1569 Cracking Mirror

'Ah... I am... starting to rethink the value of curiosity...'

Even subjected to the horror of the knowledge of the Void, which could quite literally turn Sunny into a Nightmare Creature, he still felt a strange impulse to open his eyes and try to glean the secrets left in the Estuary by the Demon of Dread.

It was such a tantalizing mystery, after all. The Void, the ineffable beings that dwelled in it, and how the gods were born from them... only to wage war on the very existence that had given shape to their divinity.

It was a bit like the compulsion to jump that some people felt while standing near the edge of a tall cliff.

Of course, taking that leap would mean the death of them. And opening his eyes would mean the end of Sunny.

So, he kept them shut and kept walking.

At first, each step felt as if he was trying to move a mountain. But slowly, torturously, he grew accustomed to the suffocating pressure of the ghastly runes. Not to the point of being comfortable around them, but at least enough so to increase his pace.

The reason he could make even a single step, though, was the Mirror of Truth — and the reflection of Nephis caught in it.

Without borrowing her [Longing] Ability, Sunny would have collapsed to the ground the moment the runes surrounded him, turning into a pile of... something. Tentacles, maybe, or bone blades.

Then again, the Mad Prince had looked pretty human-like. So, perhaps, he would have retained his general appearance, with only his soul becoming consumed by Corruption.

That would have made Sunny a Fallen Terror, which was the same Rank and Class that the Crimson Terror of the Forgotten Shore had possessed. The comparison made him feel not exactly nostalgic, but definitely contemplative.

'Things have changed a lot, haven't they?'

Distracting himself from the horror that surrounded him, Sunny continued to walk forward. Dread, absolute dread... what else had he expected to find in the heart of the Tomb of Ariel?

And it was not even the real thing. Sunny shuddered to imagine how much more harrowing the true Estuary was. What madman would want to try entering its dreadful halls?

And, somehow... the key to his freedom was still waiting for him, somewhere ahead. What could grant him freedom in this godforsaken place?

Sunny did not know, but he was determined to grasp it with both hands.

The Sin of Solace kept quiet, and so did he. Time passed agonizingly slowly but also inconceivably fast... in fact, Sunny had lost all sense of the passage time the moment he entered the Source, so he had no idea how much of it was flowing by.

Nephis was somewhere out there, either preparing to fight or already fighting the hordes of the Defiled abominations.

'Faster... I have to walk faster.'

Gritting his teeth, Sunny did just that.

Nothing changed for a while, with his mind still being ravaged by the presence of the revolting runes. But then... a subtle sound reached his ears.

It was the tranquil murmur of water licking a stone shore.

Feeling a spark of hope ignite in his heart, Sunny touched the surface of the Mirror of Truth, feeling cold sweat rolling down his back when he realized that it was almost entirely covered by cracks, now.

The miraculous Memory was going to shatter very soon. But he was still so far away...

Sunny could not risk separating his shadows from himself, or turning into a swift shadow and gliding forward — the last thing he wanted was to expose his soul to more pain. Feinting in convulsions would be the end of him, so he simply took a deep breath and forced his dazed body into a run, instead.

The Mirror of Truth kept cracking beneath his fingers.

And then, those cracks connected together, producing a quiet, but deafening sound. The miraculous mirror shattered and fell apart, the sharp shards dissipating into a whirlwind of sparks.

He heard the Spell whisper:

[Your Memory has been destroyed.]

At the same time, Sunny put his foot forward and felt emptiness beneath it. Losing his balance, he fell down and rolled on sharp rocks, quickly becoming covered in bruises.

Thankfully... a few moments later, the pressure of the ghastly runes dissipated, and he was able to take a deep breath.

Sliding down a sharp stone slope felt infinitely less torturous than being surrounded by the horrid writing of Ariel, the Demon of Dread.

Nevertheless, Sunny lingered for a few more seconds before opening his eyes.

His body had indeed rolled down another steep slope, this one leading to a vast and calm lake... or maybe a sea, or an ocean. Sunny could not see the end of it, so he did not know its size. All he knew was that the water was shrouded in darkness and tranquil, reminding him of the peaceful lightlessness of his own soul.

Behind him, the entrance to the tunnel towered like an infinite vertical wound in the mass of black stone. The ceiling of the colossal cavern he had found himself in could not be seen, if there even was one.

Taking a deep breath, Sunny stared at the tranquil lake of dark water with a resentful expression.

'Water... gods, why does it have to be water again?'

Sunny had never encountered a deep body of water that did not hide some terrifying abomination.

Hopefully... this time would be different.

He thought that, but still decided against diving into the lake. Instead, he used the Crown of Twilight, and stepped on the surface of the water instead, walking across it as if it was solid ground.

The surface of the water supported him, barely wetting his dainty silk shoes. Sunny had already experienced walking on water, running on water, and even fighting on water... so, this was nothing new to him.

Nevertheless, the quiet lake that was hidden deep within the heart of the Tomb of Ariel, at the Estuary of the Great River, made a sense of wonder bloom in his heart.

'Can this, perhaps... be the Well of Wishes?'