1364 Creating New Memories Together

The Great River flowed endlessly. Somewhere in the future, the ruins of Weave drifted empty and silent, with no one left to witness their inevitable march toward destruction. Somewhere in the past, the city of Verge stood, harboring the hidden horrors of the Defilement.

There was Twilight, too, mysterious and dreadful, lost to time.

...But here in Fallen Grace, the days were peaceful.

The work on the Chain Breaker started soon after Sunny, Nephis, and Cassie finished their tea. He visited the piers to observe the repairs, but there was really no point. The elderly citizens of the last human city knew how to tend to a ship much better than he did, and even though their bodies were ancient and frail, there were still some Awakened among them.

Their physical strength solved many problems, so Sunny did not need to help. The best he could do was not get in the way.

Knowing that there were many battles ahead, he dedicated his time to preparing as thoroughly as possible. Cassie and Nephis were doing the same. The latter was practicing her swordsmanship witthout rest, while the former... actually, Sunny was not entirely sure what their blind oracle was doing.

She spent a lot of time arranging measures to keep Fallen Grace safe in her absence, but also made a point of sparing as much of it as possible for him and Nephis. They had meals together, toured the city, and held long strategy meetings.

He was happy because the three of them were together again. But it was also a bit strange.

Cassie had spent an entire year in the Nightmare... which meant that she was older than Sunny by a few months now, making him the youngest in the cohort. He had treated her as a little sister once, at the start of it all, so it felt odd to suddenly be the one who was younger.

But then again, age was such an abstract thing... especially so for the Awakened. Sunny himself had spent an unknown length of time in the dream prison created by Nightmare. Even though he had forgotten most of that cruel trial, his soul still remembered its scars.

Speaking of Nightmare, the dark destrier was his main priority for now. Sunny had been unsure that he would be able to create enough Memories to help his steed Ascend before departure from Fallen Grace, but he was pleasantly surprised to have been mistaken.

There were two main reasons for that. The first one was that Cassie had opened the treasury of the temple to supply him with the few soul shards he lacked. The second one was the Crown of Twilight.

Its [Legacy of Twilight] enchantment greatly enhanced the rate with which Sunny regenerated essence at dawn and dusk. Here in Fallen Grace, though, dusk lasted for nearly the entire day, interrupted only by a brief and fleeting night — as a result, his reserves of essence had become nearly inexhaustible.

...Which was a good thing for more than one reason. The three of them were destined to visit the lost city of the Serpent King, after all. Twilight was situated at the opposite edge of the Great River, where it was almost always dawn. Sunny was certain that having a boundless amount of essence at his disposal would come in handy, no matter what dangers they were going to face there.

For now, he concentrated on weaving Memories to feed Nightmare above all else. The counter of shadow fragments was rising with each day.

So was the counter of nightmares the tenebrous steed had subjugated, at a speed much greater than ever before. Maybe because of the nature of the Tomb of Ariel... but much more importantly, because of the River People.

In the waking world, his Shadow had very few ways of collecting nightmares — it was because the dreams of mundane humans were powerless, while Awakened never dreamed. It was only Masters and abominations that could supply his Shadow with suitable dreams to subjugate.

But Awakened of the Dream Realm — and therefore, the River People of the Tomb of Ariel — were different from those infected by the Spell. Their souls did not travel between worlds when they slept, and so, Nightmare could invade their dreams and conquer their fears.

As a result, the citizens of Fallen Grace enjoyed strangely blissful sleep during these days, while his Shadow received plenty of nightmares to add to his swarm.

At this rate, Sunny did not know what would happen first — the black steed's Ascension or return to full power as a Terror.

He worked tirelessly to weave more rudimentary Memories, and do it faster.

One after another, they were completed.

And then, finally... Sunny weaved the last of them.

The date of their departure was already drawing near when he did. Hidden in the spacious chambers Cassie had arranged for him within the temple, Sunny slowly dismissed his four shadow arms and put Weaver's Needle down.

Left in his human hand was a beautiful nacre ornament. What made it look so tantalizing was not the colorful sheen, though, but the ethereal weave hiding behind it.

"It's done."

Sunny exhaled slowly, then dismissed the ornament and stretched.

'I did it.'

He felt both tired and exhilarated. Nightmare only needed one more Transcendent Memory to reach Ascension — and now, that Memory was complete.

Standing up, Sunny looked at the crimson sky beyond the window. The night had already passed, which meant that his Shadow should have returned to its post. These days, the black steed was usually hiding in the shadows near where the Chain Breaker was being repaired, guarding the workers on his orders.

'I better go visit him right now, then.'

As Sunny contemplated how much stronger Nightmare would become as an Ascended Terror, a swift shadow fell from the sky and landed on the windowsill. It was Jet's crow.

The small bird jumped a couple of times, then stared at him angrily and cawed:

"Stuck! Stuck!"

He sighed.

"I know, Crow Crow. We'll go get your master soon. Hey, I want to see her too! Just wait for a few more days."

The Echo had been hanging around him a lot, perhaps out of familiarity. Whenever Sunny was tired from weaving, he would study the small avian creature and try to appease its impatience.

Suddenly, a smile appeared on his lips.

"But first... do you want to come find Nightmare with me?"

The bird tilted its head and stared at him with its round eyes. Then, it opened its beak and cawed:

"Horse! Horse!"

Sunny chuckled.

"Yes. The horse. Come on!"

'Let's try it again...'

With that, he dissolved into darkness and manifested himself back into tangible form. This time, Sunny did not recreate his own appearance, instead shaping himself into an entirely different and smaller creature.

...A few moments later, two crows — one black, the other even darker, as if made of shadows — flew into the crimson sky.