

EPISODE 3 : OLD SOULS LIKE TO BARGAIN

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Elio:

- Heeey! How are you doing? Good? Good. Do you want a drink?- Oh Shinji said he wouldn't be there today, because he's saying goodbye to Asher, but I figured we could still get your introduction done and... Oh turn your mic on though, yep! And feel free to take it from here really. I'll shut up, and you can start from whenever you want. How did you feel, what was the weather like, I don't know...

Talia:

- It was raining.

(HEAVY WINDS, RAIN, THUNDER)

Back home in haïti. A storm was raging at 3am. And I know because my grandma told. Her name is Laurette and that night her window was alight. But not a single lamp shone inside. Only the flames of her candles as the storm made trees and waves dance to its tempo.

She was kneeled in a corner of her living room, praying to an altar. Praying to a picture of me. Home was nice. The tapestries, voodoo dolls and weird mixtures in the jars used to freak me out when I was little but they soon became my own toys.

Grandma's eyes were heavy from sleepless nights, reddened by dried tears. Her knees were grazed and her voice down to painful whispers...

She had been doing this for day.

But even as thunder shook the foundations of her house, she kept on praying.

Until finally...

Something answered.

The candles were whooshed away at once and she looked up, shaking. . She heard a first footstep and turned around, fear and hope storming in her eyes.

(footsteps noises.)

- Who... Who's there.

A low voice replied, like honey and iced tea, made for singing.

- *You tell me, child...*

A hand hovered above the wick of a candle And a purple flame repelled the darkness.

The other wicks quickly followed that lead, revealing... A tall black man in impeccable suit and top hat; an ebony cane in one hand and cigar in the other. He moved and swayed like under a spotlight. Like the earth was his stage and his life a performance.

And once, he was a god.

- ...Who Am I, little witch ?

- *Baron Samedi...*

My grandmother kneeled back down, face to the floor.

- *Very few still whisper my name.*

- Thank you, Baron, thank you...

- *Oh not yet, child, don't thank me yet.*

Grandma closed her eyes, a prayer for mercy in her mind, until she realized how futile it was. The Baron smiled, and she's pretty sure he heard her. He walked to the altar and picked my picture.

- *What do you want ?*

- My granddaughter, Baron. She's very sick. And she's all I have left...

- Ah.

She bowed down again.

- I beg you, Baron. I beg you to save her. She's a good child, she's honored your name every day, just like I did.
- *Stand up, child.*

And she did.

- *I am no god and no lord. I'm a friend. And I haven't walked this earth in a very long time... A lot has changed since the old man in the sky was born.*
- He's a jealous god.
- *Or so I've heard. Most Spirits are gone, some to never return. But here I stand...*

He lifted my grandmother's chin.

- *Thanks to you.*

And then he let go, dropping my picture to the side.

- *...Your child will live.*
- Oh...Thank you.
- *But I ask one thing in return.*
- Anything, Baron.
- *Not from you. Your child will live but her life will be mine. And when the time comes, she will kill the priests and burn their churches. She will avenge our people or die trying.*

To that my grandmother smiled.

- We've always been fighters, Baron. She will be no exception.
- *Excellent.*

And the deal was made.

The Baron's laugh shattered the silence. A purple glow lit up his eyes, and in a gust of wind his body became ashes, fading away.

And in a hospital not too far away, I jerked in my sleep. Above me, the neons on the ceiling flickered for an instant. From white they turned purple and from purple they went dark.

When they came back the baron was sitting by my side, cigar between his lips. He walked to the other side of the bed and casually smashed the smoke detector with his cane, then took a deep drag off his cigar.

And in my induced coma I took a deep breathe.

He exhaled and so did I.

My monitors started to shut down one by one, as my breathing followed his and the room grew quiet.

- *Welcome back, child.*

I sat up, dizzy but awake. Last thing I could remember was lunch with grandma on the garden table. Days ago as it turned out. I stared at him for a little too long, not convinced

I was awake yet. I said :

- Baron.

- *In the flesh. - Sort of.*

- Where am I-?

- *In hospital.*

- Hospital?

- *A couple more days and we would have met on the other side.*

- What happened?
- *Your grandmother has many enemies. Some with friends like me.*
- But I'm- Alive?

He smiled and there was something so insufferable about his know-it-all, all-mighty grin I could have punched him.

- *I am but a shadow of who I used to be- But I wouldn't be myself at all if I couldn't save a single child.*

I already knew who managed to invoke him, I didn't have to ask.

- ... What did she offer you?
- *Your service. Which is more than fair if you ask me.*
- I'm not ready, Baron. I can't be one of your pawns.
- *I'll be the judge of that.*
- Look at me! I'm weak, nauseous, I- I haven't walked in months! I'm not ready!

Samedi threw away his cigar and it disappeared into dust before hitting the ground.

