1529 Worm of Doubt

The conversation with Mordret left Sunny in a somber mood. The bastard clearly knew more than he had deemed necessary to share, but the few pieces of information he did offer were... concerning.

However, Sunny did not dwell on the distant threat of the Sovereigns for long. He did not have the luxury of worrying about something waiting far in the future when there were lethal dangers waiting for him in the present...

Or past, technically, considering that Verge was situated far downstream, as close to the Source and the Estuary as the Seekers of Truth had been able to build it, before the Defilement was born.

Not long after he talked with Mordret, the Chain Breaker was attacked for the first time since leaving Twilight. The cohort dealt with the swarm of the Drowned with comparative ease, allowing him to collect a few soul shards and for Jet to replenish her reserves of essence.

After that, they maintained a battle-ready schedule at all times. Sunny's Shadows stood guard at different points of the ship day and night. Nephis and Cassie took turns steering the graceful vessel, keeping it at low altitude, sometimes just above the flowing water. Jet's crow and Kai scouted ahead for signs of approaching danger.

The most useful scout, however, was none other than Mordret. With his ability to perceive the world through reflections and the vast expanse of water around them, he could see far and wide, warning them of any suspicious movement far in advance.

They did not have to fight too often. Sometimes, danger came from below the water, and sometimes, it came from the sky. But most of the time, the Great River remained calm and peaceful, leaving them with plenty of free time on their hands.

Knowing that the cohort was drawing closer and closer to the inevitable attack on Verge with each passing day, Sunny threw himself into weaving.

There was a lot for him to do.

He had five Supreme soul shards, which meant that five of the Transcendent Memories the cohort possessed could be potentially elevated to a higher Rank. The first thing Sunny had to do was choose what Memories to alter.

He chose the first two rather quickly. They were the Transcendent armors Effie and Kai had received in the Second Nightmare — the former after slaying the Sun Prince, the latter after slaying the Ivory Lord, Dragon Sevirax.

Both were potent and possessed tremendously robust weaves, making the possibility of the alterations damaging or destroying them slim. Best of all, they were Memories of the First Tier, so a single soul shard was enough to change their Rank completely.

The third Memory Sunny decided on was somewhat of a harder choice —it was the Transcendent weapon of the Seventh Tier Nephis had received for slaying Soul Stealer.

The weapon, which could take many forms, possessed several insidious enchantments. In a sense, it was similar to the Cruel Sight, but much more versatile, destructive, and potent. Because of the similarities between the two silver blades, Sunny had an easier time studying its weave. Therefore, he had a better chance of transplanting a new nexus.

Sadly, transplanting seven was currently beyond his abilities — not that he had enough Supreme soul shards. However, Sunny decided to attempt isolating a single enchantment and supplying that enchantment alone with the power equal to that of a Supreme Memory — thus creating a strange and unheard-of Memory of a hybrid Rank.

The enchantment he chose was responsible for channeling elemental damage, as well as protecting the blade from harm. Considering Neph's propensity for destroying her Memories with her own flame, or simply by exposing them to too much punishment, that single improvement would serve her very well in the future.

The remaining two Memories he decided to alter had also been received by Nephis in Twilight. Both of them were of Transcendent Memories of the First Tier — one was an arrow, while the other was a charm.

The arrow possessed a simple enchantment that enhanced the force delivered by its impact, and could also shape that force into a flat, severing field. The charm was a more complicated one, and served to enhance the material properties of other objects — making weapons sharper, armor more durable, and so on.

With that arrangement, two of his companions would be better protected, two would be capable of delivering more harm to the enemy, and one would be able to better support the rest of the cohort in any kind of situation.

With his plans set, Sunny began the work — studying the weaves of the chosen Memories in great detail, creating threads of shadow essence, and preparing himself for the alterations was going to take him a long while. He hoped to be done with the process by the time they reached Fallen Grace, and if that failed, then at least before they reached Verge.

Days passed with him being completely concentrated on the task. Strangely enough, studying the unfamiliar weaves also gave him some inspiration for his own unrelated project — the complicated puzzle of turning the Covetous Coffer into a semblance of an Echo.

For a while, Sunny was fully engrossed in the mysteries of weaving, not paying attention to anything else — except for occasional attacks on the Chain Breaker.

...Slowly, however, a note of dissonance invaded his focused mind. Sunny was reluctant to pay it much attention at first, but with each passing day, the worm of doubt that had entered his mind continued to grow harder to ignore.

Especially because the Sin of Solace did not miss any opportunity to remind him of that small contradiction.

The thought gnawing at Sunny's mind was a seemingly innocent question...

'How did Cassie survive the explosion that consumed Twilight?'

At first, he had not paid that detail any attention, simply being glad and relieved that the blind girl was alive. But the more time passed, the more it bothered Sunny, for some reason.

Except for Mordret, who had been sent back to his physical body, all members of the cohort had been thrown out of the mirror realm in approximately the same location — past the open space where they had met Soul Stealer, near the inner districts of the city.

From there, Nephis had made her way to the palace. Cassie, however, had somehow ended up near the gates of the city when the explosion happened. She then dove deep into the still water beyond the gates to save herself, as well as Effie and Jet, from the obliterating blast.

But how had she found herself all the way near the wall of Twilight?

It had to have been immensely difficult to fight her way through the flood of Soul Stealer's vessels and the remnant abominations of the Defiled horde. The distance between where the cohort had found themselves and the outer limits of the city was much greater than the distance to the palace...

Cassie couldn't have reached the water by accident. So how had she done it?

There was only one reasonable answer...

It was that Cassie's goal had always been to escape the city.

Which meant that she had known what would happen all along.