1392 Desolation

After the island broke apart, it did not take a lot of time for the debris to disappear into the depths of the Great River. Sunny, Nephis, and Cassie stood on the deck of the Chain Breaker, observing the death throes of this lost part of Fallen Grace in somber silence.

The flowing water seethed and boiled, turning into white foam. The ashen remains of the dark garden were pulled down by the current and swallowed by the depths. In something that felt like too short of a time, though, the surface of the river became calm and clear once again, with not a sign of the massive island-vessel left in sight.

Sunny sighed softly.

The destruction of the artificial island had been too depressing of a scene. It was like a metaphor of the futility of human existence... countless River People had worked hard to create and maintain it, and even more spent their lives walking upon its ground. But now, it was gone, swallowed by the elements in mere minutes. With every trace of it erased from existence.

Weave was going to be erased the same way before too long. The cities of the sybils had already disappeared... only Fallen Grace remained, its fate all but decided. The Tomb of Ariel had been home to a thriving civilization once...

But now, it was nothing but a Nightmare.

Sunny shook his head, suddenly grim. Would the cities of the waking world be gone one day, too? He had not even known that there was a world outside the endless sprawl of NQSC once. It was hard to imagine that a place so populous and boundless could cease to exist.

...But then again, the waking world was already a world of ruins. Plenty of thriving cities had been erased from its maps — most of them, even. Entire continents stood desolate, devoid of life, and uninhabited. He even witnessed the extinction of one of these empty continents himself.

'My mood is all over the place today.'

What was there to feel sad about? That island had been nothing by the lair of a dangerous abomination. They had come to its shore, killed the abomination, and absconded with precious loot. Cassie even received a pretty stick as a bonus.

If anything, he should be feeling utterly delighted.

However, Sunny felt mostly tired and sore all over. The battle against the Drowned was a short one, but nevertheless very intense. He was battered and bruised, albeit not injured too badly.

"Gone! Gone!"

Sunny turned and glanced at Crow Crow, who was hopping excitedly on the railing and staring at the empty space where the island had been with a curious expression. The small bird was unburdened by any kind of heavy thoughts. In fact, it did not have any thoughts at all...

After all, it was an Echo.

Now that the island was destroyed, though, that Echo had a job to do.

As he watched, Cassie approached the black bird and gently took it into her hands. Saying something, the blind girl opened her palms and let the crow fly away.

The last thing they heard before Jet's Echo disappeared into the distance were indignant caws:

"Stuck! Stuck!"

Crow Crow had a simple mission — to inform the inhabitants of Fallen Grace about the death of the Defiled sybil, and then find its way back to the ship. The three Masters did not know how long it would take them to rescue Effie and Jet, so they wanted to make sure that the last city would migrate downstream in their absence.

Hopefully, by the time they returned, the frail Riverborn would be doing much better.

'That's done, then.'

Sunny glanced at the wooden staff in Cassie's hands, then at the sails of the Chain Breaker. He hesitated for a moment, then asked tiredly:

"Should we set sail?"

After a moment of silence, Nephis shook her head.

"The night is approaching, and all of us are tired. I'd rather just drift with the current until tomorrow. A little rest won't do us any harm."

Sunny was happy to hear it.

...Soon, they were gathered on the mess deck at the stern of the ship. All its compartments had been cleared of debris and repaired by the inhabitants of Fallen Grace, but the three Masters did not visit most of them often, since there was no need to. They mostly spent their time on the upper deck, in their living quarters, or on the mess deck near the galley.

There was freshly prepared food on the table, giving off the familiar, delicious smell of Neph's cooking. The Covetous Coffer stood with its lid open, its teeth gleaming in the warm light of a lantern. Sunny was cradling a cup of tea in his hands, glancing at the several slates laid down in front of him.

Honestly, though, he was in no mood to study their mysteries. He just wanted to fill his belly and rest.

With a sigh, he pushed the slates away and pulled his plate closer. Swallowing the first mouthful of a fragrant meat porridge, Sunny closed his eyes in delight.

Nephis was preoccupied with eating, as well. Cassie, though, seemed to have forgotten about it — she was playing with her new shiny toy instead. The soul shard at the tip of the holy staff was emanating light, its intensity changing from time to time.

Sunny stared at her for a bit, then asked:

"What are you doing?"

The blind girl took a sip of tea absentmindedly.

"Trying to figure out how it works. It's weird... the enchantment doesn't seem to respond to everything. It points to you, Nephis, Effie, and Kai... but not Jet or that person, Mordret. Or Fallen Grace, for that matter. It does respond to Wind Flower, though."

Sunny raised an eyebrow, then shifted his perception and gazed beneath the surface of the Guiding Light. Just as he had expected, there was no weave there. There were no runes, either... just a field of blinding radiance.

He had seen something similar when looking at the knives created by Sun God. Within each, there was nothing but a radiant ocean of something —soul essence, perhaps — and a sole string of fate, bound onto itself and looping endlessly.

Such was the sorcery of gods, entirely unreasonable and void of any kind of logic he could understand.

'Looping endlessly...'

His tired mind got caught on these words, but he was distracted just then by Neph's strangely muffled voice:

"Found it."

Shaking awake from his reverie, Sunny turned and looked at her.

Nephis had a spoon in her mouth, holding one of the slates he had pushed away in both hands. Sunny was rather amused by that sight.

"...What did you find?"

She blinked a couple of times, then awkwardly removed the spoon from her mouth and pointed it at the slate.

"Wind Flower. Uh... it's described right here."