1792 Bait and Switch

Sunny remained silent for a few moments, then stood up.

"Please, follow me. I want to show you something."

Cassie rose, and they walked together through the impenetrable darkness. As they did, he spoke in a tone of indifference:

"You know a lot about what I've been up to after becoming a Saint. For a while... I did not even have plans of ever returning. So, my preparations are not as extensive as yours. Still, I've been working on bringing down the Sovereigns earnestly, in my own way."

She nodded.

"Your involvement is both welcome and appreciated. You might want to be modest, Sunny... but there is really no need to. There are very few Saints more powerful than you. Maybe even none. So, your presence alone is significant enough to change the balance of power entirely."

Sunny smiled.

"Who says that I want to be modest? Yes, I am powerful. Not only am I powerful, but each of my Shadows is also a walking calamity. There are only six people in the world that I am inclined to be wary of the three Sovereigns, Mordret, Nephis... and you."

His smile widened.

"And look at that, three of the six have decided to join hands to defeat the rest. I'd be afraid of us if 1 was someone else."

They returned to the inner sanctum of the temple and entered the stairwell to the underground level.

Sunny's smile dimmed a little.

"Returning to my preparations to kill the Supremes. Make no mistake... I am determined to achieve Supremacy without venturing into a Nightmare, as well. It's just that while Nephis is prevented from doing so by circumstances, I simply can't. Because... well, you know. Sadly, I must admit that I am half a step behind her, in that regard. Which is why my plan revolved around battling at least one of the Sovereigns as Saints."

They reached the great underground hall, which was drowning in darkness. Sunny had hidden it from Nephis the last time around. However, Cassie was witnessing the world through his eyes - so, she could see everything that he could see.

She was momentarily frozen in place.

"Don't worry. It's safe."

The hidden level was like a reflection of the main hall, as if someone had flipped the entire temple and put it below ground upside-down. The great pillars of black marble descended from the tall ceiling and rested on the floor, and silence reigned in the vast expanse of solemn emptiness. There were only two differences - the absence of the altar and the mystical circle that took the entirety of the far wall.

The circle itself looked... quite striking. It was as if the great wall of black marble had turned into liquid once, and swirled around an invisible axis before solidifying in a sudden ripple. It was both orderly and chaotic, enthralling and unnerving... but mostly beautiful.

It was also capable of absorbing a vast amount of essence like a bottomless vortex. Because of that, it emanated a sense of magnetic pressure.

Cassie was stunned by the sight.

"What... what kind of sorcery is this?"

Sunny looked at the great circle, too.

"A kind that is much older than all the rest. Divine sorcery."

If it could even be called that. Sorcery was something that followed a framework of laws and principles to shape the world, usually by manipulating soul essence. Divine sorcery, however, was simply a manifestation of a deity's will. There were some tricks to it, no doubt - otherwise, there would be no need for the mystical circle to exist, or for the string of fate belonging to the Chain Lords to be contained in the seven knives.

However, Sunny could not even begin to guess these tricks. For all intents and purposes, divine sorcery created miracles, not magic.

There was a hint of awe in Cassie's voice:

"What does it do?"

Sunny remained silent for a moment, then answered evenly:

"You probably don't know, but the Nameless Temple has not always stood in Godgrave. In fact, I found it somewhere else. It is a wandering Citadel, and the circle allows it to wander."

Cassie's brow furrowed a little.

He knew that learning that fact pushed her into rethinking a thousand of preconceived notions.

A few moments later, she turned to him and slowly said:

"You put it in Godgrave... as bait."

He smiled, allowing her to continue.

"You knew that a Citadel standing in the middle of the future battlefield would possess an irresistible attraction for both Song and Valor. So, you put your temple here and let your presence be known by delivering those Sleepers to the Song Domain. Then, you just sat back and waited... until Nephis arrived. Instead of infiltrating the Sword Army, you let them invite you to join. Shower you with gifts and try to appease you, even. Just to have you fight on their side, which was your goal all along."

Sunny chuckled.

"You are half-right."

Cassie raised an eyebrow.

"Only half?"

He nodded.

"It is true that the Nameless Temple is bait. But it is also a trap."

Sunny inhaled deeply and looked up, as if trying to pierce the marble walls with his gaze.

"The clash with the Sovereigns is inevitable, and one way or the other, it must happen here. Either they will come to besiege my Citadel, or I will move it to besiege them. Even if Nephis manages to become a Sovereign, she will still be new and inexperienced as a ruler of a Domain. So, she'll need all the help she can get when she faces the enemy."

He lingered for a moment.

"The darkness that surrounds the Nameless Temple is not one of its Components. In fact... well, you might not remember if I tell you where I received it from. Suffice it to say, it is a shard of an ancient Domain. A Divine Domain. The Realm of Shadows."

Sunny sighed.

"I can't control it, and am too weak to claim ownership of it. However, it is still a piece of a foreign Domain of unfathomable power. When either of the Sovereigns enters it, their authority will be weakened, if not suppressed entirely."

Cassie considered his words carefully, Slowly, a hesitant smile appeared on her lips.

Then, she seemed to think of something else.

"But your plans would not be limited to just weakening their authority... you are far too thorough to be satisfied with just that."

Suddenly, her eyes widened.

"The Great abominations that sleep below the temple!"

His smile turned a little sinister.

"Yes. They are a present I've been preparing for the Sovereigns. A swarm of Great Nightmare Creatures to welcome them as my guests, freshly freed from a maze of nightmares and burning with furious desire to avenge their imprisonment. Of course, just that is not worthy of a proper welcome gift. I should be a generous host, after all."

Cassie tilted her head a little. A moment later, she faced him with a flash of understanding in her beautiful blue eyes.

"In the memories... you had a fifth Shadow. A black stallion who wields power over dreams. However, I've never seen him here, or with any of your other incarnations. Sunny... where is that Shadow?"

Sunny grinned.

His gaze fell down, at the floor of the Nameless Temple.

After a while, he said:

"Nightmare is busy with an important task. He is lulling a special guest into slumber. The centerpiece of my welcoming committee."

He faced Cassie with a cold expression.

"A very nasty creature of the Cursed Rank. Since we're inviting the Sovereigns, we should have a guest of honor, don't you think?”