1580 What You Wished For

'Gods... oh gods...'

The pain... was exquisite. It was inconceivable.

It was the kind of pain that could kill a person, or at least make the pass out in an instant. Sadly, the latter did not happen, because the pain was not physical.

Instead, its source was Sunny's soul, which was being altered and transformed.

Not in a way it had been changed every time a new core was formed, but rather in a way his blood and bones had been altered in the past.

"Aaargh!"

Sunny hit the lid of the sarcophagus with enough force to split his skin and fell to the ground, the carpet of leaves softening his fall.

'Wh—what... what the hell?! How... is... this possible?!'

He knew what was happening to him. However, he had no idea why it was happening, and how eating the golden fruit from the tree growing above the grave of Oblivion had caused it.

In any case, Sunny had no choice but to endure.

He wasn't shy about screaming and howling in pain, though, especially because there was no one here to witness his sorry state.

"D—damn it! Damn it! D...damn it all!"

After an eternity — this time, quite a literal one, considering that time did not exist in the Estuary — Sunny found himself laying on the ground, staring blindly at the beautiful crown of the mystical tree. His body felt weak, and his face was wet with tears.

'...Curses.'

That one was definitely going into the collection of the most horrendous agonies he had experienced. What place? Probably not the first, which was still held by activating the [Where is my eye?] enchantment of Weaver's Mask. But it was a confident second.

Sunny groaned, and then shakily rose to his feet. Then, he took inventory of his soul.

It felt... different, somehow. And much, much more potent. Already knowing what he would see, Sunny summoned the runes.

'It can't be... can it?'

But it could.

There, in the shimmering field of runes, a new string appeared in the list of his Attributes.

Pale as a ghost, Sunny read:

Attributes: [Fated], [Flame of Divinity], [Master of Shadows], [Blood Weave], [Bone Weave], [Marble Shell]...

And at the very end, a new one:

[...Soul Weave.]

He sucked in air, stunned.

'How the hell...'

Concentrating on the new string, he read the description:

Attribute Description: [You have inherited a part of Weaver's forbidden lineage. Your soul has been altered and imbued with stalwart potency.

A lonely demon shed tears standing above a forgotten grave. A tree grew from the ground where the demon's tears fell, and from it grew a wondrous fruit.]

Sunny stared at the runes for a while, then dismissed them and concentrated on his soul.

It felt... reinforced, somehow.

His essence felt much more potent, and the rate at which it replenished itself was much faster. The soul itself seemed more robust and durable, capable of withstanding a terrible amount of damage and maintaining its integrity even if large swathes of it were entirely destroyed.

Briefly diving into the soul sea, Sunny glanced at his six lightless cores. They did not look very different, at the surface, apart from the fact that the dark flames burning within them seemed even darker now, and more fierce.

However, once he peered into the depths of his cores... was he seeing things, or had he glimpsed a weave of ethereal golden strings creating a graceful pattern within the six black suns?

Sunny left the Soul Sea, both elated and perplexed.

'So... I inherited another part of Weaver's lineage. Soul Weave. That's great.'

It was, indeed, a remarkable boon.

'...But what the hell was it doing here?'

It was already shocking enough to find Oblivion's grave. But why was a fragment of Weaver's lineage left there? If anything, it should have been Oblivion's lineage... apart from the fact that no daemon except for the Demon of Fate had created one.

It was as though Weaver lost a part of his... her?... soul at the grave of Oblivion, for some reason. But why?

How had the two of them been connected?

And did it have something to do with the strange incongruity in the number of daemons that had participated in the Doom War?

Sunny did not know.

But all of it... was highly suspicious.

And it wasn't even the most pressing question.

'Yes, it's great that my soul has grown stronger...'

But where was his promised freedom? How was Soul Weave supposed to break the shackles of fate?

Sunny pursed his lips, unsure of what exactly was happening. Had Cassie been wrong? Had she...

But then, something distracted him from these thoughts.

From the corner of his eye, Sunny noticed an ominous detail. Looking down, he stared at the Guiding Light, which had rolled away from him when he fell down, and was now laying to the side of the stone sarcophagus.

The crystal at the top of the sacred staff was still shining. However, it wasn't pointing at the sarcophagus.

Instead, it was pointing into the darkness behind it.

Sunny slowly looked up... at that moment, it felt as though a ripple spread through the world. His surroundings suddenly felt less substantial, as if reality itself was slowly dissipating.

His eyes widened.

'The Nightmare... it's starting to collapse!'

Somewhere far away, Nephis must have delivered a fatal blow to the First Seeker.

But Sunny could not concentrate on that thought for too long. Because just then, he noticed something moving in the darkness.

A hunched, towering shape that filled him with indescribable horror.

'H—how did I not notice... before...'

A giant creature had been hiding in the darkness of the vast cavern, hidden completely from his sight, his nose, and even his shadow sense, despite being the size of a hill. It had a hunched back, a disheveled mantle of messy black feathers, a terrifying beak, and mighty wings that were vast even when folded, hiding its gaunt body.

And a vile soul filled with more Corruption than he had ever seen, spreading outward from six grotesquely giant nodes.

'A... a Cursed Terror...'

Horrified, Sunny took an involuntary step back.

And just as he did, a pair of round, utterly insane eyes pierced him with a demented look.

A terrible pressure crashed into him, making it hard to breathe.

The Cursed Terror that had been hiding behind Oblivion's grave... was a giant, mad, and unmistakably vile bird.

'D—damnation!'

Sunny took a step back, but at the moment, the vile bird lunged forward, its demented eyes igniting with avarice and greed.

Before he could even react, he was drowned by its loathsome shadow. And then, its talons plunged into his chest.

Sunny gasped.

However, the talons did not rip his flesh apart. Instead, they dove much deeper, finding their way into his very soul.

If he had time to enter the Soul Sea at that moment, he would have seen the shapeless form of the Vile Thieving Bird's Spawn being snatched by the crooked talons.

And yet, they did not stop there.

Passing through Sunny's soul, the talons dug even deeper, into the depths of his being he had not even known existed.

And there, they grabbed onto something else.

Onto countless strings that were wrapped around him tightly, surrounding him like a chrysalis.

Or like the strings that held up a marionette.

Straining itself, the vile bird struggled for a few moments... and snatched those strings, too, somehow ripping them away from his existence.

Sunny opened his mouth, trying to scream, but no sound came out of his mouth.

There was another sound, though.

The voice of the Spell, whispering into his ear as the Nightmare collapsed around him:

[Your nightmare is... your... you nightmare is... is...]

It never finished speaking. Instead, the familiar voice broke and abruptly grew quiet, leaving him in utter, lonely, and terrifying silence.

'What... the hell... is h—happening?!'

And then, everything disappeared.

The heart of the Estuary was gone. The beautiful tree and the sarcophagus resting beneath its branches were gone, too.

The harrowing bird plunging its talons into his chest was nowhere to be seen.

Sunny found himself in utter darkness.

...And then, he was expelled from that darkness.