1639 Beautiful Mirage

The full moon came faster than Sunny had expected. His life in Bastion had been peaceful in the meantime - the Brilliant Emporium Café enjoyed a steady stream of guests, while the Memory Boutique continued to stagnate with no customers. Sunny attended to the kitchen and minded his business.

He was supposed to make a trip to the waking world to stock up on ingredients, but postponed it for now - partially out of laziness, and partially because there was a lot on his place.

His life in Godgrave, meanwhile, had undergone an earth-shattering transformation. Nephis was there, and so, he had no time for boredom.

But that was the third avatar's problem.

On the day of the full moon, Sunny let Aiko go home a bit earlier and closed the Brilliant Emporium. Then, he walked through the crowded streets of Bastion and bought a ticket to a theater play. A troupe of Awakened actors was performing a rendition of A Song of Light and Darkness... sadly, Sunny only noticed the name of the play after being seated in the parterre.

He covered his face with a palm and winced as if suffering from a toothache, but remained in his seat, Soon, excited members of the audience surrounded him from all sides. The lights were dimmed, the curtain was lifted, and the play began...

No one noticed that a pale young man sitting in one of the first rows did not seem to have a shadow.

At the same time, a different incarnation of Sunny was hiding in the darkness near the shore of the lake. It was already dark, and the pale moon was traveling across the starlit sky. The sight of it-the moon, the velvet sky, the silhouette of the magnificent castle, and the vast lake - was beautiful beyond words.

In fact, it seemed as if there were two moons, one lost in the distant heavens, the other drowning in the silent water.

Making sure that no one was nearby, Sunny rose from the shadows and walked toward the shore.

The incarnation in the theater was wearing the Nebulous Mantle, so he was only dressed in a mundane military bodysuit. The Quintessence Pearl was already summoned, resting in his mouth.

He did not waste any time and dove into the water without making a splash.

The lake took him into its cold embrace.

Sunny allowed his body to become as heavy as a stone, sinking to the bottom. Once there, he extended his senses, turned into a shadow, and glided down a steep slope.

The lake surrounding Bastion did not seem special from the shore, but it was immensely deep. By the time the slope lost most of its steepness, Sunny was already several kilometers below the surface. A mundane human would not have been able to withstand the pressure of the mass of water, but it was easy for someone like him, especially because he remained Incorporeal.

The easy part stopped there, though. Because these waters were not safe.

There were Echoes of powerful Nightmare Creatures patrolling the lake. As if that was not enough, there were also swords thrust into mud here and there - each of them serving as the eyes and ears of the master of this land... Supreme Anvil of Valor, the King of Swords.

Reaching the castle unnoticed was nearly impossible.

However, Sunny had not wasted the last year in vain. He had thoroughly explored the lake, studying its guardians and mapping out the locations of Anvil's swords. By now, he was confident in his ability to reach the castle unnoticed.

The castle was not his target, anyway.

Instead, it was the reflection of the moon traveling across the surface of the lake.

He hid in the shadows and waited for a vast creature that looked like a giant silver eel to swim past him, then cautiously advanced forward. Changing direction, Sunny moved like a thief, effortlessly avoiding every security measure placed at the bottom of the lake by Clan Valor.

By the time he reached the midpoint between the shore and the castle, the play his avatar was watching reached Intermission. The other Sunny rose from his seat and went to the theater's cafe, making sure to be seen by as many people as possible. Of course, he kept to the dark corners to make the absence of his shadow hidden.

The original Sunny hid at the bottom of the lake without moving. Preceding further would be... problematic. So, he was letting the reflection of the moon come to him instead.

He was sure that someone like Beth would have been infuriated by such a statement, considering that, scientifically speaking, the position of the moon's reflection was supposed to depend on the perspective of the observer. But not of this moon, in this lake, and on this night.

When it was time, Sunny made himself as light as a feather, assumed his human form, pushed off the bottom of the lake, and swam up. The timing was calculated to a split second - the Echoes patrolling the lake were far away, and no one would be able to notice his swift rise.

As the pressure of the water lessened, the darkness surrounding him grew brighter, Soon, he was surrounded by ethereal radiance, as if swimming through moonlight. The moon itself was like a perfectly round silver disk hanging above Bastion,

Its reflection was like a vast, radiant circle resting Breaking the surface a few meters away from it, Sunny swam forward and entered that circle.

He was blinded by the light...

And then, the world changed.

Sunny had left the illusory realm behind and entered the ghost of reality hidden behind its splendor.

Suddenly, it was much darker. The reflection of the moon disappeared, replaced by scattered vestiges of bleak light. The water of the lake was much colder, and its surface was restless because of the strong wind.

Taking a deep breath, Sunny looked up.

Above him was a broken sky.