1801 A New Home

Sunny crossed the threshold and entered the great hall of the ancient temple.

It was just as he remembered it.

The vast hall was desolate and empty. Its roof had partially collapsed, letting in the elements. There were piles of rubble on the floor, covered with snow and ice. Cascades of moonlight were falling through the holes in the roof, suffusing the dark hall with a beautiful and otherworldly splendor... deep shadows surrounded the silver light, not daring to touch it.

Everything was silent.

Sunny took a deep breath.

He had almost expected to find the bones of the Mountain King on the floor, where it had been torn apart by shadow, but there were none. The desolate hall was empty.

Enveloping the temple with shadow sense to make sure that there was no danger, Sunny took a step forward. Ice shattered with a brittle sound under the onyx soles of his armored boots, and the ancient shadows stirred, reaching out to him in reverent glee.

Surrounded by them, as if wearing a cloak of darkness, he walked toward the altar.

It used to be a single slab of black marble, long and wide enough for a human to lay on it comfortably...

Or maybe not so comfortably, if it had been a sacrificial altar.

Was it?

It didn't matter now, anyway, because the altar was broken.

The great slab of black stone had shattered, and was laying on the floor in several pieces. That was the only thing in the temple that had changed.

Sunny studied the broken altar for a while, his face slowly growing paler.

There were too many mysteries surrounding this

place. He concentrated, trying to remember

everything he knew about the First Nightmare, the

dead gods, and the secrets of the fallen pantheon.

And then, his eyes widened.

Of all the knowledge Sunny had learned in his life, of all the pieces of information gathered in his memory, one suddenly stood out. A memory that Sunny had never considered very significant, and had no reason to.

It was the evaluation the Spell had given him after the First Nightmare. Not the important part that had to do with the appraisal, but rather the slightly poetic summary that had been there seemingly on a whim, to add some flavor,

Standing above the broken altar, Sunny whispered:

"A nameless slave ascended the Black Mountain. Both heroes and monsters fell by his hand. Unbroken, he entered the ruined temple of a long-forgotten god and spilled his blood on the sacred altar. The gods were dead, and yet they listened."

The temple of a long-forgotten god...

He inhaled deeply.

Back then, Sunny had been an ignorant kid from the outskirts. He knew very little about the world, let alone about its greatest secrets.

He had not known who the Forgotten God was, and so, he had not paid attention to these words. The Spell had never uttered them after that, and neither used nor translated the runes describing the lost deity.

‘...Of course.’

Sunny looked around the ruined temple.

Why had his sacrifice been made to all the gods?

Perhaps because this temple had been built in the time before the memories of the seventh god were struck from the world. It was consecrated to worship Dream God, as well... and therefore, when Dream God became forgotten, the temple was forgotten, as well.

Because worshiping the Forgotten God was forbidden. Just like worshiping the daemons, his children, was.

Still... Sunny was sure that there were some who had disregarded the will of the gods and put their faith in Forgotten God despite it. Otherwise, Scholar would not have heard stories of pilgrims climbing the Black Mountain in ancient times.

‘The temple of the Forgotten God…’

Sunny looked around the great hall with a complicated expression.

He was himself forgotten by the world, so it wasn't hard to feel a sense of kinship for this forlorn ruin.

He sighed and looked one last glance at the altar.

There were deep shadows nestling deep below him, so Sunny knew that the temple extended underground. He had never got the chance to explore it during the First Nightmare, so it was nice to have an opportunity now. He was curious to see what he would find out.

Still, he would leave this place and continue toward Godgrave soon. There was no time to waste.

Before that, however...

Sunny froze.

It was because he had something familiar when looking at the broken altar.

'Wait. No way. Can it be?"

The shattered slab of black marble gave off a subtle, but very familiar feeling.

Sunny stared silently.

...It was a Gateway.

He had missed that fact at first, but now that he studied the broke altar closer, there was no doubt. It felt exactly like the one in the Sanctuary of Noctis, the chain circle in the Ivory Tower, and the runic one in the Crimson Spire.

And if the altar had been made into a Gateway... Sunny looked around once more.

Then the nameless temple was now a Citadel.

Suddenly, he wanted to laugh.

'How fitting.'

He was a Transcendent, and a homeless one at that. Most Saints, however, were usually in control of a Citadel, ruling it at the behest of their Sovereign.

There were exceptions, of course, like Saint Tyris, who had lost the Sanctuary of Noctis and had been exiled to Antarctica with her entire clan. Fortunately, White Feather was doing much better now.

Sunny himself served no Sovereign, and he wasn't even sure if he could take possession of a Citadel. Citadels were created by the Spell, after all... so, he didn't know if controlling one was something that only a carrier of the Spell could do.

It was worth trying, though.

He hesitated for a while.

Then, he hesitated some more.

'Right. But how do I actually claim a Citadel?’

If there was an instruction manual for being a Saint, Sunny had never received one.

After thinking for a while, he retracted the Onyx Mantle, bared his forearm, and commanded the Onyx Shell to reduce the resilience of his skin there. Then, he cut his forearm with his fingernail. Nothing happened.

Letting out a frustrated sigh, Sunny also commanded Blood Weave to release a few drops of blood.

Why was it so difficult to bleed a little?!

Several crimson drops fell on the broken altar and rolled down the surface of one of the black shards.

There was no reaction.

Once again, nothing happened.

Sunny scratched the back of his head. The small cut on his forearm was already healing, and before too long, it was entirely gone.

At that time, he also came up with another idea.

'It can't be that simple, can it?'

Feeling uncertain, Sunny took a deep breath... and silently released the tether connecting him to the Ivory Tower.

Then, he concentrated on his soul and started the process of placing a new one.

He had a suspicion that it was very simple to claim a Citadel, All that a carrier of the Nightmare Spell had to do was become a Transcendent and use the Gateway to return to the waking world. Then, they would become anchored to that Gateway, and therefore, take possession of the Citadel.

Unless it was already claimed, of course, in which case a more powerful Saint would take control.

However, Sunny was not a carrier of the Nightmare Spell, so he had to go through the process manually. Instead of allowing the Spell to bind him to the Gateway, he had to create that bond himself.

And so... he was placing down a tether.