

Snake Eyes, Pretty Lies and the True Reprise

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By Oskar Lam

“We locked away the burden, because we knew it could harm, but only the truth can liberate,” rang in Mary’s head. It was Henry and Aronia, “We trust thee has the strength to face it.”

And just like they left, Sam and Forrest were brought back by the nature spirits. Sam looked frustrated but it was Forrest’s expression which alarmed Mary. He was angry. And that’s when she noticed his eyes; they weren’t the honey-brown she knew, they were a lime green.

The three of them were caught by surprise when a waiter approached their table. Looking down at his notepad, his cap cast a shadow over his face.

“I couldn’t help being delighted by your story, but you missed one little detail.” The waiter sent a smirk towards Sam whose face turned to anger.

“I’m Gay and Proud!” shouted the waiter while spreading potato peels on top of the Forrest next to Sam. The waiter removed his cap, revealing long black hair.

“Forrest?!” panted Mary.

“Yeah, the one and only!”

Mary’s astonishment turned to fright when she glanced back across the table. The other Forrest was shuddering. His eyes glowed brighter as his face started to morph uncontrollably. He shapeshifted into Jackie, Mary’s boss, then Detective Vargas, Sister Eleanor from her dream, and other faces she couldn’t recognize until, finally, it looked like . . . Michael.

“C’mon, Mary, I don’t think it liked the fries!” Forrest, dressed as the waiter, tugged Mary out of the seat just as Michael was about to grab her. Mary looked down at the table as a claw retreated to its owner. Michael now had scaly skin, sharp teeth, and snake eyes!

“I’ve had enough of thissss!” Michael’s garish rasp caused all the patrons to exit in a panic.

“Forrest, what’s going on?! Why are you dressed like that?” asked Mary, terrified.

“Well... Sam is not too creative, so she actually had to use *some* of the truth in her story. Apophis is not only an organization, it’s also the name of their leader whom you’re seeing as Michael, the chaos spirit,” explained Forrest as he handed her a broom. “Look, I never really believed in this stuff, but Old Man recently taught me a lot.”

Mary’s friends ran through the exiting crowd. Before they could reach her and Forrest, Apophis unleashed the Crawlmares, creatures that looked like smokey human skeletons with sharp shoulders, knees, elbows, and heels. They ran on all fours towards both groups. Their

upside-down skulls and extremely long fangs, looking like horns, terrified little Twix. John held her closer to him, comforting her.

“What is this madness, Sylvia?” demanded Grace as she roundhouse kicked a Crawlmare, turning it into dust on impact.

“Oh my... this is what my mother always had me prepare for,” Sylvia realized as John and Grace protected them. “The Valley’s magic brings people from all over the world. There is nothing more beautiful for the nature spirits than a melting pot, harmonizing. Sadly... .”

“Sometimes there’re collisions caused by the differences we have among us. This is what Chaos spirits’ feed . . . Watch out!” Forrest yelled.

Mary quickly dodged a Crawlmare jumping towards her. Mary and Forrest were across the café swinging brooms, dusting into oblivion more of the sneaky, creepy creatures.

“World War I was a buffet for them,” Forrest elaborated as he kept swinging, “Old Man mentioned before he retired, he had made sure to scatter the chaos spirits so they couldn’t unite. Man, these things are Uuu-gly! Anyway, it seems like Apophis stayed low until he was strong enough to grow a nest under Cine El Rey and used its Michael façade to organize chaos to feed on.”

Both groups slowly moved towards the middle of the room, where Apophis was mind-controlling the Crawlmares. Sam was casting a force shield protecting her father.

“Why didn’t Henry and Aronia tell me this? Forrest, duck!” Forrest crouched and Mary’s broom hit the monster in the face, impressing herself. Forrest stood up and replied,

“They didn’t want you to have the same fate as Ronnie’s father... and your mother.”

“Twix, I need you to use your powers to protect us!” Sylvia shouted behind her. John and Grace, being targeted, were having a much harder time.

“Okay, ladies, I don’t understand. I read the Apophis file. There was nothing on fairy tale stuff,” mused John. Grace fought on in silence, analyzing all the information Sylvia gave her, still having a hard time understanding all the spirit intel.

“This could explain all the double-crossing... but what about...” Grace had been too distracted to notice the origin of the Crawlmares, a small tear drop rolled down her cheek when they made eye contact, “Sam...”

“She’s the danger I’m protecting my mother-in-law from,” Forrest clarified. “She was doing her best to cause chaos among you and your friends by trying to get in your heads. Since she’s only half-chaos spirit, she probably read your thoughts or something. She failed by assuming Grace had another daughter.”

Mary gasped, “SHE IS GRACE’S DAUGHTER!”

“What do you mean she’s your daughter? You said Ronnie was your only child,” Sylvia called out. Grace had pulled out some high-tech electric gloves, a better fit for her fighting style.

“She was taken from me by the organization, that’s why I connected with Michael recently. Not only for the benefit of the agency but to find out more about Sam. I can’t believe that bastard wasn’t only a backstabber but also a shadow spirit.”

Twix corrected her, “Chaos spirit.”

Both groups were finally together. Mary, Sylvia, and Elly all hugged furiously while Grace and Forrest fought side by side. “You all are lucky this boy fights well,” praised Grace.

“Not to show off but I did fight in the Second Civil War--” Forrest froze in mid-sentence. This was the first time meeting his mother-in-law; she reminded him so much of his dear Ronnie. *It breaks my heart to know saving you means I might never meet Ronnie, but I know how much he misses you.*

The Crawlmares were gone, the only ones left standing were Apophis and Sam casting the force field around them. Mary stepped forward, facing Michael with a bravery she never knew she had. “*Your plan to cause **HATE** with a pandemic is over!*”

“Isssss not close to over!” he laughed manically. Apophis disappeared with Sam, leaving a shadow explosion behind. Twix quickly ran in front of Mary, releasing her protective, iridescent wings, sheltering the group from destruction.

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