodded and Rika gave me another one of those silly salutes, responding, “Roger wilco, Senpai! Leave it to us!”

“We’ll handle it,” Ritsuka translated. He turned to Euryale and Asterios. “So, um...*Miss* Euryale and...*Mister* Asterios?”

“Don’t hurt yourself, boy,” Euryale said. “We’ll go with you.”

Asterios grunted, but didn’t reply verbally.

“Ah, don’t be like that, big guy!” Drake told him. She slapped him on the arm, probably because she couldn’t reach his shoulder, and he looked down at her, unsure of how to react. At the very least, he seemed to understand it wasn’t an attack. “It’ll be fine! C’mon, we’ll get you patched up, and then get some food in that belly of yours! Then you’ll be right as rain!”

“That’s not really...” Mash began, and then she gave up and sighed. “Right. Let’s get back to camp.”

And together, they all left, but not without Euryale eyeing me suspiciously as they went. Even though I could understand her paranoia, especially if this creep of hers really was that dogged in his pursuit, it was annoying that she was still so distrustful.

Once it was just Arash and me, I switched the communicator over to video, and Marie’s face popped up in front of me. “Director —”

“Hold on!” Marie said. “There were three extra Servant signatures with you when I contacted you! Why hasn’t the third one left yet?”

My heart stopped. A third Servant? One we hadn’t detected before now?

“Where?” I whispered.

Marie’s brow furrowed for a moment, confused, and then realization washed over her face and her eyebrows shot up towards her hairline instead.

“About six meters to the east,” she answered quietly. “Behind you, in the forest. We can detect the Saint Graph, but that’s it.”

Arash shifted behind me, tensing as his fingers curled around an invisible bow. My own hand went towards my Last Resort, and slowly and carefully, I unfastened the sheath so that it could be drawn quickly.

Had they been following us this entire time? In that case, were they with Euryale and Asterios, even though neither of them had said anything or given anything away, or were they with Euryale's mysterious creepy pirate Servant?

Or were they somehow unaffiliated? Had they been on this island originally and watched both us and Euryale and Asterios come here, trying to decide if we were friend or foe? No, that one seemed the least likely. Not impossible, but not probable either.

Whoever they were, they were probably in spirit form. There was no way I wouldn't have noticed them following us otherwise, and no way I *still* wouldn't be able to detect them with my bugs even now.

So I forced myself to relax a little and let out a dramatic sigh.

"Well?" I said, pitching my voice to carry. "I can't pretend you're not there anymore. Are you going to come out, or are you going to skulk about in the shadows some more?"

A long moment of silence followed. A breeze rustled the trees, sending the leaves dancing, but nothing else happened. Our mysterious guest didn't appear, but neither did Marie say that whoever it was had left, so I had to assume they were still there, watching, waiting, and probably hoping I was just bluffing. The problem for them was, I happened to be very good at bluffing, and I had a very good poker face.

"This will go a lot more smoothly," I warned, "if you cooperate. This is only a fight if you make it one."

Another several seconds passed. Marie fidgeted a little nervously and bit her lip, brow furrowing, but said nothing more.

And then something shifted in the forest behind me, and when I turned around, a woman shimmered into existence, appearing from the head down in condensing blue particles of glittering dust. The cowl of a black cloak hid her face from view, and she hugged the fabric to her body, as though shielding herself from the world. The only reason I could even tell it was a woman was because of her dainty feet and the fact that she was five foot four if she was lucky.

Even so close, I could barely make out her presence. By the furrow of his brow, even Arash was having trouble sensing her, and yet, she obviously wasn't an Assassin, because if she was, then there was no way Chaldea's sensors would have even picked her up. Not unless she was so poor an Assassin that her Presence Concealment was abysmally low.

"How long did you know?" she asked me bitterly.

Lisa might have said something along the lines of "since before you were born," but that wouldn't be particularly helpful here. I just needed to keep her from knowing the truth; pissing her off wasn't necessary.

So I settled for the vague, noncommittal, "Long enough."

Her mouth — the only part of her face I could see at all — pulled into a scowl.

I wished I was more confident in how long she'd actually been tailing us, because it would really have thrown her off guard if I said that I'd known she was following us since the Labyrinth and she actually had been. Unfortunately, getting that wrong would weaken my position here too much to risk it, so I left it at that.

