

AMNESIA

A Rune & Brand Short Story

It's possible to lose yourself in bliss. Scarily, helplessly possible.

I'm not sure how long I spent floating in carelessness—where I had no name, no past, no present, no direction or needs or urgencies. I floated through what felt like a lifetime of quiet instructions and movement, on chairs and beds, through moments flushed with sunlight and others shrouded in dusk.

The one word that battered at this wash of subjugation finally broke free when I stubbed my toe.

I was sitting in a chair before a bare wooden desk in a bare institutional room. A man with horn-rimmed spectacles blinked at me. I'd been kicking my leg against the desk, which caused the spurt of awareness and pain.

"Brand," I said. "Where is Brand?"

The man blinked again, grimaced, and laid his pen alongside a closed folder. "I see. Still no progress then. I'm so sorry to hear that, Lord Sun, I truly am. I fear we've lost much ground this month."

"Where," I said, "is Brand?"

He rose from his chair slowly, circled the desk, and sat in a chair next to me. He put a hand on my arm and said, "Your companion died thirteen years ago, Lord Sun. You are experiencing a recurring loss of memory caused by damage in the Raid that cost Lord Brandon his life. Please know that you are safe. We are discussing events well in the past. Do you understand me?"

I let the mental bliss grab me like a riptide, tearing me away from this unfriendly shore.

Awareness returned in inconstant flickers.

I sat on a bed in a plain room with a single mattress and white-washed walls. The bedsheets fibers felt like dandelion fluff under my fingers.

I stood at a window looking out at a generic courtyard. I stared at the leaves of a tree for hours until my mind accepted that they were yellow and red.

I put a fork in my mouth. I was at a table in a loud room, but the people and scene around me were a blur of detail. I closed my lips around something that tasted like chocolate.

But mostly, there was just that never-ending pull of thoughtful bliss barely slowed by a tiny, growing, frugal awareness.

The office. I returned to my senses again in the office. I had more memories of this space than any other.

The man in the eyeglasses regarded me with a pleasant smile. “Go on,” he said.

“Go on?”

“We were talking about your father. Do you remember?”

I stared at him and said, “We can talk about my father. Sure.” And that was a victory of sorts. I stared at him. I thought of a question. I spoke the words.

So I kept talking. I talked of my younger days, which were the best memories I have of my father. Things are always blurrier in my early teens, the closer I get to the actual fall of Sun Estate.

The doctor seemed more focused on asking questions about those years, however. And I let him talk, because it helped ground me.

“How many times?” I asked him when enough time had passed.

“Excuse me, Lord Sun?”

“How many times have I...forgotten. Forgotten Brand.”

“Several, Lord Sun. It’s not worth dwelling on. You’ve made much progress. I am very pleased.”

“Several,” I repeated. “I’ve remembered losing Brand several times.”

“Yes, Lord Sun. But after a period, you always seem to forget, and we return to these amnesiac moments.”

“Hours, then? Days? Weeks? How long do I live without him?”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“It doesn’t matter,” I said, and now I felt the yawning stretch of my magic in the back of my head. “You’ve overplayed your hand anyway. You should have done your research better.”

“I’m not sure what you remember, Lord—”

I held up a hand. “It’s not about memory. It’s about nature. I can be-

lieve I'd wake up in a hospital once without Brand. I just know it wouldn't have happened over and over."

"I don't follow."

"He is my Companion," I said simply. "I will not walk this world without him. I'd sooner survive with half a heart or brain. I'll let you in on another secret, too, if you'd like to know."

The man had gone still.

I said, "Whatever this is, you've muted my bond with Brand. Out of every insult you've shown me, that's the worst. That's the reason I won't try hard."

"You won't...try hard?"

"To save you."

The man marshaled a smile. "You have no sigils or spells, Lord Sun. You're in a safe environment that protects—"

My eyeballs itched as amber light flooded them. The light grew until I saw the small circles reflected in the man's wide, wide eyes. It was a sign of my power—my Aspect, my deepest Atlantean magic. It didn't care if this was a dream or spell—magic is metaphor, and this was my metaphor.

My mind cleared. I felt the invisible strings holding my mind in place. I was very, very good at battling psionics. It was nearly a discipline for me—an obsession since the night my father's court ended.

"You won't like it very much when I tear free of your brain," I promised him.

I came to in a small, circular room lined with coral. Volcanic dust was baked into cursive black writing along the ceiling. On the ground in front of me was a small figure covered in scales. He didn't look very humanoid. He was alive, but the sounds coming from his mouth sounded like sobbing, stuttering, half-finished nonsense syllables.

There was a single door to the room. I went over, undid several deadbolts, and opened it.

Brand stood in an office-like waiting room. There were three dead bodies in the room. He looked pissed.

"Can I still blow the fucking door down?" he said. "I was about to blow the fucking door down." He glanced behind me and saw the crying

creature.

“I broke his brain,” I admitted.

“Why can’t you ever leave anyone to question?” he demanded.

“You are literally surrounded by corpses,” I said. “Why is it always my job to leave someone alive?”

He grumbled at that, and I hid my smile, because the sheer relief flooding through our bond said all I needed to about his state of mind.

On our way out of the building, as Lord Tower’s team rushed in past us, I talked about the weird mental prison. We were on a mission for the Dagger Throne; we’d been in his service for years now, and lived in the Pac Bell.

“There’s no way you said all that,” Brand said. I’d just told him about the moment I’d finally confronted the mental construct.

“Why not?”

“Because you survive just fine with half a brain. All the fucking time. I could write movies about the decisions you make with half a brain.”

But as he said this, his arm came up around my shoulders and he pulled me into a sideways hug for a brief, fierce second.