1550 Change of Plans

Nephis had offered a good plan, one that was both solid and flexible enough to hopefully keep all of them alive while accomplishing the goal. Each member was assigned a role that suited the situation best, making all three teams highly mobile and capable of defending themselves in case there was an ambush.

Cassie, meanwhile, was the least suitable for swift movement and stealth, while at the same time being the most familiar with steering the Chain Breaker — so, she was the best candidate for staying on the ship.

And that was precisely what Sunny did not like, even if he chose not to share his reasoning.

By now, he was thoroughly confused about what he felt toward Cassie. Was he suspicious of her? Or concerned for her? Or simply acting paranoid, his thoughts muddied by the Sin of Solace? He did not know, but he did know that as soon as she spoke, his intuition raised an alarm.

The blind girl did not directly volunteer herself to remain alone on the Chain Breaker, but she did not need to. As soon as they had decided to leave someone behind, she was the obvious choice. Instead of telling Nephis to choose her, Cassie could simply let her come to the conclusion without anyone's help.

...And while Sunny was not sure about the reason for his anxiety, he was absolutely certain that Cassie had engineered this situation on purpose. For some reason, she wanted to send the cohort off and stay on the Chain Breaker alone.

Why? Was it to lure them into a trap?

Of course, no. Sunny had already established that suspecting the blind girl in wishing to harm the cohort was preposterous.

However... he could easily imagine her going on some stupid, self-sacrificial quest by piloting the flying ship into the heart of Verge and dropping it on the First Seeker. Or maybe drawing Torment away from the city at the cost of her life, to let the cohort win.

Which was not to say that his imagination reflected reality. There can be any number of explanations for Cassie's subtle manipulation, from completely innocent to absolutely ominous.

In any case, he did not like it.

Which was why, after Nephis explained the plan, Sunny shook his head.

"I disagree. The members of the three teams will be able to cover each other, true... but what about the person staying on the ship? Once we travel far inland, they'll be completely alone. If something happens, not only will Cassie be in danger, but we also risk losing the ship and becoming stranded with no way to retreat."

Nephis looked at him and frowned slightly. There was a silent question in her eyes, but Sunny pretended not to see it.

Eventually, she nodded:

"That... is a valid concern. Do you have a suggestion?" Sunny shrugged.

"Yeah. I think I should stay on the ship with her. My Aspect is the most versatile, so I'll be able to deal with all kinds of situations. That would leave you without a partner, though, so the number of teams should be reduced from three to two — one team consisting of you and Mordret, the other of Effie, Jet, and Kai."

He smiled.

"Mordret can use his Ascended Ability to transport both of you, while Kai can carry both Jet and Effie in the Beast Locket. Therefore... everyone will be much safer."

Not to mention that Mordret would not be able to pull any tricks under Neph's nose, considering she was more or less immune to his Awakened Ability.

Nephis stared at Sunny for a bit, a subtle hint of confusion hiding in her eyes. His suggestion was not unreasonable, though, so she nodded eventually.

"Alright. Let us proceed with that team composition, then."

There was no time to waste and no need to say anything else, so everyone immediately started preparing for the mission. Effie brought up the straw basket Sunny had masterfully weaved for her, cushioning it with a blanket.

That basket was meant to be the infant's crib. Safely wrapped, the baby was going to spend the next few days on the idyllic and perfectly safe

meadow inside Effie's Supreme Memory, sleeping and being visited by his mom, or other members of the cohort, every few hours... until the final battle.

That was a hell of a way to spend the first days of one's life, but such an arrangement was the best one they had been able to come up with.

Eventually, the five members of the cohort whose task it was to scout the frozen landmass were ready to depart. Sunny watched them from the bow of the ship, not feeling the need to say or feel something poignant.

This was not a farewell, anyway. One way or the other, they were going to see each other tomorrow — either when the scouts returned, or when things went south and the Chain Breaker flew forward to rescue them.

The ship approached the shore of the frozen island and came to a halt, hovering just above the water.

Five figures jumped from it, landing on the ice.

Nephis was first, wearing the Starlight Legion Armor and wielding the somber silver blade — a unique hybrid Memory of both the Transcendent and Supreme Ranks, the result of the most complex and intricate sorcery Sunny had woven to date. The Crown of Dawn, which had survived the annihilating conflagration in Twilight, was resting on her head, empowering all other Memories around her.

Kai simply glided to the shore. He was clad in the Supreme armor crafted from the ivory dragon scales, wielding a Transcendent bow of the Fifth Tier. Another Supreme Memory, a lethal Severing Arrow, was ready to be summoned the moment he had need of it. The cohort's resident Dragonslayer was as deadly as one could be.

Effie made a bit of noise when she landed on the ice, enveloped by her own Supreme armor — the legacy of the Sun Prince, which made her look like a beautiful statue of polished steel. Incredibly, she seemed to have mostly recovered from bearing a child, already. Even if there was some remnant malady holding her back, she did not show it. Flashing a defiant smile, the huntress summoned her spear and walked forward.

Jet was right behind her, looking like she was born to exist in this land of ice. Chilling mist swirled around her, pierced by the somber glow of her cold blue eyes. Then, the mist flowed into her hands and took the shape of a sinister war scythe, its blade glinting eerily as it seemed to cut the rays of sunlight.

Finally, there was Mordret, wearing his own Ascended body. The Prince of Nothing did not have particularly powerful Memories, or insidiously lethal Reflections to fight for him. However, he was perhaps the most dangerous of them all.

An easy smile played on Mordret's lips as he followed Nephis. The enemies of the five Masters could only lament their fate.

The five of them separated into two groups and moved stealthily across the desolate landscape, soon disappearing from view.

...Leaving Sunny and Cassie alone aboard the Chain Breaker.