1765 The Three of Them

The last memory Cassie saw was of the mad Saint climbing the statue of the Knight. She knew that he could have reached the top in one step, or turned into a crow to fly there - but, for some reason, the Lord of Shadow chose to climb the great height of the beheaded colossus like a mundane human, one handhold at a time.

In the end, he sprawled on the severed neck of the statue and stared at the black sky with a detached expression on his pale, handsome face.

That was where the memory ended, this time.

It was... almost too much for her to handle, making Cassie feel dizzy.

Reading someone's memories wasn't like reading a book or watching a video. She perceived things the way people remembered them - a chaotic mixture of images, sounds, smells, sensations, thoughts, and emotions. More than that, memories were often unreliable, and tended to twist the truth a lot.

There was no solid concept of time in the memories of most people, either. It was warped and twisted in accordance with how significant the event had been for them... or sometimes for no reason at all. A single minute could span an eternity, while entire years could leave close to no trace in a person's memory.

Usually, if Cassie wanted to uncover the truth, she had to gently... or not so gently... lead the man or woman looking into her eyes toward it. Very few people were truly in control of their memories, after all, so she had to guide them patiently. Often, they themselves were surprised to remember the details of certain events in their lives.

It had taken her a long time to teach herself how to navigate human memories. Eventually, though, Cassie had become a master of perceiving them.

But her hands were tied with the Lord of Shadows, because he was the one choosing what to show her.

His memory was incredibly sharp, but the way he perceived the world and remembered things was entirely too strange. On top of that, Cassie's own memory was incapable of retaining many of the things he remembered feeling, witnessing, or thinking about.

It was a proper mess.

But, still...

She managed to learn a lot from what he had shown her today.

Cassie looked at the Lord of Shadow with a complicated expression.

At first, he had shown her the Ivory Island. Knowing that he had been anchored there as a Master was already a precious piece of knowledge. She knew that he had not been a Fire Keeper from his service in the First Evacuation Army, so combining these two facts sent Cassie's mind into overdrive, countless theories spawning at it each moment.

What had been his connection to her and Nephis?

Soon, however, she couldn't help but pause as a cold shiver ran down her spine.

That was because she saw herself in his memories. The mysterious man had been so close... he could have reached out of the shadows and put his hand on her shoulder.

...Or drive a knife through her heart. And she had not sensed anything.

That was both an eerie and frightening thing to learn.

'He was right there, in my shadow...'

She paled.

The Lord of Shadows had come to the Ebony blimi Tower to study the runes left behind by the Demon of Choice. Cassie had read them, as well.

Very few people in the world were capable of knowing the truth of what was written on the walls of the Ebony Tower - few enough that they could be counted on one hand, perhaps. And the Lord of Shadows, it seemed, was one of them.

Shadow God was the God of Mysteries as well, after all. So, in a sense, it was only fitting for the Saint of Shadow to be privy to the forbidden knowledge about the Forgotten God.

Had Cassie herself taught him the truth? Or...

Was she the one who had been taught by him?

The memories that followed were like a feverish nightmare, The mists of the Hollow Mountains…

was hard to pierce, even with her power. The long months the Lord of Shadow had spent challenging the impregnable mountain chain were like a blur not only because he didn't concentrate on these memories, but also because he had worn that strange mask of his for most of the journey.

As long as the mask one resembling those worn by the priests of the Nightmare Spell was summoned, Cassie could not see anything in the forgotten man's memories.

But it was while watching these memories that she finally noticed that there was something strange about the Lord of Shadows. The inconsistencies had piled up until Cassie realized in shock...

'He is not a carrier of the Nightmare Spell.’

She was rattled.

How could that be? Something like that was impossible... for a human of the waking world, at least.

And yet, she couldn't deny it.

There was no voice of the Spell in the memories of the Lord of Shadows. No shimmering runes, no new Memories and Echoes. There were other clues, as well, but the most undeniable of them was the fact that he had spent close to a year learning how to enter his Soul Sea.

All carriers of the Spell could do it from before becoming an Awakened. And yet, one of the most powerful Transcendents in the world had not been able to.

Her eyes widened when the realization hit her.

Cassie lingered for a while, then looked at the Shadow Saint with a mournful expression.

‘...Is it because he has been forgotten by the Spell, as well?'

How lonely and painful would it be, to be erased completely from the world?

She didn't need to guess. After all... she could experience his anguish personally, by looking at his memories.

Cassie's lips quivered.

No wonder he had been in such a disturbed state back then... was still?

Eventually, she was distracted from her thoughts by a stunning sight.

Her heartbeat suddenly turned erratic.

Cassie took a shallow breath.

‘The... the Forgotten Shore...'

Indeed. The madman had actually crossed the Hollow Mountains - something that most humans considered utterly impossible.

And on the other side, a forlorn land lay shrouded in darkness, both familiar and unfamiliar.

There was a storm of emotions raging in Cassie's heart. But, more importantly... she focused her mind completely on these dark memories, knowing that they would hold the key to the secret of where the Lord of Shadows had come from, and how closely tied he was to her and Nephis.

'Outer Settlement hunter? One of Gunlaug's lieutenants? Maybe... maybe even a Sleeper from the same year as us and Caster?'

She peered into his memories tensely, fighting against the inescapable forgetfulness as hard as she could.

Cassie shivered when he saw the ruins of the Crimson Spire.

She cried when the Lord of Shadows built a grave for the fallen of the Dreamer Army.

She smiled sadly when he explored the molten ruins of the Bright Castle.

She was curious to see the runes for "Sunless" carved into the wall of the ruined cathedral.

'Is that actually his real name?'

Whose name? What had she been thinking about?

She was shocked when he descended into the secret cell under the cathedral and read the ominous words written on its floor,

'Weaver...'

When the Lord of Shadows started his tour of the giant statues, Cassie was finally illuminated.

‘That arch... he was actually with us during the expedition to reclaim the Dawn Shard!’

So their connection had been that deep...

But it was only at the very end that Cassie's eyes widened, and she gasped in shock.

The memory of the Soul Devouring Tree burning was incredibly vivid.

Her entire body trembled.

'From... the beginning... he was with us from the very beginning…’

The Lord of Shadows was not a hunter from the outer settlement. He wasn't from the Bright Castle, either. He wasn't even just a Sleeper from the same year as them.

He was someone who had accompanied Cassie and Nephis from their very first steps on the Forgotten Shore.

The two of them... had been the three of them, all along.

It was just that they had forgotten.

Suddenly, Cassie felt a sharp pain pierce her heart.

She felt as though... as though something so precious that it couldn't be described with words had been taken from her.

And with that, Cassie finally closed her eyes, breaking the contact between her and the Lord of Shadows... with Sunless.

Sunny.

There were so many details in the avalanche of memories he had shown her, so many hints and clues... it would take her weeks to slowly digest and contemplate all of them, then build her knowledge based on the new understanding.

But right now, Cassie did not care to do so, and was incapable of doing so either.

All she cared about...

Was the feeling of loss, the bittersweet emptiness, and the faint hope of finding what they had lost once again.