Time

by themidnightrhapsody

Summary

Time is never particularly kind to anyone, and he doesn't wait. Alice dreams, Kairi wishes, and there may not be a solution, but there will always be an opportunity.

Notes

Original notes from FFN: I have a terrible habit of letting my mind wander, and sometimes it comes back with odd friends. This is one of them. It's based on Tim Burton's Alice, but it incorporates some of the parts of Lewis Carroll's work the movie didn't touch or didn't carry. If the characterization is slightly off, I apologize; I have a terrible habit of writing people according to events rather than writing them in their basic forms. If it helps, I think this is how both characters would act in these circumstances.

Kairi isn't sure when everything lost meaning – when Thinking became thinking, when Traveling became traveling, when fighting no longer seemed Important and her Heart became a burden.

the entirety of the universe couldn't lift her spirits – everything is flat and lifeless and riku is missing again and sora is...gone.

At first, she'd been looking for a way to cure Sora, cure him of the affliction nobody but a princess of Heart could understand – Darkness from the Keyblade had seeped into him, leched onto his insides, and destroyed him. She'd thought, as a princess of Heart, she could...

But then, it had been about finding Riku – in his grief, he'd gone out by himself, to challenge
Darkness itself. She knew he couldn't win. Nobody could. Even all seven princesses couldn't. What made him think...

And suddenly, it had been about staying alive. Without a Keyblade Master, the Darkness was everywhere. Her Keyblade could protect her, but she couldn't save the universe. Not like Sora, lost to the Darkness like every Keyblade Master before him.

Coming to a world she doesn't recognize is a common situation; as the barriers between them weaken, she has better access to them. But this one is different. This one is...

Ah.

There is a princess here.

Kairi doesn't feel 'at peace,' but it's nice to find a familiar presence. She doesn't know who it is; she suspects it might be Jasmine – the presence is almost as young as she is.

Young. She feels as though her world stopped when Sora disappeared – she will perpetually be twenty-one, even when the hair on her head is gray. Her body is twenty-seven, now.

She follows the light – the feeling of light, at least – to a tree in the sprawling garden. A blonde girl is there – so, no, not Jasmine, but who? This can't be Alice...can it?

The girl squints and flashes a tiny smile, the same kind Kairi gives when she knows she should smile. "Good morning, Kairi."

"I..." She stops, and then looks down, feeling sheepish. "Are you Aurora, or Ella, or-"

"Alice."

"Ah." Kairi isn't sure exactly what to say next. "You've grown up quickly."

"And you haven't."

Kairi doesn't know what to make of that. "I guess not. We grew up on different worlds, though – time probably got weird."

"Time's not particularly kind to anyone," Alice says. Her eyes stray to a hole by the roots of her tree, and Kairi wants to ask, but doesn't.

Instead, she says, "I've never heard that one before. I always thought of time as..."

A corner of Alice's mouth turns up, looking more natural than her previous smile, and she asks, "Have you ever met Time?"

"I've met lots of people," Kairi replies, sitting down next to Alice, who doesn't seem to mind. "I can't say I've met Time, though. Have you?"

"Once, briefly, in China. I begged him for a favor. I asked him to give more attention to a friend...and he did, but in return, he took the same amount away from me. It's why I've grown up so fast, you see. He's quite a nasty fellow...never likes to look back, or help anyone. In fact, the more you want him to help you, the faster he runs." Alice's mouth turns down now, though Kairi doesn't think she's conscious of it. "You know, a dear friend of mine got into trouble with Time. A queen cried out in front of everyone that he was murdering Time, and...well, I suppose Time must be a bit paranoid, because he stays away completely. Now, it's always...always teatime."
Kairi frowns, and thinks Alice must either be speaking in metaphor or lacking in sanity. She opens her mouth to speak – though she isn't sure what to say – but Alice laughs and Kairi recognizes the note in it. *Loss. Sadness.*

"Sometimes I wish I could go back in time," she whispers. She's not sure if it's true, but it *feel*strue, and sometimes that's second best. "But I guess if he's as irritable as you say, it would be a pointless venture anyway."

