1558 First Thread

Sunny stared at Cassie, struggling to believe how deep the roots of her mysterious scheme went. He noted recently that the blind girl's personality changed drastically after the cruel words he had thrown at her at the underground level of the Academy's medical complex, right after the Forgotten Shore.

That was when she had begun to weave her spiderweb, most likely.

Looking at the young woman sitting across from him, meeting his gaze with dark and defiant pride, he felt a chill running down his spine.

'...Which one of us is worthy of being called the heir of Weaver, even?'

Cassie had just as high of an affinity to fate as him, after all, if not higher.

He took a deep breath, feeling stifled.

"Yes... it was back then. Looking back, it didn't make a lot of sense, did it? You had just been burned by blindly believing a vision of yours, to catastrophic results. And yet, you seemed to not question the validity of us dying come winter, even though that vision of yours could only be called vague, at best."

Cassie had seen the two of them falling into a bottomless abyss, surrounded by snow. She told Sunny that they would die in the winter... but, in the end, the events of that vision happened in November, when the Night Temple was destroyed in a terrible battle between Sky Tide and Saint Cormac.

"You already knew that it did not mean our deaths. And yet, you made me think otherwise. But... why?"

Cassie remained silent, but Sunny's eyes widened, a flash of frightening understanding illuminating his restless mind.

"It... it was because I was planning to challenge the Second Nightmare in the winter. But you needed me to move the plan forward, and aim to reach the Seed in the Ivory Tower by the end of autumn. What changed because I listened to your vision and adjusted the timing of the expedition?"

A dark, dangerous light ignited in the depths of his eyes. Sunny gasped.

"Because Saint Cormac... was away from the Night Temple until the end of autumn. Which meant that he wouldn't have been able to stop Mordret from escaping his cage!"

Cassie shifted slightly, continued to face him without saying anything. But she did not need to... once Sunny pulled on the thread, the tangled web of her hidden actions started to unravel itself. All he needed to do to understand all of it — or at least most of it — was to continue pulling.

Remembering the horrid agony the two of them endured in the Night Temple, side by side, Sunny shuddered and felt rage fuel his veins.

"You... knew about Mordret all along. You must have learned of his existence before he even learned of yours, when you were anchored at the Night Temple — even though neither you nor your cohort were allowed to enter the inner parts of the Citadel. Later, you left for the Sanctuary and then went on an expedition to reclaim a sapling of the sacred tree... knowing that I would come to you, and carry the mirror shard that would allow that bastard to escape to the doorstep of his jail."

Sunny and Cassie had come very close to dying in the cage of the Valor's secretive Citadel. Knowing that she had expected the mad prince of the great clan to escape, and for them to be embroiled in the horror that followed his release, made it all seem even more disturbing.

Sunny remained silent for a few moments, stunned by the ruthlessness with which Cassie had treated herself. By then, he had already been an Awakened Monster, and armed with the power of his Divine Aspect, he had a much easier time surviving the imprisonment in the Night Temple.

She, however, did not possess multiple soul cores or an Aspect that could augment her endurance and resilience, so Cassie had suffered much more in that cage.

Shaking his head in stunned silence, he said quietly:

"You wanted Mordret to escape... why did you want him to be free?"

There were all kinds of answers to this question. The most obvious one was that Cassie had needed the cohort to enter the Second Nightmare sooner rather than later, and do it in the company of the Prince of Nothing, as well. The very fact of his escape had put a crack in the potential relationship Sunny could have had with the great clan Valor... putting him in conflict with them at the moment when Nephis returned to the waking world.

Which, in turn, pushed her into accepting their terms and becoming an adopted daughter of Valor.

There were numerous other consequences of that single event Cassie had helped happen, spreading outward into the future. Mordret was a singular existence, so the fact that he was free to roam the two worlds had changed too much, from the events of the Second Nightmare to the conclusion of the war the great clans had waged in Antarctica.

Which of these events had been planned by Cassie? Which had been mere coincidences? Which were coincidences that she had nimbly incorporated into her grand design, adapting to the changing circumstances with stunning speed?

Just like she had perceived and calculated numerous futures with incredible speed while fighting the Defiled sybil in the drowned temple.

It was impossible to tell.

Cassie's design was a bit like the tapestry of fate, which she claimed to wish to destroy. The details could change or be influenced by unforeseen circumstances, but these sudden twists were only minor disturbances in the flow she willed into existence. The currents changed, but the direction of the tide always remained the same, pulling everything it touched to an unchanging conclusion.

All Sunny could do was determine the points in time when Cassie had

influenced the events openly, and try to gleam her purpose from that.

He rose from his sit and walked to the bow of the ketch, unable to remain in place. His mind was too tumultuous for that.

'Incredible...'