

Requiem 9.02

I blinked. I blinked again. She was still standing there looking at me.

“...Erm, please come in?” I stepped to one side and waved an arm inward. How does one host a mass-murdering nutcase without it devolving into a massacre?

“Thank you.” She actually glided across the threshold, floating inside. “You have a lovely home.” Rounding the corner into the den, Glastig Uaine noticed my dad and friends looking at her in confusion. “Ah, and this must be your father and...the rest of the Undersiders?”

“It's kind of a breach of etiquette to just show up at a parahuman's house, her civilian identity.” I don't know what prompted me to speak up, but after I said it I felt justified. Regardless of how powerful or unstable she was, I was most definitely not going to kowtow to her, especially in my own home.

She pursed her lips. “You make a good point.” Taking off her hood to reveal the entirety of her head, Glastig Uaine looked quite a lot like if Lisa had a younger sister, sans freckles. Bizarre. “It is a pleasure to meet you all. You may call me Ciara, if you so desire.”

“You caught us at sort of an...awkward time,” I continued. “I've been, well, in mourning for Atlas. We're not really prepared to receive guests.” *Take the hint*, I thought. *Get out of my house*.

“The accommodations and company are already more pleasant than that to which I've become accustomed,” she replied, that creepily serene smile still on her face. “You will forgive the imposition, I hope, as my visit is of some import.”

Lisa couldn't contain herself any longer. I was amazed she'd managed to hold back that long. “Pardon me for interrupting, but didn't you make a deal to remain in the Birdcage for three hundred years? Kind of odd that someone like you would go back on her word.”

Every muscle in my body clenched. That was a powder keg of a question. But Ciara just giggled. “Your governments drew up a quite detailed contract, which I signed in blood in addition to my simple word. However, they are not adept at negotiating with fae.” Her smirk was positively impish. “We are notorious for finding loopholes. I am certain that the statement 'a period of three hundred years' was considered to be iron-clad, but they did not specifically designate that those three hundred years needed to be consecutive.”

I looked at Dad and mouthed, 'Tea, please'. We needed to keep this situation calm. “You said this visit was important. I've heard that you want a cuddlebug. If this is all about that...”

“No,” she replied with a dismissive wave, “though I do find them adorable. I came to study you.” Her crystalline green eyes locked onto mine. “I had long harbored suspicions regarding your particular role, yet those suspicions were thrown into disarray the longer you remained in the public eye, revealing new abilities and...physical alterations.”

The clinical way she spoke tripped something in me, a primal anger based on my still-prominent self image problems and the calm way my bullies used to deride me. “You'd best start speaking in a more straightforward manner, or I'll kick you out of my house. I don't appreciate being looked at as a 'thing'.”

Her expression flickered for a moment, but I couldn't tell what emotion shone through. I opened my additional senses and almost immediately clamped them back shut. All around this girl was a tempest of loathing, despair and outright hatred, directed both inward and outward. I had difficulty believing it, but it seemed that the dead capes' personalities did remain, at least as fragments. And they weren't happy being used as tools.

"I am the Faerie Queen," she stated, with an odd sort of declarative gravitas. I realized that I'd been bristling ever so slightly each time she called herself a queen. "Around us we have the Stable Master, the Silent, the Puppeteer, the Overlooked, and the Spymaster. But you," her gaze settled back onto me after looking at the other parahumans in the room, "are an oddity. You *should* be the Queen Administrator, my equal and opposite, the queen of the living while I rule the dead. But you have been...changed. Your faerie has become corrupted, yet unlike other corruptions it has somehow consumed the darkness and grown stronger from it."

While I could see the wheels in Lisa's head turning as she processed all of that, Brian spoke up. "So she has, what, two fairies or something? Wait," he looked back to me, "didn't Scanner say you're the only one she's ever seen with two different glows?"

"And Eidolon's a kaleidoscope, apparently," Lisa interjected, "his colors always changing...each color represents a power, Eidolon can select more than one at a time..." Her eyes widened. "Wait, you're saying Taylor somehow has two different powers?"

