2028 : Clandestine Meeting

It was not easy to find privacy in the temporary camp of the Song Army. There was no night in Godgrave, and unlike in the city-like main camp, there were no permanent structures and deserted alleys here.

Still, there was also less security and fewer watchmen. The order had hardly been restored in the aftermath of the battle, and most soldiers were either asleep or resting.

The funeral rite for the fallen was going to begin soon, too, which gave Rain a chance to slip away unnoticed.

She found a desolate space hidden between a row of empty tents and the outer palisade, hiding in its cool shadow. A moment later, she felt herself being pulled into the darkness, and experienced the familiar sensation of being transported somewhere else.

Only, this time, there was no quaint brick cottage waiting for her on the other end of the journey.

Instead, she found herself in the Hollows, with her brother standing by her side.

The ancient jungle sprawled around them, brimming with a myriad of scents, rustles, and harrowing perils. Rain could not help but shudder, remembering the doomed march to the Collarbone Citadel. The gruesome scenes of people being devoured by the jungle surfaced in her mind, making her feel nauseated.

There were no trees or vines close to her, at least. They were standing in the middle of a large clearing, with only the scarlet moss covering the surface of the ancient bone. It was a relief, but…

They weren't alone in the clearing.

Not too far away from, the corpse of an appalling abomination lay on the ground, seeping blood into the scarlet moss. Next to it were two figures.

One was a man in a fearsome onyx armor, his face hidden behind an eerie mask of black polished wood… the Lord of Shadows.

Rain blinked a couple of times, stared at him for a few moments, then glanced at her brother.

No, but how… were they really the same person?

If she did not know the truth, she would have never believed it.

Her brother was a young man of modest stature, with a slender build and delicate features. He was not quite flimsy, but no one would call him physically imposing either. He wore simple clothes and wielded no weapons.

The Lord of Shadows, meanwhile… actually, strangely enough, it was difficult to tell what his height was. Nevertheless, he seemed to tower above everything, as if his mere presence made the world smaller. His battered onyx armor made it impossible to see him as anything except a deadly warrior, and his menacing mask was chilling to look at, pools of impenetrable darkness nestling in its eyes.

More than that, their very presence was different.

Her brother emanated an easygoing, relaxed, and joyful feeling. He was quick to smile, and his dark eyes often glistened with wry humor.

The Lord of Shadow, though, was the epitome of aloof and threatening. His gaze, his bearing, the subtle slant of his shoulders… all of it expressed cold indifference, ruthlessness, and arrogance.

This was indeed a person who could slaughter Saints and laugh as he did so.

Rain was taken aback for a moment.

'Well… it makes sense.'

Her brother was living several lives at the same time while hiding that fact. Naturally, he would need to develop sublime acting skills to pull off this scheme — otherwise, there would be no point in hiding his true identity.

She couldn't help but wonder which of his incarnations was the real one, though. The warm and joyful one she knew, or the cold and unfamiliar slayer standing in front of her?

For all Rain knew, the guy running a restaurant in Bastion could be the true face of her brother!

As great as her shock at seeing two versions of him was, there was someone else who immediately stole all her attention.

Because the Lord of Shadows was not alone.

Next to him… stood a breathtakingly beautiful woman.

Her beauty was so lovely and exquisite that Rain felt utterly stunned for a moment, barely able to think. The woman wore a white tunic and a seawave cloak, her hair falling down like a cascade of pale gold…

Her eyes were hidden behind a blindfold, but Rain remembered how they looked very well.

After all, she had met this beautiful Saint before.

It was Lady Cassia, Song of the Fallen.

'What… what… what is Lady Cassia doing here?'

Logically, it made sense. The Lord of Shadows and Song of the Fallen were both members of the Sword Army, after all — so, it was only reasonable to assume that they knew each other.

Still, Rain was utterly shocked to meet her here.

She suddenly felt self-conscious and uncomfortable… ashamed, even.

It was because Lady Nephis and the members of her cohort had shown Rain great kindness before, but now, she was fighting on the side of their enemies. There was no reason for her to feel shame — her decision to join the Song Army had been dictated by the desire to protect her friends and neighbors against the invading forces of the Sword Domain, after all, and that decision was still valid.

But emotions were not always reasonable, and so, Rain couldn't help but feel as if she had betrayed the benevolence of the beautiful woman in front of her.

'...Why did he bring her here?'

Shifting from one foot to another, Rain looked at her brother hesitantly.

He smiled.

"Don't worry. She is my… partner in crime, I guess."

Hearing that, lady Cassie tilted her head a little.

Rain's brother chuckled.

"Rain, Cassie… you two should already know each other, right?"

Rain remained silent for a moment, then nodded.

Then, she flinched and hurriedly voiced her answer aloud:

"Oh… yes. It is nice to see you again after all this time, Saint Cassia."

The beautiful Saint smiled softly…

Rain was more or less convinced that entire kingdoms could be toppled by that smile.

"It is nice to meet you again as well, Rain."

Her eyes shook a little.

'...She actually remembers me?'

Her brother, meanwhile, looked at the Lord of Shadows and scoffed.

"Anyway. I asked Cassie to help me figure out a few things about your Awakening. The two armies are relatively close to each other at the moment, so that fool over there carried her here to take a look at you."

The Lord of Shadows answered in a cold, menacing tone:

"Who are you calling a fool, you fool?"

Rain stared at the two of them with a strange expression.

No, but were they really… really the same person?