"You want to tell me why you were hanging around?"

"Don't you already know?" she shot back.

"I have a few guesses," I said calmly. "I'd rather hear you say it yourself."

She bowed her head and said nothing. Great. I guess we were going to be doing this the hard way, then.

"Alright. The way I see it, there are three main possibilities. First, you're a minion of that creep that's chasing Euryale, and you're here to scout out and report her location."

A huff of air escaped her nostrils, and it might one day have grown up into a snort. That was a no, then, which was all for the better as far as I was concerned. It pulled her out of the "almost certainly an enemy" category and moved her into "possible ally," although it wasn't definitive enough to say for sure.

"Second, you were summoned by the Counter Force and you've been trapped on this island ever since. When Euryale and Asterios decided to hide away here, you snuck around, and you've been following them in secret to try and get a hang of what's been going on in this place."

"And the third?" she challenged, so it wasn't option two, either. I'd had my doubts.

"I thought so," I said like I'd known the answer from the beginning. "I guess it was too much to expect that Euryale would trust us that easily. If it really concerns you that much, then go ahead and listen while I give the Director my report. The reason I sent the others away was to avoid wasting too much time on the bickering and insults."

She took a step forward and out of the forest. "Then you won't mind if I get closer so that I can hear you properly?"

"As long as *you* don't mind the fact that Arash will be keeping a close eye on you."

Arash, who had been silent up to now, merely frowned. The genial, friendly hero was nowhere in sight, and that was almost as worrying as the idea of him cussing up a storm.

Something wrong? I asked him silently.

...I don't know, he admitted. *There's...something about her. A...kind of presence that clings to her like tar.*

That...wasn't what I wanted to hear. *Is it something to worry about?*

I don't know, he said again. *It's not something she's causing, I don't think. It's more like a curse she's under.*

Fantastic. And she would clam up tighter than Fort Knox if I asked about it, wouldn't she? As suspicious and distrustful as she was, I wouldn't get a straight answer at all, so there wasn't even a point in asking.

I turned back around and addressed Marie, "Should we get back to my report?"

She startled, blinking at me for a handful of seconds, before she regained her composure.

"R-right! Yes, of course!" She cleared her throat into her fist and tried for an air of professionalism. "You were going to explain why it was we lost contact with you for almost an hour."

"Right," I said, pretending not to notice our "guest" stalking closer to me. "It happened not long after we dropped anchor near the island..."

So I explained what happened, from the ship getting trapped to the fight with Asterios all the way to Euryale's admittedly sparse explanation of the Servant pursuing her. In the interest of saving time, I kept mostly to the highlights and avoided things like my attempt to summon Siegfried failing and just how much trouble Asterios actually gave us. No need to tell our mystery woman too much about what we were capable of.

Although if she'd been with Euryale and Asterios since the beginning, then she'd probably already seen that summoning fail. I still wasn't going to give her anything more to go on, not when we knew almost nothing about her.

By the end of it, Marie was leaning forward on her console, chin in hand and brow furrowed, the bridge of her nose crinkling — the seated version of her thinking pose.

"A pirate with black hair and a beard?" she murmured. "That's..."

"Hopelessly vague, yes," I concluded. "It might be our visitor from a couple days ago, but without more to go on, there's no way to know for sure."

"I'll run the description to see if we can find any positive matches that would narrow it down," Marie promised, but she didn't sound all that hopeful. I wasn't, either. "In the meantime, are you going to stay on that island?"

"For the night, yes," I told her. "The next island is significantly further away, and there's some sort of perpetual vortex that we'll have to avoid, according to the map, so it's better if we have some time to relax and prepare beforehand."

Marie nodded. "We're still making space to accommodate the supplies you suggested sending, so we might not be ready before you leave the island — tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Before you leave tomorrow," she finished. "However, we should be fully prepared by the time you reach the next island, so at that point, we'll arrange to receive whatever food and drink Captain Drake's Grail can send our way."

“Understood,” I said. “I’ll contact you once we’ve made landfall to set up the transfer.”

“For now, however...”

She tapped something on her keyboard, and after a minute or so, she ordered, “Check your map.”