"Two distinct faeries," Glastig Uaine replied, "though now they're more like one. The Queen Administrator, being one of the most powerful of all fae, survived the usurpation attempt and, like ancient warriors, ate her attacker to gain its power."

"Okay," I decided to play along with the insanity. "So what is this 'Queen Administrator' supposed to do?"

"Absolute control," the small blonde replied. "When fully unleashed, the Queen Administrator could dominate any rival – mind, body and soul."

"And if my bug control comes from that, then this other power – however I got it – is responsible for my physical changes? And my ability to make new critters?"

"It would seem that way. You see, now, why it was necessary that I meet with you. I needed to understand your abilities and analyze you in person."

I felt something, a change in the air. Something tripped my instincts; I began to gather my critters as well as all bugs in my range. "And what's your conclusion?"

"You are powerful, and have the potential to become even more so, an exponential growth as you face and overcome obstacles. You could even take my place at His side." I heard her capitalize the H, but she didn't elaborate on who 'He' was. Her serene smile didn't falter. "I apologize, but I cannot suffer even an unknowing usurper."

I didn't wait for her to make the first move. My arm lashed out in a palm strike to her chin and sent Glastig Uaine crashing through the window onto the street. Dad was already on the phone, hopefully to the Protectorate. I called up my army and stepped through the broken wall and past the shattered glass.

The supposed Queen of all Faeries would die today.

“Grue!” I didn't need to speak further as Brian sent his darkness out, blanketing the street. My vision turned orange and I could see the mental map of my insects and critters. A spiker volley impaled the ground around Glastig Uaine, the blonde throwing up a shield to disintegrate any spines that would've struck her.

I called up about a dozen raptors, while mentally summoning every critter that I had at the Hive. My babies charged and their target retaliated with a burst of lightning that sent them reeling. I got the sense it was supposed to flash-fry them, but Grue's darkness was doing its job of dampening offensive powers. Instead she threw wide her arms and released a violent current of air, blowing the darkness aside. I could see what looked like cutting edges within the wind, so it was likely a power similar to Stormtiger's. Her body twitched and the winds wavered, giving me the chance to spit up an artillery bombardment of bursters. Glastig Uaine flicked her wrist and new waves of cutting wind lanced out, detonating my bursters and sending their luminous payload back at me. *And I liked these pajamas*, I thought to myself as the alkali splattered over me. While I wasn't hurt, it quickly ate through my clothes. I couldn't afford shame right now; she planned to kill me. Another lance of electricity hurtled down the open channel, heading straight for me. I found my body throwing itself to the ground.
Thanks, Alec.

One of the vaguely humanoid wraiths flickered and faded away, only to be replaced by another. Thus far Glastig Uaine was only manifesting three at a time, though Dragon had said she could supposedly summon a fourth: maybe it was extremely cost-intensive? My wandering thoughts were jerked violently back to the real world as the asphalt grew claws and tried to attack me. I leapt up with a yelp, dancing around the vicious hooks until I could hitch a ride on the back of a spiker. The slithering creature was able to simply roll over the grasping earth.

Two of my sprayers rode in, the ponderous critters each being carried by several helpers. Poking their heads from their fluted shells, they rained down glowing green death. Again the blonde blew it back at them, and I took that moment to strike. I had my spiker buck me off, leaping as it did in order to get the most speed. I collided with her but she seemed much more solid this time. My claws unsheathed and I went for her neck, only for her to grab my wrist in her small hand and squeeze until the bones shattered. Holding my wounded arm, she yanked back and then hurled me across the street where I impacted a storefront's wall hard enough to leave a decent imprint of my body.

I saw Imp sneaking up behind Glastig Uaine, a steak knife in her hand, ready to drive it into the blonde's neck. The non-child casually backhanded her with enough force that I could've heard the slap from across the street even if my bugs hadn't been listening in. “You forget,” she chided, “I can see the faerie that gives you your prowess. Even if you are hidden from my eyes, it is not.” One of her shades spasmed violently. “Your trick will not work twice, Puppeteer.”

