1973. Me, Myself, and I

For a while, there was nothing but silence in the dark hall.

Then, there was more silence.

Rain stared at her teacher with wide eyes.

‘What did he just say?’

It seemed that she imagined that her teacher claiming to be the Lord of Shadows…

The Lord of Shadows - the mysterious Saint of Godgrave, the sinister sellsword who had offered his blade to the King of Valor, faced Princess Revel in the battle at Vanishing Lake, and decimated a supply caravan of the Song Army alone, sparing the lives of two hundred Awakened and Ascended warriors at Changing Star's behest.

That Lord of Shadows.

‘Wait…’

The Lord of Shadows who had saved the lives of Tamar, Ray, and Fleur!

…At Changing Star's behest.

The situation was so shocking that Rain was struggling to form a single cohesive though, but despite all its seriousness, an entirely frivolous memory surfaced in her mind instead of something important.

It was one of her teacher's preposterous rants:

“Do you know Princess Nephis? Changing Star of the Immortal Flame clan? I was practically her boyfriend!”

Rain almost swayed.

‘No… no, wait!’

She pierced her teacher with an intense gaze, momentarily forgetting even about the sweet Memories he had promised to give her.

“Teacher… you… you really are the Lord of Shadows?”

The bastard had started humming again, at some point.

Hearing her, he looked at her and smiled.

“Sure. Now can we move on to…”

Rain did not let him finish.

“No! We absolutely cannot move on! What the… how… I mean, why… no, what do you mean, you're the Lord of Shadows?! He's all the way in the camp of the Sword Army! When he was fighting Princess Revel, you were with me! When he was saving Tamar, you were helping me track down the Huntsman! How does that make any sense?! What, you can be in two places at the same time? Following me around and simultaneously acting as the Lord of Shadows ?”

Her teacher gave her a confused look.

“What? Of course not…”

Rain let out a relieved sign.

‘Thank the gods! It was another one of his preposterous lies.’

However, she celebrated too early. Because her teacher wasn't done talking.

“I can be in seven places at the same time. Actually, I am also a Knight Commander of Clan Valor and the Memory Purveyor of the Ivory Island. Oh… and I also run a small restaurant in Bastion. It's quite popular!”

Rain just started at him with dumbfounded expression.

Her teacher looked at her with concern and smiled.

“Do you want to sit down?”

She nodded slowly.

“Yeah.”

A moment later, specks of darkness swirled in the air and formed into an opulent wooden chair. Her teacher moved it caringly to stand just behind Rain, and she lowered herself onto the seat.

‘Aaa!’

So… her teacher could be in seven places at the same time.

She had to repeat it several times mentally for the meaning of this words to sink in.

Rain covered her face with a palm.

‘Let’s think about it…’

Something like that was unheard of… but not really impossible. After all, there were all kinds of Aspects in the world, and all kinds of unnatural powers wielded by the Nightmare Creatures. Anything was possible!

Actually, it even made a lot of sense.

She had long noted how similar her teacher and the Lord of Shadows seemed. It was just that she could not have concluded that they were one and the same without this key piece of information. Assuming that a person could exist in several places at the same time would have been quite an unreasonable leap of logic, after all.

Who could have guessed that her closest companion was also a complete stranger... a sinister Saint serving the King of Swords, no less?

And what was that, had he mentioned something about running a restaurant in Bastion?!

‘A restaurant?!’

Somehow, that last detail rattled her mind more than the rest of what he had said.

No, that was not important right now.

Rain could reluctantly accept that her teacher possessed the power to live several lives at the same time. But…

She lowered her hand and looked at him

“Teacher… what the hell!”

He scratched back of his head.

“Huh? What are you angry about this time?”

Rain's eyes narrowed.

"If you are really the Lord of Shadow, one of the most fearsome champions of the Sword Army... then why the hell did you let me join the Song Army?! Did it not occur to you that being on the different sides of this damned war might pose a bit of a problem for us?!”

He looked at her with a strange expression.

"What do you mean? Of course, it did! Have you forgotten that I tried to dissuade you? But no, you just had to be all moral and righteous... I can't just sit on the sidelines! These are the people I know, and they will be the ones who suffer! I can't step back and do nothing! Those were your words... do you even know how loudly I was cursing on the inside while going on about how you are joining the war?"

Rain's eye twitched.

"Well... when you put it like that..."

Her teacher scoffed.

"But I couldn't very well stomp on your principles, so I kept quiet. Well, it doesn't matter that much, anyway. Who says that you and me being on different sides will become a problem? Me and me are on different sides as well, and I'm not worried."

Hearing that last sentence, Rain felt a strong headache.

As if it made sense!

It was too bizarre.

Not only had her teacher been living several lives at the same time, but one of his incarnations was even a general of the opposing army... the most feared general of them all! The very same sinister Saint who had just attacked the supply caravan of Song.

The incriminating evidence was right here an entire mountain of stolen... commandeered, as he had called it... supplies.

And he had not even taken them in the name of the Sword Army. He had just hoarded them for himself!

Her eyes trembled.

‘My teacher... is a bandit! He's a shameless, flagrant highwayman!’

But then again, that one actually wasn't that surprising. Quite the opposite, really.

She could believe it easily. That sounded exactly like something her teacher would do...

Rain took a deep breath.

‘So…’

Her teacher was pretending to be a sellsword Saint who had been hired by the King of Swords. He was also the Knight Commander of the Great Clan Valor. He was also the Memory Purveyor - whatever that meant - of the Ivory Island, which was Changing Star's own Citadel.

And he was a master chef somewhere in Bastion on top of that!

‘Right.’

It was going to take her some time to come to terms with these facts.

‘Just as expected from a dark deity.’

No... was he really a dark deity?

Suddenly, Rain came to realize that she knew very little about her teacher, despite spending almost every day of these past four years in his company.

She took a deep breath and looked at him soberly.

After hesitating for a while, Rain asked:

"Teacher... who are you, really?”