1660 Fragments of a Fleeting

Dream

Cassie slowly closed her eyes and turned away from the young man sitting in front of her. His delicate appearance, polite demeanor, and modest smile...

Were so unlike the frightening, unhinged demon she had witnessed in his memories.

Witnessing one's memories was a strange affair, because what had been and what people remembered were usually two different things. Memories were vague, disjointed, and fragile, like the fragments of a fleeting dream. Some were vibrant and deeply etched, some were dull and shallow.

Some were bright. Most were full of sorrow.

But the Shadow Saint possessed an unbelievably clear memory. It was striking, second only to Cassie's own now that she had Transcended. It was as if nothing he had experienced were ever truly erased... at least not the details of the memory he had chosen to show her, which must have been important to him.

What an irony, then, that his whole existence had been erased from the world.

There was a problem with reading his memories, though.

Firstly, the way the man who called himself Sunless perceived the world was simply too strange. Even Cassie, who was uniquely suited to having multiple points of view and had already experienced the way he sensed his surroundings through her Ascended Ability, found herself feeling dizzy from the avalanche of unfamiliar sights and sensations.

Secondly, and more Importantly... there were countless gaps in her recollection of what she had seen. Those were the moments where the young man pretending to be a humble shopkeeper thought, spoke, or felt something about the places and events that had been erased from everyone's memories.

In the end, what she had witnessed - or rather, could remember witnessing - was even more disjointed than the memories of ordinary people.

The chilling images...

A young man with alabaster skin crawling from the black water on the cracked ice, his eyes brimming with unfathomable darkness. The eerie city where a terrible slaughter had taken place, but only emptiness remained. The days of slaughter across the desolate expanse of the abandoned continent, the snow turning crimson from the spilled blood. An aloof figure observing from a cliff as an army of enslaved Nightmare Creatures marched to their deaths into a raging blizzard.

The furious battle under the slopes of an erupting volcano, The harrowing strength both the monster and the man had shown. The culmination of it all... and so much more.

Cassie scowled.

Why, why was it so hard to cling to the very idea of It?

She had to know...

Countless thoughts surfaced in her mind, clicking together as they assembled into chains of logic.

"The frozen slege capital... it must be Falcon Scott, the fallen bastion of the Antarctic Center. He had returned there as a former member of the First Evacuation Army.”

"That winged beast he used as a mount was unmistakably a Spire Messenger. I was right, after all... he was with us on the Forgotten Shore.”

'However, the Fire Keepers only joined the Southern Campaign after the Antarctic Center was swallowed by the Chain of Nightmares. Which means that he was never one of us. What relationship did we have? This strength... was he one of Gunlaug's lieutenants? A prominent hunter of the outer settlement? Someone who paid tribute to live in the castle, like Kai and Aiko?’

He could have been sent to the Forgotten Shore the same year as Cassie and Nephis, but that was exceedingly unlikely. There had been only three people who reached the Dark City that year: Caster, Nephis... and Cassie herself, due to being dragged along by Nephis.

Or.., no.., had there been someone else? Her memories were vague, which meant...

Her train of thought broke apart and faded, even the memory of having such thoughts disappearing from her mind.

She vaguely sensed what had happened and tried to retrace the steps of her logic, but to no avail. So, Cassie continued to think.

And find more pleces to fill the vold.

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Sunny allowed Cassie to contemplate what she had seen for a few minutes. He guessed that it was going to take her a while to come to terms with the Winter Beast's demise.

However, she spoke sooner than he had expected. Turning to face him once again, the blind seer said evenly:

"So... you are the Lord of Shadows."

Sunny shrugged and smiled lazily.

"What if I am?"

She hesitated for a while.

"I know that your second body is currently enjoying a tasteless theater play that we sponsored, while the third one is somewhere in Song Domain, hiding in the shadows. However, I can't sense the one in Godgrave at all. Curious."

Cassie frowned.

"A powerful anti-divination Memory, perhaps, Or maybe it's the nature of your Citadel."

Sunny tilted his head a little,

"If you know that the play is tasteless, why sponsor it?"

She shrugged.

"Tasteless things have their use, as well.”

'How Machiavellian of her.’

Sunny remained silent for a few moments, then sighed.

"In any case, I would prefer it if you didn't share the fact that the Lord of Shadows and me are the same person. Especially with Changing Star.

Cassie's frown deepened.

"You want me to deceive Nephis? Why?"

He stared at her with no particular emotion on his face.

"I get it that you are overwhelmed, Saint Cassia, but think about it for a moment. Unlike you, she is unable to remember that she has forgotten something. So, she wouldn't know that the three of us share a connection. All she would remember is that there is a person pretending to be a Master here in Bastion, who is actually a powerful and not entirely friendly Saint residing in a Death Zone. Our relationship would become strained in that case, and it definitely would not become any better."

Sunny smiled.

"Plus, this incarnation of mine is really just a humble shopkeeper, It's like a vacation... I wouldn't want my peaceful life to be spoiled. Who knows what will happen to my mental state if my only source of peace disappears in a puff of smoke."

Cassle met his gaze with her unseeing eyes, then sighed.

"Fine. I'll keep your secret. As long as you don't scheme to harm Nephia, of course. If you do..."

Her expression didn't change, but the air in the stone chamber suddenly seemed terribly cold.

Sunny's smile dimmed a little.

"Why would I harm Changing Star? She is the cornerstone of my survival, after all. And therefore, the integral part of my plans."

The blind seer raised an eyebrow.

"Your... plans? And what are you planning exactly, Lord Shadow... Sunny?"

He laughed, then abruptly fell silent.

After a while, Sunny spoke in a subtly insidious tone:

"Well, the future might be unknown to me, but one thing is certain. Very soon, there will be a war for the throne of humanity. Anvil, Ki Song... maybe even that third one. They will clash, and knowing Changing Star, she will insert herself into that clash, somehow. To slaughter them."

He shrugged.

"So, why not make sure that when the dust settles, she is the one sitting on the throne? That is my plan. To hand her the crown. No matter how I feel about Changing Star, I absolutely despise those three ghouls... not to mention that I absolutely do not trust them to keep me alive. So, there's that."

Cassie remained silent, facing him with a frown on her delicate face.

Eventually, she turned away.

“...Time is short. The moon will disappear soon, so we must hurry to leave. I'll be waiting for our meeting next month."

A crooked grin twisted Sunny's lips.

"As you wish, Saint Cassia."

He rose, ready to activate Shadow Step, but then stopped.

Sunny lingered for a few moments, then coughed and asked awkwardly:

"Oh... about that Memory you wanted to commission... I am really quite good at making those, you know?"

Cassie tilted her head in confusion, then blinked.

"Right... the Memory. Of course. I'll send someone to you in a couple of weeks, with all the details."

She took a step forward, coming practically face-to-face with Sunny, then placed her hands on his shoulders.

"Pleasure doing business with you, Master Sunless."

He coughed,

"Ah, yes. Likewise, But...why are you holding me?"

Cassie remained silent for a few moments, then elegantly raised an eyebrow.

"...Because you need to teleport me out of this terrible place? You weren't thinking of leaving me here, were you? I hope not…”