1525 Memory of Light

The breakfast ended up passing in a strange atmosphere.

Which was understandable, considering that they were sharing the table with a homicidal maniac. Mordret was nothing but amiable and pleasant, but it was exactly his disarming charm that made everyone feel disturbed and uncomfortable. After all, they all knew what the Prince of Nothing was capable of... some better than others.

Mordret was not the only one who made the conversation feel stifled, though. Nephis was still detached and impassive. Cassie was keeping quiet, as if she had forgotten how to speak. Sunny was not in the mood to talk, either, concentrating on his food. Kai was deep in thought, still struggling to come to terms with what he had learned from Effie and Jet.

After a while, all seven of them were more or less done with the meal. In the silence that followed, Effie glanced around the table.

"So..."

She leaned back and smiled.

"...Is anyone going to explain what the hell happened in that damned city?"

Sunny looked at her somberly. So did Nephis and Mordret — the former without any emotion, the latter with a hint of amusement. At that moment, Jet stretched her legs, crossed them comfortably, and nodded.

"Yeah. Actually, I'm dying to know, too."

Sunny remained silent for a few moments, trying to imagine the situation from their perspective, then sighed.

Taking a sip of tea, he said:

"Well... first of all, our base assumption was wrong. We assumed that Twilight had been frozen in the middle of a battle between its army and the invading forces of the Defilement, but in fact, it was a battle between Soul Stealer and the Dread Lord all along."

He paused, then added in a dark tone:

"They must have breached the walls of the city, which allowed Soul Stealer to consume the souls of everyone in Twilight. That was when he turned on the Dread Lord and tried to consume him, as well... and when the Mad Prince made use of the situation to activate the defensive array and trap them both. So, when I deactivated the array, both of those fiends were unleashed."

Across the table from him, Cassie suddenly spoke:

"Some of us have a good chance of resisting Prince Mordret's power, but some don't. That was why you two had to be hidden from Soul Stealer."

She turned slightly, facing Mordret. He smiled innocently.

'I don't like it at all...'

Sunny stared at the Prince of Nothing silently for a moment, then looked away.

"Don't worry. You don't have to be wary of him... too much. We are currently allies, after all, and he knows that if something untoward happens, this Nightmare will become his grave."

The threat hidden in his words was not very subtle. But Sunny did not really worry about Mordret — there might have been something really wrong with that guy, but he was not a fool. The exact opposite, actually. He knew that harming any member of the cohort inside the Tomb of Ariel would be a fatal mistake.

Especially now, right after Soul Stealer had been destroyed by Nephis, Mordret would not risk making them all his enemies. At least not until the very last moments of the Nightmare.

Sunny sighed.

"In any case, pretty much as soon as the array was deactivated, Kai and I faced the Dread Lord. I had to use an enchantment of the Crown of Twilight to resist his commands, but at the cost of plunging into an uncontrollable rage. While the two of us fought against the dragon, Nephis and Cassie found themselves surrounded by the vessels of Soul Stealer."

He paused.

"I am... actually not too sure what happened next."

Saying that, Sunny hesitated.

He said that he did not know, but in truth, he did know something.

Shimmering runes were glowing in the air in front of him. They read:

Name: Nephis.

True Name: Changing Star.

Rank: Ascended.

Class: Titan.

Soul Cores: [7/7].

Soul Fragments: [7000/7000].

Which was already startling enough. But there was something else near the end of the field of runes. Several new strings had appeared there.

Those were the runes that truly gave him pause.

Shifting his gaze slightly, Sunny read them once again:

Aspect Legacy: [Memory of Light].

Aspect Legacy Description: [A beautiful tree grew from the ashes of doubt, bearing fruits of knowledge.]

Knowledge of Fire: [Mastered].

Knowledge of ???: Unearned.

Knowledge of ???: Unearned.

Knowledge of ???: Unearned.

Knowledge of ???: Unearned.

Knowledge of ???: Unearned.

Knowledge of ???: Unearned.

There were seven strings in total, with only one of them revealed and described as mastered.

So... whatever happened to Nephis in Twilight had not only allowed her to become a Titan, but also unlocked her Aspect Legacy. And that Aspect Legacy was more than a little bit strange, seemingly granting some sort of knowledge instead of Relics.

Sunny would lie if he said that he wasn't interested in learning what had happened.

He looked at Nephis, hoping that she would explain at least something. She remained silent for a few moments, then shrugged indifferently.

"I tried to make my way to the palace, but Soul Stealer stood in my way. Facing defeat, I made a breakthrough and conceived of a new way of using my Aspect... just like you had conceived of using yours to take shapes of powerful creatures. So, I used one of my soul cores as fuel and destroyed it to unleash a conflagration of soul flame."

Sunny stared at her incredulously. On paper, what Nephis said made sense... he had indeed managed to deepen his understanding of his Aspect and create techniques like Shadow Shell and Shadow Incarnation, thus becoming more powerful while remaining of the same Rank. In a similar fashion, Nephis could have deepened her understanding and reached new heights of power.

But there was a piece of the puzzle missing.

"So... your Aspect allows you to burn your own soul and use it as fuel. But why was the explosion so immense and destructive?"

She looked at him impassively.

"My soul essence is especially potent, as you know. The explosion would have been devastating, regardless. But... yes, there was another element, as well. It was sorcery."

Sunny raised his eyebrow, hiding how perplexed he was.

"...Sorcery?"

Nephis nodded.

"Yes. The sorcery of Names. I used the Name of Wind to fan the flames burning across Twilight, and absorbed them. Then, I ignited my soul... and whispered the Name of Fire. You saw the rest. In the end, all vessels of Soul Stealer were destroyed. The remnants of the Defiled horde were destroyed, as well, allowing me to reform the Terror Core and form a new one."

She paused for a moment.

"With nowhere else to run, Soul Stealer was forced to enter my soul. I burned him."

Her even tone and motionless face made it seem as though destroying a Corrupted Titan, millions of his puppets, and thousands of Nightmare Creatures in one fell swoop was nothing out of the ordinary.

The rest of them stared at Nephis in stunned silence.

In the end, Effie grinned.

"Good job, Princess. Let's be friends, okay?"

Sunny was thinking about something else.

'Knowledge of Fire...'

He had an inkling of what the knowledge Nephis had received from her Aspect Legacy was. It had to have contained the True Name of Fire, at the minimum... of every kind of fire there was, perhaps. It must have also elevated her already unmatched affinity to flame to entirely new heights.

Nephis, meanwhile, looked at Effie with a hint of confusion in her striking grey eyes.

"...Aren't we already friends?"

The huntress chuckled and raised her thumb up.