1748 Precious Moments

Cassie was waiting for him near the same toppled tower as the last time. She was just as ethereally beautiful as the last time, too, bathed in moonlight and standing on the edge of tranquil water.

However, the atmosphere of their meeting was different today.

It was more... familiar, somehow. Perhaps even friendly.

When Sunny emerged from the lake, Cassie smiled faintly.

"Sunny."

He brushed his wet hair back and smiled, as well.

"Lady Cassia."

She shook her head lightly.

"It feels unfair that you are still maintaining decorum after insisting that I should be more informal. Call me Cassie, please."

He hesitated for a few moments, then nodded.

"Alright, Cassie. Shall we go? I am hoping to explore as much of the mirror labyrinth as possible tonight."

She nodded and offered him her small hand.

Sunny took it and pulled them both into the shadows, teleporting straight to the underground chamber they had discovered before, This time, there was no need for her to guide him deep into the ruins of the Castle, erasing the memories of the Knights patrolling it.

The chamber had not changed at all, which was a relief. Sunny vividly remembered the warning Cassie had given him about the Others, so he was wary of the beings that lived inside the mirrors in the former stronghold of the Demon of Imagination.

Summoning the Shadow Lantern, he drowned the maze in shadows without wasting any time. Soon after, Sunny and Cassie continued to explore the labyrinth.

‘This place is vast...'

They had wandered it for hours the last time, and were not making any noticeable progress tonight. Slowly, Sunny was starting to grow wary.

He remembered the Nightmare Desert and the black pyramid standing at its center. No matter how long one walked across the white dunes, the pyramid never drew closer... was there some sort of trickery preventing him from reaching the heart of the labyrinth, as well?

They walked in silence for a while, but quickly grew bored of it.

Eventually, Cassie spoke:

"I must admit, Master Sunless... Sunny, You are a fascinating man."

He raised an eyebrow.

"I am?"

The blind seer chuckled melodiously.

"Indeed. I suspected that you were, of course, when we first met. But knowing it and witnessing it in person are two different things. That stunt you pulled with poor Master Tristan... 1 pride myself on being able to predict things, you know! However, that caught me by surprise. What were you thinking?"

Sunny coughed quietly.

What was he thinking, indeed?

He kept quiet for a few moments, then said nonchalantly:

"Well, thinking too much is bad for one's health. Back then, I was thinking... gods, I want to punch this buffoon so much! And so, I did. It's all about the little joys in life."

She drew a sharp breath.

"I... guess."

Sunny grinned.

"Anyway, it ended up working in our favor, didn't it? We wanted everyone to get the wrong impression about the nature of the relationship between me and Nephis. Well, mission accomplished."

Cassie exhaled slowly.

"...A little bit too well, even."

He glanced at her.

"Whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well."

The blind seer did not find what to answer. She remained silent for a while, then laughed quietly.

"True. Then, here is your true body, the Lord of Shadows. Meeting him in person was quite an experience. The contrast between him and Master Sunless is quite striking, to say the least. 1 applaud your acting skills."

Sunny looked at her curiously, hesitated for a bit, and then smiled.

"Why, thank you. But actually, you are wrong."

Cassie raised an eyebrow elegantly.

"I am?"

He nodded.

"This is my true body. The Lord of Shadows... is a shadow. He's a performance."

She tilted her head a little, baffled.

"Wait. You mean to say that this... the shopkeeper... is your true personality? And the aloof Saint of Godgrave is merely an act?"

Sunny smiled, then sighed, and eventually looked away,

"...Yes? But also no, I guess each of my incarnations is me, it's just that they have different purposes.

The purpose of the Lord of Shadows is to be a warrior. So, the parts of my personality that have to do with conflict take the lead. The purpose of the humble shopkeeper is to live peacefully and enjoy life. So, he's a bit of a homebody"

He paused, and then added with a shrug

"It's not that strange. We all wear different masks when dealing with different people. A person will behave one way when they are with their family, act differently when they are with their colleagues, and put on a new mask when they meet their friends. I am much the same, it's just that I have many bodies, so I can wear all the masks at the same time."

Cassie looked at him thoughtfully.

"Isn't it easy to lose sight of your true self that way?"

Sunny smiled.

"You might not know, but I am the world's topmost expert on not losing my true self. Shadows are formless and shapeless by nature, so I have to be careful not to forget the shape of my soul."

She lingered for a while, then let out a wistful sigh.

"I'll have to ask you for advice one day, then. I also struggle with maintaining my sense of self. Living through other people's senses, and experiencing their innermost memories... can be disorienting, sometimes,"

Cassie smiled, then asked in a gentle voice:

"But, speaking of the Lord of Shadows..., can I ask you something?”

Sunny glanced at her briefly.

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"You can."

She nodded, hesitated for a moment, and said:

"Before, you asked me to keep the true identity of Master Sunless to myself, saying that Nephis would not trust either if the connection between him and the Lord of Shadows was revealed. But now, you are not a stranger to her anymore. She has accepted Lord Shadow into her inner circle and entrusted him with her life. Likewise, Neph is... uh... sympathetic toward Master Sunless. Why maintain the charade?"

Sunny did not answer immediately, contemplating her question.

Why did he want to keep that secret?

He hesitated for a while, then sighed.

"Because it's fun."

It was a callous answer, but a truthful one. Well, of course it was otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to give it.

There was no strategic reason to keep Nephis in the dark anymore. And yet... Sunny was enjoying himself too much to let it go, already.

Nephis did somewhat trust the Lord of Shadows now. But she was also wary of him, because anyone who possessed such power would make people wary,

The humble shopkeeper, however, wasn't powerful at all. So, she could allow herself to be at ease around him. And to Sunny, such moments were... precious. They were much closer to the relationship they had before becoming Saints than the courteous distance between her and the Lord of Shadows.

He didn't want to lose these moments, yet.

Cassie let out a small laugh.

"Fun? Well... I have to admit, it is indeed a lot of fun. However..."

She lingered for a moment, and asked quietly:

"Don't you think that it is unfair to her, to keep such a secret?"

Sunny kept quiet, the smile slowly disappearing from his face.

Eventually, he let out a sigh and lowered his head.

"You are right. It is indeed unfair. But don't worry... I'll tell her soon."

He looked ahead and added with a hint of regret in his voice:

"I'll tell her before the war starts. Until then... well, Master Sunless should probably make an effort to enjoy his last days of peace as much as possible."

The two of them continued to explore the labyrinth, sometimes keeping silent, sometimes chatting about this and that.

Sadly, Sunny failed to solve the maze this time, as well.

Not long before the dawn came, he found himself back in the underground chamber, face-to-face with Cassie.

It was time to show her another memory.