1755 Affirmation

Sunny walked up the rocky slope, surrounded by the flowing mist and a silence so absolute that it was almost deafening. He could not see very well, and even if he could, he wouldn‘t have been able to perceive much his mind was so strained by the imperative need to continuously affirm his own existence that there wasn't much space left for other thoughts.

The mist could barely be permeated by his shadow sense, as well. His senses were impaired - not as much as they would have been in true darkness, but still severely. Step. Step. Another step.

All sounds were muffled, and he could not hear his own footsteps. Because of that, Sunny had an eerie feeling that he was not moving at all.

'Damnation.‘

This is going to be tiring.

He walked for a few hours, feeling more and more fatigued. Just a day before, he was flying across the Chained Isles, unrestrained and full of power... but now, simply taking a step felt like a burden.

That said, Sunny suspected that he would slowly... very slowly... grow accustomed to the pressure of existing within nothingness. He would have been long erased from existence if he had been a mere Sleeper... but a Transcendent soul was much more vast and potent than that of a Dormant being.

More importantly, it was fundamentally different from the souls of Sleepers, Awakened, and Masters. That was because a Saint's soul was connected to the world — so, to erase it, nothingness had to erase all those connections as well.

That was why Sunny could struggle to keep existing in the mist.

In the next few days, he made little progress. Sunny did not dare to move brazenly here in the Hollow Mountains, especially before knowing what horrors lay hidden in the fog. So, he kept a low profile and simply walked, like a mundane human would.

The slopes under his feet turned steeper and steeper, and his surroundings became colder and colder. If these were mundane mountains, there would have already been snow covering the ground. But in this eerie place, the hidden expanse of black rock remained barren, with nothing but mist flowing across its surface.

Sunny judged that he would have to start climbing in earnest soon, scaling towering cliffs. Alternatively, he would have to circle around the steepest slopes to find easier paths. There were no ruins hidden in the mist, no signs of living beings having ever been here. No sounds, no signs of danger. Nevertheless, Sunny tried to remain as alert as possible. He did not believe for a moment that there would be no abominations hiding in the fog — after all, if he could resist the pull of nothingness, so would the more powerful of the Nightmare Creatures.

And then there were the others... those who had been born from the mist.

As the days passed, he was slowly getting better at keeping himself from disappearing. It was still putting a constant strain on his mind, but at least Sunny did not sway like a drunk anymore while walking. He could pay more attention to his surroundings, as well, which was a relief.

He journeyed deeper into the mountains, having nothing to do but think.

Of course, what he thought about the most was nothing.

Sunny did not know how Cormac had managed to brave the insidious mist — perhaps the same way he was doing it, through sheer will, or perhaps with the help of some artifact forged by the King of Swords.

However, he had come to believe that some people were better suited for the task than others.

And, surprisingly, Sunny was one such person.

There were several reasons why he could survive better in the white mist of the Hollow Mountains.

The first reason was very simple — it was his Transcendent Ability, Shadow Incarnation. One had to constantly affirm their existence if they wanted to resist the pull of nothingness, which, among other things, meant that they could not allow themselves to sleep. Surrendering to sleep, even for a few moments, would mean death... and even Saints had to rest from time to time.

Sunny, however, could delegate rest to his absent incarnation. Not only that, but his avatar could also don the Puppeteer's Shroud — he had transplanted the [Blessing of Spirit] enchantment of the Shroud of Graceless Dark into the weave of that armor, which enhanced his ability to endure and recover from mental fatigue.

Cormac had not possessed such an ability, so his expeditions into the Hollow Mountains had never lasted more than a month or two. Sunny, however, could, in theory, stay here indefinitely thanks to his avatar.

The second reason was that he possessed a rich experience of trying to maintain his sense of self due to Shadow Dance. Sunny had spent years trying not to lose himself in the forms and shapes of the beings he shadowed, so resisting the dreadful pull of nothingness was, in a sense, nothing new to him.

It would have been much better if he still had a True Name, but, sadly, that was one of the two disadvantages weighing him down. The other disadvantage was that there were no strings of fate connecting him to other people, places, and events. Erasing someone like him, untethered from everything, was easier. After all, the vacuum left in his absence would be very small.

Luckily, there was the third reason — his greatest ally in the sea of nothingness. It had to do with the power and nature of his soul.

A powerful soul was harder to erase from existence than a weak one, and Sunny's soul was much more potent than that of almost any other Saint, let alone someone of a lesser Rank. Not only did he possess six cores instead of one, but each of them was also altered and bolstered by Soul Weave. He also carried four powerful creatures in his soul — Saint, Serpent, Nightmare, and Fiend.

The nature of his soul was no less important. In that regard, Sunny actually had two advantages. The first was one of his Attribute, the [Flame of Divinity] — for whatever reason, divinity seemed to repel nothingness, protecting him like a radiant shield. The second... was the fact that he was a shadow, and had the soul of a shadow.

Sunny did not know why, but he had come to believe that shadows were especially difficult to erase from existence. The Vile Thieving Bird's Spawn had failed to consume his soul because he possessed shadow essence instead of soul essence. Similarly, nothingness was having trouble swallowing him now.

He remembered the cohort's journey to the outer boundary of the Underworld, and the forlorn shadows he had found in the maze. They had belonged to the companions of the First Lord, but their owners were somehow gone, leaving only the orphaned shadows behind.

Sunny thought that he understood how that had happened better now.

They must have encountered a creature of nothingness somewhere there, in the dark maze.

But Sunny and the rest had been warned by Cassie to keep their eyes shut, and so, they somehow passed through the darkness unscathed.

Stopping for a moment, Sunny let out a sigh, leaned against the black rocks, and stared into the mist.

'Keep our eyes shut…’