I resisted the urge to arch an eyebrow and did as she asked, pulling up my map of the Singularity. There, immediately, I could see three new labels: the first, the island where we met Drake, was simply “Pirate’s Paradise.” The second, where we’d first encountered those “concepts of the pirates,” was named “Crescent Island,” no doubt because of the crescent shaped mountain that curved around the beach.

The third, where I was currently standing, was called “New Crete,” and I had to stifle a groan. Something, however, must have shown on my face, or maybe she was just incredibly self-conscious about it, because Marie immediately went on the defense and said, “I-it’s not like there’s a more appropriate name for it, is there? It seemed appropriate!”

“No,” I allowed neutrally, “I guess not.”

On the plus side, if Marie was making changes like this, then it meant that the Singularity itself hadn’t changed since we arrived, so it was settled enough that we didn’t have to worry about the islands spontaneously morphing under our feet. It was as “terra firma” as it was going to get.

“I-in any case,” she segued clumsily, “be careful! We still don’t know who has the Grail that is distorting that Singularity, so keep your eyes peeled! It might even be this creepy pirate Servant that Euryale claims is chasing her around, which means he’ll be coming to you! You have to stay vigilant!”

Or it could be someone who hadn’t even shown their face yet. After all, Drake hadn’t recognized any of the Servants we’d come across so far, and yet she’d apparently had encounters with one or more that led to the discovery that her Grail let her hurt them. We still knew way too little about what was going on in this place.

“Of course, Director.”

“A-and another thing!” she went on. “No more drinking! Tell Ritsuka if he gets intoxicated again, I’ll...I’ll dock his pay!”

I resisted the urge to smile. “I don’t think that’s going to have quite the impact you think it will, Director.”

Since we technically weren’t even getting paid right now. Even when this was all over and if by some miracle our backpay got handled smoothly, he would still get enough for fixing these Singularities that docking a few days’ worth for being “drunk on the job” would be essentially meaningless.

She huffed. “I-it’s the principle of the thing! As a Master of Chaldea, he has a responsibility to represent us and comport himself appropriately! I won’t tolerate any...any *slovenliness* from anyone!”

Only Marie could use a word like “slovenliness” so seriously.

“Of course, Director. I’ll make sure to remind him.”

Marie grunted and crossed her arms, glowering at me through the hologram. “I can tell when you’re humoring me, you know. I know you well enough by now.”

“Then you know that I won’t let any of it get in the way of the job,” I replied. “I think Ritsuka has learned his lesson. It won’t happen again.”

She met my gaze for a long second and then nodded. “Good.”

A moment later, the connection cut, and I shut my communicator off as I turned back around to face our mystery guest.

“Satisfied?”

For a moment, she didn’t reply, she just stared at me from under her cowl, her eyes hidden. The only thing I could make out was the thinning of her lips. At length, she sighed and forced herself to relax a little, but even with how little of her face and body I could see, I could tell it was largely an act. That cloak of hers couldn’t hide *everything*.

“I suppose I’ll have to be, won’t I?” she lamented. “Very well. At the very least, you don’t seem to be on the side of that pervert. I’ll go along with you, for now, since it seems like our interests align at the moment.”

And she wasn’t going to tell me how they aligned, was she? Of course not. If she got any more skittish, I wouldn’t be surprised to see her grow a pair of wings and take off.

Fine. I knew how to play this game. Eventually, one way or another, it would all come out. I just need the right leverage to pry those secrets out of her, and the longer she spent around us, the more of it I would collect.

For now...

“Do you have a name we can use, then?”

She hesitated, but only for a second. “Calliope.”

I blinked. I’d honestly been expecting her to tersely tell me her class. “Like the muse?”

“Of course.” She smiled, but it had something in it that felt not quite...honest. “Many men — and women alike — have been influenced by me and my actions. My words have changed the fate of *nations*. Who else would I be?”

Who else, indeed?

“You can call me Taylor,” I told her. I nodded to Arash. “This is my Archer class Servant, Arash.”

No reaction, or if she had one, it was hidden by that cloak.

“Charmed,” Arash said politely.

“I’m sure you are,” she replied.

“Now that we’ve gotten that out of the way,” I said, “let’s go and introduce you to the rest of the team, Calliope.”