1538 Lord's Wisdom

While the Chain Breaker was receiving light repairs, the members of the cohort were left to their own devices. Those who had never been to Fallen Grace spent time exploring its island-ships and getting to know the locals. Cassie was busy arranging things for when she was gone.

Sunny... Sunny did not really want to look at the beautiful city of eternal dusk. It made him wistful, and so, he threw himself back into weaving, knowing that there was not much time left.

He did, however, continue to observe the blind girl through one of his shadows — out of habit more than anything else, by now, since she had never done anything to confirm the accusations made by the Sin of Solace in the past two months.

He also sent one of his shadows to keep an eye on Mordret. Sunny was certain that Cassie was doing the same, as well — the Prince of Nothing could not be trusted to be on his best behavior in a city full of people. Especially people who were inhabitants of a Nightmare, and therefore no different from his countless victims in the Kingdom of Hope.

But Mordret did not seem inclined to go on a massacre in Fallen Grace. In fact, he was mostly interested in its myths and legends, of all things, spending his days talking to people on the streets and listening to their stories.

The people seem to enjoy his company.

On the third day of their stay in the last human city, Sunny successfully altered the Transcendent arrow Memory Nephis had earned in Twilight, elevating its Rank to Supreme.

The onerous process of transplanting a new nexus and reinforcing the weave to withstand it left him drained and fatigued. So, Sunny decided to let himself rest and left the temple, eventually finding his way to the edge of the island-ship.

Sitting down there, he observed the busy canals of Fallen Grace and allowed his tired mind to rest.

It was not long after that when Cronos found him, brimming with endless curiosity, just like always.

Today, however, the teenagers at least tried to keep it in check. Noticing his strange behavior, Sunny raised his eyebrow and asked:

"What's on your mind?"

The young man hesitated for a while, but eventually asked:

"Lord Sunless... I heard that you won't be returning from Verge. Is it true?"

Sunny looked at him, frowning a little. Then, he looked away and sighed.

"Sure. We aren't planning to die, mind you. It's just that we are Outsiders. Once the Defilement is destroyed, it's back to the Outside for us."

Cronos seemed saddened by that response. He stared at the water dejectedly.

"What is it like, really? The world outside Ariel's Tomb? What are you going to do after leaving here?"

Sunny blinked a couple of times.

Indeed, what would he do after leaving the Nightmare? He had no idea. It was hard to tell, considering that the state of Antarctica — and the waking world in general — was entirely unknown.

The war between Valor and Song would probably grow more intense. The Nightmare Gates would continue to pop into existence, slowly consuming the waking world and making it a part of the Dream Realm. No matter how much Sunny wanted to simply live a good life, he knew that these events would not let him remain a bystander.

After a few moments of silence, he shrugged.

"Well, it's more or less the same. There is no Defilement, but there is still Corruption. Nightmare Creatures are running around devouring people, so Awakened like me need to keep them in check. So I'll probably be battling some hideous abomination every other day, cursing loudly. That's life for you. The secret to a happy life, though, is to do all these things in good company. Oh... and in a place with good plumbing."

He glanced at the teenager and smiled.

"Why? What are you going to do after we get rid of the Defilement? Are you really going to the House of Youth?"

Cronos laughed awkwardly.

"Well... I will, eventually. But probably not just yet."

He looked into the distance, at the bustling streets of Fallen Grace, and sighed.

"In truth, I've been sensing my soul essence recently, a bit. So I'll probably work on forming a soul core and becoming an Awakened. Even if you and the other lords and ladies defeat the First Seeker and vanquish the Defilement, there will still be corrupted creatures left, threatening our city. Someone has to defend it after you leave."

Cronos smiled.

"Plus, I've always been interested in how the city works. All these people, all these moving parts... it's a bit of a miracle that a place like Fallen Grace can exist, don't you think? Lady Dusk has always been taking care of us. What are we going to do without her?"

His eyes turned cloudy for a moment, but then shone brightly once again. Wiping them, he smiled again.

"I want to make sure that Fallen Grace continues to exist... and thrive, just like she told us to. For myself, my wife, and our future children. Ah, but I'm just some brat. So, I figured I should become really strong first. Like you, Lord Sunless! So that people had no choice but to listen to what I had to say."

Sunny looked at him incredulously.

Cronos was, indeed, just some brat. But all great people whose deeds shaped history had been brats, once. Would this kid become a great leader, one day? Would his actions shape the future of Fallen Grace, and create a world where his children could grow up safe and happy? Would the stories of his deeds become legends, one day?

Or would he disappear without a trace once the Nightmare was complete? Sunny forced himself to smile.

"Strong like me? Brat, do you think people actually listen to what I have to say? Stronger! Become much stronger than me. Then, they'll listen."

With that, he patted the teenager on the shoulder and rose to his feet.

The charm Memory waited to be altered. The day of their departure from Fallen Grace was drawing near.

"Stronger than you, my lord? B—but... no, that's just unreasonable!"

Sunny looked at the startled youth with a smile, then shook his head and headed away.

"Then be unreasonable!"

Imparting Cronos with that piece of questionable wisdom, he returned to the temple and spent a few sleepless hours going over his plans for altering the Transcendent charm. He felt that he had already accounted for everything that could go wrong... so he would probably be ready to start the process once his essence was replenished by the Crown of Twilight.

Just when the night fell, however, something distracted him from the preparations.

After wasting its time for months, the shadow that had been following Cassie finally noticed something strange about her movements.