1552 Lifeboat

'What is she doing?'

Laying in the darkness while pretending to sleep, Sunny suppressed the desire to frown. Cassie had left the runic circle, picked up the Guiding Light, and slowly walked across the deck. As she did, a hurricane of white sparks rose around her, slowly forming into a humanoid figure.

It was the echo of the Defiled sybil she had received in Fallen Grace. The eerie thing had survived Twilight, although just barely. Now, her wounds were healed. Even her flowing red dress mended itself, as did her veil. The Echo followed the blind seer, the hem of her red garment hovering a couple centimeters above the ancient wood.

Just like always, her movements were too smooth to be the result of walking. Sunny had seen what was hiding behind that dress once, and he never wanted to see it again.

Nevertheless, he continued watching.

By then, Cassie had passed the sacred tree and was most of the way to the bow of the ship, near Ananke's ketch. She did not, however, proceed any further. Stopping near the ketch, she silently gave a command to her Echo.

Soon, the boat was lowered into the water. The masts were affixed in their grooves, and the sails were raised. Gliding down with the help of the Quiet Dancer, Cassie took a seat at the helmsman's bench and summoned a different Memory.

It was a wooden staff she had used on the Forgotten Shore — one of the three Memories from her First Nightmare. The Endless Spring was now with Sunny, the Evertwine was with Nephis, and only the staff remained in Cassie's own soul arsenal.

Its enchantment was capable of summoning wind.

Aiming the staff at the sails of the ketch, Cassie activated the enchantment and sent the boat moving away from the Chain Breaker.

Sunny's shadow, of course, was already hiding under one of the masts. Back in his cabin, Sunny continued to pretend to be asleep.

The night was silent, with only the sound of waves breaking against the hull of the Chain Breaker disturbing the quiet. The water glowed softly, and bathed in that glow, Ananke's ketch was slowly traveling along the shore of the frozen land.

'...Goddammit.'

Although Sunny was more or less certain that Cassie was hiding something, he had hoped to be proven wrong until the very last moment.

However, he had been right all along.

"You mean I was right."

The grating voice of the Sin of Solace sounded like thunder in the silence. Sunny refused to react, knowing that Cassie was most likely perceiving the world through his senses. As long as he kept his eyes closed and controlled his breathing and heartbeat, though, she had no way of knowing that he was awake.

Because she could only share the senses of those marked by her Ability, not read their thoughts.

"That's the question though, is it?"

The sword wraith laughed.

"Am I just a figment of your imagination, or am I more real than you give me credit for? If it's the former, then I am merely a thought construct, and Cassie has no way of knowing of my presence. She said so herself, back on Aletheia's Island. But... can anything she said be trusted? Because if she does hear me, then your little performance was just rendered useless. Oh... sorry."

Sitting in the ketch, Cassie showed no sign of having heard what the Sin of Solace said. And yet... by now, Sunny knew that she was a remarkable actress. Her effortless switch between her usual unassuming persona and the magnetic image of Dusk was proof.

Could Cassie perceive the Sin of Solace, or not?

If not... then how had she become aware of the time loop on Aletheia's island?

What was she trying to accomplish right now?

He forced himself to remain motionless, continuing to observe her.

'I'll wait until she is about to exit the range of Shadow Control before taking action.'

Sunny could control his shadows from a vast distance. It was also the maximum distance to which he could travel via Shadow Step. So, as long as Cassie remained within that range, he would be able to appear next to her in an instant.

And by remaining passive, he would hopefully learn what secret Cassie was keeping, and what she was planning. Knowing that, he would be able to decide what to do.

If she was going to leave the range at which he could reach her, though... then all bets were off.

Sunny was not about to let Cassie put herself in danger, and just on the off chance that what she wanted to do could put the rest of the cohort in harm's way, he had to intervene as well.

He had remained silent and tolerant of her for long enough. Today, on the eve of the decisive battle of this dreadful Nightmare, the truth would come out... one way or another.

The ketch continued to sail along the shore of the icy island, surrounded by the beautifully glowing water. Up above, the night sky was impenetrably dark, hiding a numerous legions of slumbering horrors. Somewhere, not too far away, the abominable remains of Aletheia of the Nine were sprawling through the city of Verge, waiting to be destroyed by the challengers of the Tomb of Ariel...

Or infect their souls and bodies with seeds of Corruption, making them a part of her Defiled legion.

Cassie sailed further and further away from the Chain Breaker, making Sunny feel grave. The Sin of Solace continued to whisper into his ear, spouting all kinds of vile accusations.

Finally, to Sunny's indignation, he felt the sailboat was getting too far away. If he lingered any longer, the ketch would slip from his reach, cutting his connection to the shadow.

So, taking a deep sigh, Sunny opened his eyes and dissolved into shadows.

A moment later, he stepped out of them inside the ketch, standing a few meters away from Cassie. She was sitting on the helmsman's bench, accompanied by her Echo. Her face was illuminated by the soft radiance of the Guiding Light and the pale glow of the iridescent water.

Sunny's face, meanwhile, was drowning in shadows.

Letting out a sigh, Sunny looked at the blind girl and asked, his voice neutral:

"...Where are you going?"