"Go back to whom," Alice asks. Not to *what* – to *whom*. Alice understands, and Kairi wants to know why, but she's not sure how to ask.

"Sora," she says.

Alice's eyes widen. "Sora? What happened to him? He saved my life once, you know."

"If I had a moment for every time someone has said that to me..." Kairi shakes her head. "Darkness got to him. I knew it was happening. I could *feel* it. But I couldn't stop it. I didn't know how."

"And do you know now?"

"No," she admits, "but I just want to kiss him again...to hear him laugh again. To see him smile that silly smile and hear him tell me about all the things he's seen. He knew some very weird people...he kept telling me he'd introduce me, but there wasn't enough time."

"Then going back would only make you sadder. You would only lose him twice. And then you'd lose yourself." Alice eyes her thoughtfully. "Unless you've already lost yourself. Yes, perhaps that's why you're able to find me in my dream. If you had yourself, yourself wouldn't be wandering where it doesn't belong. I'm very glad to see you, Kairi, even if you aren't yourself, because dreams are lonely when one is alone – even more lonely than being alone during waking hours."

"You're not dreaming," Kairi says.

"How do you know?"

She shrugs. "Because if you were dreaming, I'd only be a figment of your imagination. I refuse to be a figment, Alice."

"*Much more muchier,*" Alice says in an odd tone, and laughs an odd laugh. Kairi wonders if maybe Alice is a bit less sane than she first thought. "You know, you're the first dream I've run into that just refused to be a dream. Even the Hatter accepted it, but he wasn't a dream after all. But I know this can't be real, because Underland is, and nobody from Underland remembered the Darkness. There's logic, for you."

"Um..."

"No, Alice."

Kairi smiles. There's something absurd about this entire conversation. She wonders what would happen if she tried to convince Alice she's just a dream, which may actually be the case. It would be lovely to wake up and find that the last seven years were all just a dream.

"What would you say if I told you that you're the dream?"

Alice *hmms* and is quiet for a moment, before replying, "I suppose I'd tell you that you have very..."
odd dreams, and you may want to get your head examined."

There's a beat of heavy silence, and then –

"I've never had tea before," she says suddenly, mostly because she's completely out of her element.

"That's awful," Alice replies. "If I could dream up a way to get back to Underland, I would introduce you to the best cup of tea you'll ever have. Unfortunately...I can't get back. I made a promise, but I'm unable to keep it, because...well...the rabbit hole is too shallow. I can see the bottom. Kairi, I can't go home."

"Then...you should come with me," Kairi says briskly. She's always been a girl of action. Standing quickly, she holds out her hand for Alice to take. "I know Sora's still out there somewhere, lost. As long as his body is living, I should keep looking for a cure. You know Underland is still there somewhere, but you can't get there like you did before. As long as you're living, you should look for a way in."

Alice stands – on her own – and looks at Kairi thoughtfully. She's rather tall, Kairi notices, but it's not intimidating. It adds to her subtle beauty.

"If I'm dreaming," Alice says, "I'll wake up and be here again. I come here periodically, you see, just to check the hole, and if this is a dream, I simply fell asleep here. If I'm not dreaming, there are entire worlds unexplored and an ocean of possibilities. If I'm dreaming, I shall wake up and feel sad, but if I'm not dreaming, I'll have left behind so many people who are depending on me."

Kairi puts her hands on her hips. "Are you coming with me or not?" Suddenly, she's very impatient. Suddenly, there is a purpose. Suddenly, there is Alice – a friend. A kindred spirit. "You're wasting time."

Alice shakes her head. "Don't let him hear you say that. He'll be insulted, you know, and then he'll haunt us."

Kairi feels herself start to smile. "Us?"

"You and me."

"So you're coming?"

Alice takes her hand. "Time waits for no one."

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