1382 Long Time Coming

The breaking point of the battle happened when the massive body of the depth dweller finally collapsed into the boiling water. Many of the monstrous creature's limbs had been severed, its mantle of rotting seaweed had been devoured by flame, and the slithering mass of eels comprising its gaunt body had been charred, sliced open, and pierced through.

After a long and arduous fight, Nephis had finally killed the abominable giant.

By then, Sunny and his Shadows already sensed that the Drowned were wavering. Once Neph joined the fight against the demons, the scales swung in favor of the cohort drastically, and before too long, the last of the sinister creatures was slain.

Suddenly and without warning, the dark expanse of the flooded hall turned silent. The only thing Sunny could hear was the sound of water streaming through the cracks in the ceiling.

He looked up.

'This place is not going to collapse, is it?'

But then, suddenly, there was another sound. A ghastly, repulsive squelching of flesh being torn...

Spinning around, Sunny raised the Sin of Solace and prepared himself for the worst. But what he saw made his eyes narrow...

Having already climbed on top of the dead depth dweller, Fiend was enthusiastically tearing into the creature's repugnant flesh with his fangs. Feeling Sunny's gaze on him, the ogre looked up in confusion, as if trying to ask:

What?

Pieces of disgusting, fleshy meat were still hanging from his maw.

'T—this... this bastard! He almost gave me a heart attack!'

Not receiving an answer, the steel devil shrugged and continued ravenously devouring the dead abomination. He was practically beaming with delight.

Sunny let out a long sigh.

'Well, whatever. The rascal deserves a reward.'

He was very satisfied with how Fiend had performed in the battle. It seemed that Sunny's efforts were paying off — the decision to only feed the gluttonous Shadow enchanted metals until his primary Attributes were set had turned him not only extremely durable, but also effortlessly lethal.

It was as though Fiend was made from both armor plates and steel blades, with infernal flames enhancing both the former and the latter. The steel ogre did not even need to use weapons, because he was a living weapon himself.

'...He's so gluttonous, though.'

At this point, Sunny was really not sure how much Fiend was going to have to eat to evolve once again. It was probably going to take veritable mountains of food. On the bright side, they never found themselves lacking terrible Nightmare Creatures to kill, so at least there was no risk of running short on meals.

'Yeah... I'm not sure that it's something to be happy about.'

Sunny studied his other two Shadows and dismissed Nightmare after a moment of thought. Although his dreadful steed was not wounded seriously, there were some wounds on his sable coat. It was better to let the black stallion heal now that there were not supposed to be any more enemies around.

At the same time, the two Echoes dissolved into a whirlwind of sparks —half of them white, half of them scarlet. The sybil seemed fine, but the blade mannequin was seriously damaged. It would be some time before Cassie would be able to summon the artificial swordsman again.

Sunny lingered a bit, then dismissed Weaver's Mask and took a deep breath. The stale air of the underground hall was pleasantly cool on his skin. He enjoyed it for a moment and headed for the raised dais.

Not long after, the three Masters were reunited on its slightly tilted surface.

Nephis looked perfectly fine... well, of course she did. Any wound she had received would have been healed by the white flames long ago. In fact, that was one of the most frightening things about Changing Star —unless someone managed to kill her both instantly and utterly, she could recover from almost anything.

Nevertheless, she looked terribly drained and exhausted. The same power that healed her wounds and burned her enemies to ash subjected Nephis to unspeakable agony, which was why she only used her Aspect when there was no other choice.

Cassie seemed untouched, too. But although she only delivered a few swift strikes throughout the entire battle, she somehow looked even more fatigued than Nephis.

It was as though she would collapse at any moment.

Sunny was suddenly worried.

"Uh... are you alright?"

The blind girl lingered for a few moments, then smiled faintly.

"Yes. It's just that... remember the headache I told you about? I'm feeling it now."

He frowned.

'Right. Although it all happened terribly fast, she must have overused her Aspect Ability to be able to kill that thing.'

Sunny shook his head.

"Anyway... dispatching a Corrupted Tyrant in a single exchange. That was impressive. Since when are you so terrifying?"

Cassie faced him and suddenly laughed.

"I'll... take it as a compliment? If you don't mind."

Her laugh was bright and clear. She turned in the direction where the sybil had disappeared beneath the dark water and sighed.

"She was the enemy that cost me half of Fallen Grace. And all the lives that have been lost as a result of moving the city upstream. I've been preparing for this fight for a very long time, so... don't be too surprised."

Sunny coughed and looked away. The Defiled sybil had been a dangerous adversary to him... but to Cassie, she was something more. He knew all too well the shame of losing people you were responsible for to an overwhelming enemy.

'Good... it's good that Cassie got some payback.'

He hoped that he would be able to slaughter the Winter Beast one day, too.

Sunny hesitated for a moment, thinking if he should pat the blind girl on the back. Or maybe grip her shoulder. What was one supposed to do in these situations?

Before he could decide, though, Nephis took a few steps forward and took Cassie into a gentle embrace. She did not say anything, but there seemed to be no need for words.

The blind girl smiled.

"Thank you... anyway, the temple should be safe now. I don't think it will collapse any time soon, either. Still, we shouldn't linger. How about we rest a little, gather our spoils, and then do what he came here to do?"

Sunny nodded. Accomplishing their goal as soon as possible sounded like a good plan.

...Gathering plentiful spoils sounded even better.

But the most enticing thing Cassie suggested, by far, was to rest.

"Great idea!"

Without wasting any time, Sunny plopped on the ground and summoned the Covetous Coffer...

Fiend was not the only one who had worked up quite an appetite during the tiresome battle.