Forcing myself onto my hands and knees, I took stock of the situation. She currently had super strength, earth (or asphalt) manipulation, and an unknown third power active. My sprayers and bursters wouldn't work as she could just blow their base back at them. Plus, some of it might...splatter... *Okay, new plan.* “Leave them...alone,” I growled, wrestling with my body and commanding it to stand through the pain. I felt sharp, scratchy hooks of asphalt grab onto my legs, tearing at my skin.

She turned to look at me. “You still believe yourself to be capable of fighting me? You barely understand how to utilize your own powers. I have been collecting and mastering faerie abilities since

before you were born. Your insects will not help you; your pets will not avail you. What do you think that you can possibly do?" She took a step toward me, lightning crackling along her fingertips. Well, at least I knew her third power.

"This." I unhinged my jaw and let loose a swarm of yellow widows to charge her, falling into a backbend to avoid the electrical bolt that fried my bugs. The moment she fired, my raptors burst up through the pitted, porous street damaged by spiker projectiles and misaimed alkali. Claws, blades and teeth fell upon her and she yelped in pain. Whatever Brute rating her strength power had given her was not enough and I could smell blood in the air.

Her power changed yet again and she drew in matter around her like a black hole before releasing it all in a tremendous burst, sending my raptors flying, some over several city blocks. Glastig Uaine was bleeding, yes, but her wounds were already closing. I hadn't scored the killing blow. "While your tactical acumen is impressive, you cannot stop me. I am beyond your attempts, beyond all of your pitiable flailings." She stepped over to one of my downed raptors and placed her shoe on its throat. The little thing gurgled in protest, but was too hurt to fight back. "In the animal kingdom, when a creature is too grievously injured to continue living, the humane thing to do is to kill it quickly so that it does not suffer a prolonged, agonizing death." The pressure increased and I could feel its life ebbing away. "I will be just as gentle with you and your friends."

"No! Stop it!" Tears were pouring from my eyes; I didn't care. I wrenched my legs against their bindings, shearing off my skin but eventually breaking the asphalt and tearing myself free. "This is about you and me, right? Leave them out of this!"

"They are of your sphere," she said in a gentle, polite tone as though she was doing anything other than contemplating mass-murder. "If I spare them, they will come after me again and that will be a grievous inconvenience. While I understand patience and waiting, procrastination is not one of my vices." Her foot pressed harder.

Snap.

(BREAK)

No more death. No more pain. No more hatred. No suffering. No unrest. No... No... No... No! NO! *I WON'T HAVE IT!!!*

I tried to articulate the word 'no', to scream it at the top of my lungs, but all that came out was a deafening feral noise that was not at all in the realm of what a human voicebox could manage. The world stretched and distorted around me, my surroundings becoming twisted and nightmarish until they receded so far into the distance that they were unidentifiable, and it was just me across from Glastig Uaine. I reached out, yet did not move a muscle, and lunged past her. There was no point in attacking her yet. First I had to take from her, like she'd taken from me. I grabbed the essence hovering behind her, ripped it in half, threw it to the ground. She let out a keening noise more appropriate to a circular saw. The other two were smashed together, bursting like balloons filled with confetti, their remains drifting to the street. Then I moved, was on her, pinning her down so she couldn't escape. But I didn't use my claws, or my fists. I tore into her mind, gripping at the gates and slowly grinding them open. I was going to eviscerate her, send the coils of her essence streaming out like toy snakes from a magician's sleeve.

She placed a hand on my cheek, the touch so gentle and purposely soothing that it gave me pause. For once her smile was not the odd, detached serene expression she normally wore, but one of satisfaction. "I have taken nothing that you cannot replace," she whispered. "Nor have I visited any lasting harm upon you or your companions." She drew the shredded wraiths into herself, replacing them with three others, and gently floated us upright. "You are an anomaly, something I had never seen before. I needed to understand you, and the best way to understand the people that you call parahumans is to fight them." She let me go and in my confusion my arms dropped limp at my sides. "With your permission, I would repair the damage to your home. But before that, I believe I smell tea."

I followed her back into my house, still unsure of exactly what had happened. But I needed to get some new clothes on, anyway.