- *I like your fire, child. But I don't understand your anger.*
- I know what your presence means, Baron. You should be dead, and if you're not then the priests will soon hunt you down. And Hunt me down.
- *No deal is made yet, I could still leave you to die.*
- And where would you go? Who on this world still has faith in your name?
- *A few.*
- But none like me. I've heard of other messiahs, Baron. Others, who's beliefs were so strong they resurrected an old spirit like you. All of them gave their body and soul for their masters' vengeance. And all of them died. You all think you can lead your own crusade against the Old Man in the Sky, but you don't know how men fight anymore.

- *And you do?*
- I've spent my whole life waiting for this moment, Baron. For a chance to avenge my people. I won't let you squander it.

He leaned in and I could tell I had gotten his attention.

- *What are your terms, Child?*
- You can not possess me. Not now, not ever. But if you give me your powers, I will get our revenge.

(Samedi chuckles)

- *I will give you a year.*
- A year? - A year for what?
- *A year to kill the Old Man in the Sky.*
- ... but-
- *Bu-but-but ? How ? He's a god ? He has an army ? I'm alone ! We know child. If you want to succeed you'll have to do what witches do. Find others, and plot in the dark.*

Before I could try to bargain or argue he snapped a finger and in a blink the room changed.

Heavy curtains suddenly covered the windows and a crystal chandelier was dangling from the ceiling, almost touching the ground. And the baron was sat on a velvet sofa instead of a rusty hospital chair.

There were candles and jazz, faint voices and far away laughs. It was the beginning of a ball.

I looked around the room, at loss for words while the baron got up and took my hand.

He tried to force me up.

- No- I- I can't

Yet I stood. For the first time in weeks.

- *Let's do it like the old tales!*

The baron spun and walked backward toward the corridor. The music outside got louder. Ballroom jazz, rising.

- *3 gifts, for my chosen one.*

I followed him out and as soon as I stepped out of the room I felt my gown weight heavier on my shoulder. It tightened at my waist and deployed around my legs into a regal ball dress, colour like red wine. It was the most beautiful thing I've ever worn, the fabric felt like a breeze between my fingers, its gold laces softly gleaming under candlelights.

I was no longer in hospital, the entire corridor was dressed in Colonial 19th century fashion. The ground was marble and the curtains velvet, it was all disgustingly expensive, and a crowd was gathered against the walls, forming a runway for the Baron and I to walk. They exploded in cheer as he appears, their hands hidden by gloves and their faces by fans or hats. They were all so extravagant but also... incredibly frail... Their skin unnaturally white...

And I noticed a glimpse of a face behind one of the fan. It wasn't a face, at all.

They were all skeletons.

But the Baron didn't care, he strolled down the runway, dragging a terrified me behind him, and he boasted :

- *You will have my strength.*

He lifted up two skeletal-women from the crowd and dropped them down the opposite side.

- *You will have my flair!*

He spun and dipped, hitting every beat of an insane tempo and then he turned back to me, down on one knee to grab my hand and said :

- *And you will have my people. The dead, are at your service, lady Talia.*

The entire court bowed to his words... right before he got up and sent me down the runway.

- *You've got it all child, now flaunt it! Flaunt it!*

I broke a nervous smile nervous smile and the crowd went wild. They all loved me.

Praised me. Venerated me. And it felt good, so good. I tried a spin, a wink and in a second

I was gone. I was driving them But Talia is too far gone to care, she dips, driving the court

crazy. She laugh and whirl, dance and provoke; a party of one, a god reborn. The

skeleton court is throwing flowers and glitter as she make her way through the runway.

She slams the wooden door at the end of the corridor... and steps out in the rain.

The music stops and the ballroom disappears. Behind her, the hospital doors close back.

A few worried patients are staring, while a couple of nurses quickly head toward her.

Her dress is gone as well, replaced by her hospital gown.

She's back to reality. And she starts to run.

Less than a hour later, someone knocks on Laurette's door.

She startled. Who would come in such weather?

Wary, she pulled a strange dagger from her sleeve, before opening the door to...

Talia.

Her granddaughter in hospital gown, wet like a dog. It was impossible, the hospital was miles away, nobody could have run that far, that fast. But, Laurette didn't think any of it. She brought her granddaughter into an embrace, and said...

- Talia... Oh Talia, Talia...

Her granddaughter broke from her embrace, feigning regrets.

- I don't have much time.
- You met him.
- Yeah. Make the call now, I have to go.

Laurette nodded and retreated to the living room. Talia rushed to my room to grab a change of clothes and the emergency backpack under her mattress. She was ready to go in less than 2 minutes, stronger with every second that passes. She's never felt such power, and yet, it was so familiar.

In the other room she saw her grandmother hanging up. The phone Laurette joins her to sit on the bed and embraces her one last time. I asked:

- Where will they take me?
- I don't know. But don't stop until you've reached Europe.
- Across the sea?!

Laurette nodded :

- Put an ocean between you and the Church and it might be enough. You'll need this.

She handed Talia her blade, a large dagger carved from bone.

- *Oh, I can use that.*

And Talia smiled. A little too wide. And somewhere in there, I saw my grandmother take a step back from me.

(CAR PULLING UP.)

- *It's time. Goodbye, litte witch.*

END OF EP 3