1299 Nameless Things

A few more days passed in blissful idleness. Sunny continued concentrating on Shadow Dance, not ready yet to learn more from Ananke — the information she had shared with them was already vexing enough, and he was struggling to parse through all of its many implications.

He also resumed his habit of studying the weave of the Estuary Key, even though it still remained a complete mystery to him.

After hesitating for a while, Sunny turned to the old woman for help, but there was no result. Although she was a priestess of the Nightmare Spell and a follower of the Demon of Fate, she was not a weaver herself. Sunny knew more about Weaver's sorcery than Ananke did.

...Which was not to say that she did not know anything about sorcery at all.

After spending several days in the ketch, Sunny and Nephis noticed two strange things about the swift vessel and its owner.

The first one concerned the ketch itself. Its sails were always full of wind, pushing the boat across the shining surface of the Great River with enviable speed. Which was not too strange in and of itself, if not for the fact that this speed was too constant and stable. It also did not seem as though the direction and strength of the wind ever changed — or rather, they never changed around the ketch.

They did, however, change some distance away from it, creating an eerie situation where the waters where the wooden sailboat passed were different from the rest of the world.

Not only that, but Ananke also never manipulated the sales in any way to help them catch the wind.

And nothing ever attacked them.

Both Sunny and Nephis knew, of course, that the ketch was not a mundane boat. It was obviously enchanted in some way, they just did not know how. There were no runes carved into its surface and no sophisticated runic patterns like on the Chain Breaker. There was no spellweave hidden within the old wood either.

Eventually, they were defeated by curiosity and asked Ananke directly.

That was how Sunny learned that, while the old woman was not a weaver, she was still a sorceress. However, the sorcery she used did not belong to the Demon of Fate, nor was it the runic sorcery created by Hope.

Instead, it was the ancient sorcery upon which Hope's runic magic was based — the sorcery of Names.

Noticing their bewilderment, the old woman chuckled.

"My Lord and Lady... don't look too surprised. I am not some kind of powerful Shaper. I was just taught a few simple Names and Phrases by my mother, enough to sail the Great River and provide for myself."

Sunny and Nephis were still stunned. It was not every day that they met a practitioner of an entirely new system of sorcery.

In fact, Sunny had only ever met two sorcerers... himself and Noctis. Noctis had known a great deal about True Names of things and how to invoke them, but his was a more sophisticated kind of magic, which relied on inscribing the Names with runes instead of speaking them directly.

Nephis had met a few more, considering that she was acquainted with the forgemasters of Clan Valor. She had told him that the members of the Valor family often received Aspects tied to crafting, which was how they were able to create powerful Memories. However, the family had accumulated plenty of knowledge of runic sorcery, as well.

The cage that Sunny and Cassie had almost died in during their imprisonment in the Night Temple was proof.

Ananke tilted her head curiously.

"Are there no Shapers in the future? Well... makes sense. We were a dying breed even before the war. And with the gifts of the Nightmare Spell, no one would need to seek power in such an antiquated and obsolete art."

She lingered for a few moments, and then pointed to the sails.

"It is rather simple, really. I just invoked the Name of the wind, the Name of moving forward across water, and the name of the sail, then put them together into a Verse. I also used the Name of concealment and the Name of being hidden from predators. Of course, most of that was only possible because this old ketch of mine is imbued with a True Name of its own, which served as an anchor for the entire Verse."

Ananke sighed.

"It is also most of my repertoire. True Names... were never meant to be spoken by mortals. So, one has to possess innate talent in order to master even the easiest of them. My talent is not too good."

Sunny looked at her intently and asked:

"Is it very important for the ketch to have a True Name of its own?" The old woman nodded with a smile.

"Of course. Without a True Name, a thing does not have... pull. It is tenuous and slippery, so sorcery can't stick to it that well. Oh, at least that was how it was explained to me when I was a child. A nameless thing won't be influenced as much, but it will also be unable to exert much influence in turn... that is a rule that goes beyond sorcery, as well."

Sunny grew silent, contemplating her words. Ananke, meanwhile, looked at them with a strangely wistful emotion in her cloudy eyes.

"...Actually, I was going to teach you how to control the ketch, my Lord and Lady. If you are willing, of course... since even I was able to master these few Names, at least one of you will surely succeed."

Sunny and Nephis glanced at each other. Her expression was thoughtful, while his was full of greed.

'Ah, damn it...'

He was burning with curiosity and insatiable avarice. Learn a few sorcerous words? Of course, he was willing!

However, Sunny had to reluctantly pull himself back. He would indeed love to learn a tiny bit of the Word sorcery, but his resources were already spread thin. Apart from Shadow Dance, he also had to study weaving. His combat skills and Aspect powers all required attention, too. Becoming distracted by a shiny new toy was only going to slow down his progress.

Plus, if Nephis learned these Names from Ananke, he could always ask her to teach him in the future.

Sunny sighed, then forced himself to say: "...I'll decline, for now."

His heart was in pain.

Nephis looked at him silently, then turned to Ananke and bowed slightly.

"Please teach me, Grandmother."

The old woman nodded with satisfaction. "It will be an honor, my Lady."

And that was how the first strange thing they noticed was resolved.

The second, though...

The second had to do with Ananke herself.

It seemed that the further downstream they traveled, the more the old woman changed.