1505 Shape of His Soul

All of them froze, fading into the chaotic scene of the motionless battlefield. Surrounded by unmoving warriors and Nightmare Creatures, the six Masters were nearly indistinguishable from them.

Sunny and Mordret were next to each other, while Nephis was a few steps away. Effie and Jet were right behind her, separated from the rest of the group by a few meters.

They held their breaths.

'Soul Stealer is near...'

Sunny did not see or sense the Defiled Saint, but there was no other reason for Mordret to warn them. The Prince of Nothing looked too tense. A pleasant smile was playing on his lips, but his eyes were full of cold darkness. Sunny saw his own pale reflection in them... and then, he saw something else there, as well.

A cold shiver ran down his spine.

'Did... did something move at the edge of the square?'

He did not dare to speak aloud, but there was the [Blessing of Dusk]. Activating the enchantment of the Shroud of Graceless Dusk, he established a mental connection between himself and Mordret:

[What is happening?]

The Prince of Nothing remained as motionless as a statue. Even his eyes continued to stare at the same spot. However, his answer arrived shortly:

[Why, what else? Soul Stealer is here. He must have sensed us.]

Sunny suppressed a strong desire to grit his teeth and calmed his heart. Making sure that it wasn't beating too loudly, he asked:

[How? Didn't you say that you would hide our presence from him?]

A hint of dark amusement appeared in Mordret's eyes.

[Did I? No, not quite. I only said that I would try to hide it, remember? Which I did.]

He paused for a moment and added in a dejected tone:

[Soul Stealer's mirror realm encompasses the entire city. Therefore, he can perceive everything that happens here, all at once. I've been manipulating countless reflections to mask our presence — every puddle of water, every shard of glass, every polished sword, every pair of eyes. Forgive me for making it sound like an easy task, but it's not. Regardless, we've only come this far because of me... but now, it seems that our luck has run out.]

Sunny forced himself to remain calm. It was a bit hard, considering that an even more sinister, more evil version of the Prince of Nothing could have been following their scent.

[ So, what now?]

Mordret shifted his gaze slightly.

[Now... well. Might I suggest praying? Perhaps that monster won't notice us.]

After that, he fell silent.

'Damn it...'

With no other choice, Sunny continued to stand in place, pretending to be one of the frozen warriors. They had discussed the possibility of something like this happening, of course, but only as the worst-case scenario. To think that their plan would be at the risk of being derailed before the battle even began... this step had been supposed to be the easiest one.

The true hardship would arrive when the array was deactivated, and the battle against the Defiled legion resumed.

A few moments passed in absolute silence.

And then, Sunny felt it... the ground beneath his feet shaking subtly, as if something terribly heavy was approaching them with measured steps.

He could not turn around and take a look, but Mordret's eyes were like two mirrors. The bloody scene of the frozen battlefield reflected in them, and so, Sunny caught a glimpse of the creature that emerged from between the houses, entering the square.

His blood turned cold in his veins.

Soul Stealer... or rather, the reflection of Soul Stealer... looked unlike anything he had imagined.

Undying Slaughter and Devouring Beast had been changed and twisted by the Defilement. However, they still resembled their former selves.

Soul Stealer did not.

In fact, he did not resemble anything Sunny had ever seen.

The vague figure that entered the square did not look like a human, but it did not look like an abomination either. Instead, it was like an amalgamation of countless people and numerous Nightmare Creatures, all fused together into a harrowing patchwork monster. The contours of its body constantly changed, as if light refracted when touching it.

Or maybe they were indeed changing, shifting from one shape to another. With each of its steps, the ground shook.

'Gods... what the hell is that thing?'

Sunny was appalled and more than a little bit rattled. Not only because of how eerie and alien the reflection of the creature looked, but also because there were seven nodes of vile darkness permeating his... its?... monstrous body.

Soul Stealer was a Corrupted Titan.

Sunny shifted his gaze and stared at Mordret for a moment.

It was the source of this horror, standing next to him with a pleasant smile on his lips. Using that smile to cover the eerie, unnerving wrongness hiding behind it.

'Should we really be helping this bastard Transcend?'

He hesitated for a moment, then threw these thoughts out of his head. Here in the Nightmare, it was good to have Mordret on their side... it was infinitely better, at least, than having him as their enemy.

[What kind of a weird Transformation Ability is this? What is he capable of in this form?]

The Prince of Nothing lingered with an answer.

[...It's not a Transformation Ability, per se. It's simply the shape of his soul. His physical body looks differently, hidden somewhere in Twilight. I've never been able to find it.]

He paused for a moment.

[Becoming Defiled did a real number on me, didn't it? Bah! So unsightly.]

With that, Mordret's eyes shook a little.

[That's not what we should be concerned with, though. The real problem... is that the monster is moving straight for us.]

By then, the quaking of the ground had grown more pronounced. Sunny cursed inwardly, but still remained motionless. Surrounded by frozen warriors and abominations, with his back turned to the approaching Titan... needless to say, every cell in his body was screaming of danger, pushing him to move.

[So, what do we do?]

Mordret remained silent for a few moments, then suddenly turned his head and looked directly at Sunny.

There was no humor left in his cold, mirror-like eyes.

"I guess it's time for desperate measures. How unfortunate. It's up to you now, Sunless!"

As soon as Mordret moved, there was a chilling sound from behind them, and something swift tore through the air in their direction. A massive, terrifyingly deep shadow fell on Sunny, making him feel as if he was drowning in it.

"Damn it!"

He was already turning, instinctively trying to summon the Sin of Solace.

However, all Sunny saw was the fabric of reality around them cracking like glass, and then shattering to reveal...

He was violently thrown out of the mirror realm, crashing on the cobblestones of Twilight — the real Twilight, not its perfect reflection.

'Damn it all!'

The only contingency they had in case Soul Stealer discovered them was to escape the world of reflections altogether. Mordret had managed to send them back at the very last moment... so, they were safe, for now.

But the problem was that everyone, including the Prince of Nothing himself, was now frozen in time.

...Everyone except for Sunny, who was protected from the influence of the defensive array by the Crown of Twilight.

Standing up, he uttered a quiet curse and looked up, at the distant dome of the Serpent King's palace.

Now, he alone could reach it.