2142 Three Flawed Foes  
  
'W—what?'  
  
Even as Cassie delivered the attack, she felt that something was wrong. But she could not understand what...  
  
It was so strange.  
  
A few moments ago, she clearly perceived attacking the loathsome enemy. She had even noted how sharp her movements would be, and how determined her attack was going to feel. As if her entire being was consumed by the burning resolve to defeat her foe.  
  
Naturally, she knew that her enemy was Jest.  
  
But then, when the future she had perceived finally arrived…  
  
Suddenly, she felt consumed by incinerating wrath, feeling like she had to kill the enemy at all costs. Even knowing that she was being taunted by the old man's Awakened Ability, Cassie nevertheless lunged at the odious, hateful figure in front of her.  
  
Only that figure was not Saint Jest — the old man whom she had to protect and keep alive until the battle was over. Of course, it was the woman with beautiful features and long flaxen hair, Saint Helie, whom she hated with all her heart.  
  
She almost managed to pierce Helie's heart when the beautiful Saint staggered back, deflecting the blow with the blade of her xiphos.  
  
"Cassia! What the…"  
  
'I'm being influenced.'  
  
Of course, she was.  
  
Cassie froze for a moment, suddenly troubled.  
  
It was at that moment that her wrath was replaced by disorientation and confusion, while Helie's eyes ignited with scathing loathing.  
  
The old man wasn't just watching them fight, either. He was already drawing close, his wooden cane raised to deliver a fatal blow.  
  
The cane was going to plummet, aimed at her head.  
  
Helie's xiphos, meanwhile, would shoot toward her heart.  
  
More than that, Cassie could not quite determine where Jest was anymore, because she suddenly became half-blind. One of the two points of view through which she gazed upon the world had gone dark.  
  
She could still see what Helie could see, and feel what Helie felt. But while she could sense through Jest, she could not see what he saw… for some reason.  
  
Well, it was easy to explain. The old man must have simply closed his eyes.   
  
She was in danger.  
  
She was going to die.  
  
Luckily, danger and death were still a few moments away, because she was perceiving what would happen shortly in the future.  
  
So, Cassie moved.  
  
Turning her body, she allowed for the xiphos to slide past her body without ever touching it. At the same time, she raised her arm and caught the falling cane with the crossguard of her parrying dagger, twisting it into a collision with Helie's sword and stepping back to disengage at the same time.  
  
The force of the impact sent a painful shuddеr through her body and made her bones groan in protest.  
  
'Just… how strong is he?'  
  
And why was Jest attacking her? Weren't they allies?!  
  
Np, they... they were, weren't they? She had to... make sure that he survived the fight...  
  
In the next few moments, both Helie and the old man unleashed a barrage of attacks on Cassie. Both were powerful Saints and masters of combat, but despite that, she managed to avoid their blows. Her technique was elegant and precise, but more than that, it was eerily graceful.  
  
Physically, Cassie was clearly weaker than both of her opponents. And yet, she moved as if anticipating their every move, seemingly reacting to attacks before they even thought of delivering them. She dodged and evaded some, often missing the enemy weapons only by a few millimeters, while deflecting others with her dagger in a way that dissipated and redirected most of the force.  
  
There were also the bracelets she wore on her wrists. One seemed to be capable of enhancing the strength of her own attacks, while the other was a protective charm, creating a small repelling field in front of her hand from time to time. That bracelet saved her from a few blows that the dagger had failed to stop.  
  
But each time she used it, some of her essence was burned.  
  
Cassie only seemed to attack Helie, defending herself against Jest while showing stubborn determination to keep him alive. Helie, meanwhile, was too overcome with mad wrath to attack anyone except the blind seer, so the old man remained completely unscathed.  
  
A few dreadful moments later, the three Saints jumped away from each other, pausing briefly to reevaluate their enemies.  
  
Cassie was breathing heavily, and blood was seeping from a thin cut on her cheek. She faced Jest and Helie, visibly confused, her breathtaking beauty accentuated by the glimmers of light shining in her enchanting, unseeing blue eyes.  
  
The old man shook his head in dejection and furtively opened one of his own eyes to take a look around.  
  
"Ah… it seems that this one will be troublesome. I really should have known! You always remained so quiet, so subservient, so unassuming… to the point that it was often hard to remember that you even exist, lass. Who knew that you were such a fiend with a blade? Ha! Consider me fooled."  
  
He shook his head and glanced at Helie.  
  
"And what's up with you? Use your Aspect, foolish girl!"  
  
The beautiful Saint ground her teeth.  
  
"I… can't…"  
  
The old man raised an eyebrow.  
  
"Huh? What's that? Surely, you are not low on essence?"  
  
Helie grimaced.  
  
"No… I can't use it… unless my emotions are in check!"  
  
Jest frowned, then suddenly exploded with laughter.  
  
"What? Wait… is that your Flaw? You can't use your powers unless you're calm? Well, that will make things easier, at the end."  
  
Helie simply threw a dark glance at him, struggling to contain her fury.  
  
Her lips twisted in contempt.  
  
"What are you doing yourself, old man? Summon a damn Memory! She will kill us both if this goes on!"  
  
Jest hesitated for a moment, then smiled.  
  
"Well, since neither of you are coming back from this hike, I guess I'll tell you a secret. Actually, I too have a regrettable Flaw. I can't use enchanted items. Therefore, I don't even possess a single Memory. What, did you think I was walking around with this cane for fun?"  
  
He snorted.  
  
"It was carved from nearly indestructible wood, of course. And it's really dapper… but I don't really fight with it often. In truth, I prefer to kill my victims with bare hands. It's much more enjoyable that way."  
  
Noticing that both Cassie and Helie were looking at him strangely, Jest raised an eyebrow.  
  
"What?"  
  
Cassie, who had been trying to catch her breath and subdue the tremors running through her hands, answered quietly:  
  
"No… it's just surprising. Everyone assumed that your Flaw has to do with a terrible sense of humor."  
  
Jest stared at her for a few moments, then gave her a sinister smile.  
  
"What nonsense is that? You rude child… hey, Helie! Don't worry about this one. She might seem dangerous, but that is only because she is a cheater. Seers are like that — they are indeed difficult to handle, but there's a simple trick to dealing with them. We just have to exhaust her essence. Once she loses the power of her Aspect and becomes defenseless, I'll snap her neck and rip off her pretty head, no problem. That'll be quite funny, don't   
you think?!"  
  
Staring at her darkly, the old man grinned.  
  
"Let's get serious, them."  
  
With that, he dropped his cane. His body twisted, starting to transform.  
  
Suddenly, Cassie was overcome with fear once again — this one her own, not summoned by the power of an enemy Aspect.  
  
She smiled tiredly.  
  
"Too late, old man. I figured you out."  
  
At that moment, without making any noise, the Quiet Dancer finally returned, shooting from the dense canopy of the jungle at stunning speed.  
  
It was aimed at Helie's back…  
  
But just a moment before piercing her flesh, the graceful rapier pivoted in the air, and streaked toward Saint Jest instead.