1551 Left Behind

The five members of the cohort were gone, off to scout the approach to Verge. Sunny felt uneasy and worried about their safety, but not tremendously so. Each of them was a powerhouse in their own right, and possessed a wealth of experience when it came to moving stealthily through a region infested with Nightmare Creatures.

Nephis, Kai, and Effie were veterans of the Forgotten Shore, where humans had been at the very bottom of the food chain. Effie, who had hunted in the Dark City alone for many years, was especially proficient in navigating dangerous terrain without alerting anyone or anything of her presence.

Jet had already been a frightening existence before the Southern Campaign, and grew only more tenacious after going through the disastrous months in the Antarctic Center, followed by serving in the military reconnaissance in East Antarctica.

Mordret was by far the most slippery of the five, so even if Sunny was inclined to care about his well-being, the bastard was the last person in the Tomb of Ariel he would be worried about.

So, the scouts were more than capable of fulfilling their mission unscathed.

If anything, Sunny was more concerned about himself and Cassie. The restlessness he had felt for the past few months reached an apex, telling him that something was about to happen.

The Sin of Solace was not shy about voicing his opinion, either:

"You've done it now, fool. What madness made you think that staying here alone with her was a good idea? It wasn't me, that's for sure. Now, you are completely defenseless against whatever new betrayal she had in mind, with no one to cover your back."

Sunny looked at him somberly, then turned away.

Saint, Fiend, and Nightmare were still aboard the Chain Breaker. So, the loathsome wraith was wrong — there was someone to cover his back. There were plenty.

'No, that's wrong...'

Why would he even need that? Cassie was not going to betray the cohort. That was just his paranoia talking.

Sunny frowned, realizing that this state of his was a bit concerning. He had grown so used to the Sin of Solace that listening to the apparition's poison was already a habit. It had failed to drive him insane due to Sunny's robust mental defenses... but maybe the sinister whispers of the cursed sword were having some effect on him, after all.

Then again, maybe it was simply the result of the incredible mental strain he had been exposed to in the Tomb of Ariel.

'Is that how the Mad Prince started to slip, as well?'

Feeling grim, Sunny filtered out the incessant whispers of the sword wraith and went about his business.

Cassie softly landed the Chain Breaker on the water and brought it close to the shore of the ice land, hiding it in the shadow of a tall rock mound. Sunny moored the ship, making sure that the ropes could be cut at a moment's notice.

Then, there was nothing for them to do but wait and remain on guard.

While Sunny was consumed by alarm and doubt, Cassie seemed perfectly at ease. If she had been surprised by his sudden decision to stay back —which, in all honesty, went against how he would usually act — she did not show it. The blind girl remained at the stern of the ship, ready to activate the runic circle and send the Chain Breaker into the air the moment there was danger.

Sunny, meanwhile, was in charge of watching out for said danger. One of his shadows continued to keep an eye on Cassie, while the other five spread out to have a better view of the environment. He commanded Saint and Fiend to remain on the ship and sent Nightmare to hide in the shadows on top of the mound they were moored to.

Hours passed in tense silence, with nothing happening.

...It was strange, really.

Torment had been like a scarecrow in Sunny's mind. He had enjoyed the benefit of having Cassie around for long enough to know how potent and miraculous, albeit not applicable in a direct confrontation for the most part, her powers were. So, he was understandably wary of the Defiled version of the blind seer, not to mention if that Defiled was a Saint.

What was Torment's Transformation Ability? How had her other Abilities grown, and what was she capable of?

There were no answers, which only made Sunny feel more nervous. If there was one thing he did know, however, it was that the Last Plague would be attuned to fate and revelations to an incredible degree. Which meant that she would have means of knowing when she was in danger.

The arrival of the cohort was definitely a dire danger. They had already exterminated the other Plagues, after all. So, Sunny had been fully prepared to fight their way to Verge through a sea of abominations.

However, there had been no one waiting for them when they descended from the black void. There was no one laying in ambush at the shores of the frozen landmass, either. Even now, when the members of the cohort had split up into three teams, nothing appeared to attack them while they were separated from each other.

Why was that?

Was Torment, perhaps, unable to receive any visions of fate in the Tomb of Ariel, just like Cassie was unable to see anything except darkness in hers?

That would certainly make things easier.

If Cassie was really unable to see the future...

Was Torment's strange passivity the result of the Mad Prince's schemes?

Sunny was full of alarm and ready for something perilous to happen, but nothing was happening. That only added to his frustration.

Cassie remained on the stern, acting like nothing out of the ordinary was happening.

Hours slowly passed, and then, the night came. The seven suns drowned in the water, and the Great River ignited with a soft, iridescent glow. Even the massive plain of ice shone dimly, illuminating itself with a pale, ghostly radiance. Bathed in that radiance, pillars of black stone were like a forest of colossal, dead trees.

Sunny remained on the deck for a while, looking in the direction of Verge and wondering how the members of the cohort were doing. After a while, he went to the stern and spoke with Cassie about taking turns guarding the ship.

"My shadows will wake me up instantly if something happens. So... if there's danger, just keep yourself alive for a few seconds. I'll be there before you know it."

The blind girl nodded seriously.

"Of course. Go, and try to rest well. There probably won't be a chance to do so after the scouts return."

Sunny hesitated for a bit, then descended below deck and entered his cabin. Laying down on his cot, he closed his eyes and relaxed his body. He also controlled his heartbeat and breathing, making them as calm and natural as he could.

Pretending to be asleep.

But, of course, Sunny was not asleep. Instead, he was observing Cassie.

If she really intended to do something in secret, and his decision to stay behind put a wrench in her plans, now would be the perfect moment for her to act.

And, indeed, after some time passed... Cassie did.