1370 Insidious Adversary

Sunny sighed heavily, then subtly studied the world through his shadows. There was no danger around them. Everything seemed fine.

That said, his intuition was indeed telling him... something. It was not exactly ringing an alarm, but there was an eerie sensation at the back of his mind.

He rose to his feet and studied the Great River with his own two eyes. After a few moments, Sunny asked:

"What is it? I don't see anything."

Cassie did not move, her frown deepening. The waves rustled as they brushed against the hull of the ship. The sails rippled in the wind.

Raising a hand, she touched her cheek briefly, then said somberly:

"I feel... strange. As if I'm drunk."

Sunny stared at her wordlessly.

"Huh?"

The blind girl grimaced.

"It's like I'm seeing double. Only, of course, it's not my sight that is blurry. Rather, it's my Aspect Ability. The one that allows me to sense what will happen a few seconds into the future."

He remained silent for a few moments.

The shadows across the Chain Breaker moved, stirring.

"...So, what you're saying is that something is wrong with the future?"

Cassie hesitated a little.

"Or at least with my ability to perceive the future."

That was a rather terrifying thing to hear. Sunny looked around once more, noting how peaceful their surroundings looked. The sky was burning beautifully with countless shades of red, with not a cloud in sight. The surface of the flowing river was spotless, with nothing hiding beneath it.

And yet, there was something sinister happening to the world, unseen and imperceptible. If not for the keen senses of the oracle, none of them would have known that something was wrong.

"Let's go."

Taking Cassie by the wrist, Sunny guided her to the stern of the ship, where Nephis was holding the steering oar. He had not had to guide the blind girl in a long, long time... but now that her Aspect Ability was compromised, she must have been disoriented. Even if she was looking at the world through his eyes, that was not the same as perceiving it with her own senses.

'What the hell is happening in this damned Tomb...'

Soon, they arrived at the runic circle and told Nephis the news. She remained silent for a while, looking forward with a somber expression.

After a while, Neph nodded.

"I see. I felt that something was wrong, too."

Sunny tilted his head a little.

"How?"

Even his faint premonition had only appeared because of his tenuous affinity to fate, which had been enhanced by Weaver's lineage. Sunny usually called these vague feelings his intuition, but it was not exactly a sixth sense. It was actually a rudimentary ability to feel the tremors of the strings of fate.

What allowed Nephis to feel the wrongness, then? She pointed to the sky.

"It's the suns. I am responsible for steering the ship, so I keep an eye on them for navigation. There's something strange happening, though... for the last hour or so, our course has been changing slightly. It's like we are being pulled toward something. But if we are, I don't know how. I don't think there are any forces exerting pressure on the ship or the current."

Sunny suddenly had a very, very bad premonition. His face turned grim.

They were on a hunt for a Defiled sybil, and Cassie's perception of the future was suddenly behaving strangely. More than that, the world itself was not working quite as it was supposed to.

'No, no. It can't be. Can it?'

Glancing at the blind girl, he asked evenly:

"Say, Cassie... that thing that broke free when the temple was unsealed. What exactly were her powers?"

Cassie hesitated for a moment.

"I am not sure. I did not get a proper look at her... all I remember is that all the soldiers I sent to stall her were torn to shreds in an instant, unable to land a single blow on her hide. Arrows and magic projectiles missed, enchantments failed. She was too dreadful of a creature for us to handle, especially while fighting the other sybil."

Her beautiful blue eyes glistened.

"...As soon as the second sybil died, I ordered everyone to retreat and disconnect the entire section of the city where the creature was raging. That was how we lost half of Fallen Grace."

Sunny inhaled deeply.

"But all the sybils had powers related to revelations, right? And revelations are a manifestation of extreme affinity to fate. That sybil was capable of sensing the future before becoming Corrupted..."

He gritted his teeth and shared a wild suspicion that was making him incredibly wary:

"...so is it possible that the abomination is now capable of affecting the future?"

Nephis looked at him strangely.

"What do you mean?"

He shrugged.

"Let's say there's an ancient sybil... a Transcendent Outsider who comes from the time before the Doom War. She becomes Defiled and turns into a Nightmare Creature, then gets buried alive for countless years. In the end, she breaks free of her mausoleum and devours half a city's worth of human souls."

Sunny shook his head.

"And then, we three go searching for her. And just at that moment, Cassie's ability to perceive the future starts behaving weirdly, while our ship is inexplicably moving in a direction that it's not supposed to be moving. Wouldn't you say that it's quite possible that this primordial horror of a Defiled abomination is more than likely to possess powers that have to do with affecting the flow of time... or at least the probability of things happening?"

Cassie and Nephis paled a little. After a while, the blind girl asked:

"That... that sounds too fantastical to be true. A power to change probability? Even if she is a tremendously powerful Corrupted abomination of unknown Class, that's a bit too much. Don't you think?"

Sunny shrugged.

"No, I don't. Too fantastical? We are inside a huge pyramid, sailing on an endless river that flows through time, suspended in the middle of a bottomless abyss. Oh, and it's all made from the corpse of an Unholy Titan. I don't think that there can even be something too fantastical, anymore."

He grimaced, then added in a stifled tone:

"As for how unimaginable a power that affects probability would be... aren't you forgetting something? I've been suffering from a similar kind of thing since before I became a Sleeper. Only, in my case, it's not me who is affecting probability... rather, improbable things have a way of pulling me toward them. In any case, the result is the same."

The three of them remained silent for a few moments. Then, Nephis said calmly:

"So what?"

Sunny blinked.

"So what? You are not wary of an enemy who can literally change the future as they see fit?"

She leaned back, then shrugged with indifference.

"There are obviously some limits to that power... if you're even right about its nature. Otherwise, we would have died from heart attacks or been hit by stray lightning already. Why don't we just go and kill that sybil, anyway? Do I need to remind you two that we also have the power to change the future?"

Sunny and Cassie were confused. The blind girl tilted her head a little and asked:

"...We do?"

Nephis nodded.

"Of course. If we go there and kill the abomination, that will be the future. We would have made it. Every action performed by every person in the world changes the future. That power is really not that unique. In fact, it's pretty universal."

He stared at her for a moment, then chuckled wryly.

'It's hard to argue...'

"The power to change the future, huh? Alright. Let's go and make a future where the abomination is dead, and we're alive. It's not like we know how to escape, anyway..."