1925 Missing Oracle

Far away, Sunny — his original body, donning the guise of the charming Master Sunless — was sitting on the edge of the Ivory Island with a resigned smile on his face, suffering in silence.

'D—amn... nation. Its torture.'

His nose was itching.

It had been itching for what felt like an eternity already, but sadly, he could not scratch it. He could not move at all, really, because the Cloudveil was torn above the warcamp of the Song Army, drowning the world in a blinding white light.

The camp stretched below him, resembling a city — there was no movement on the orderly avenues, and the countless people populating it had all turned into motionless statues. Their silhouettes were like black shadows painted on the blurry white backdrop, melting in the stark radiance.

Mercifully, that was simply because his eyes were tearing up, not because they were turning to ash.

Now that Saint Tyris had left to accompany the expedition force on its quest to conquer the Citadel, the main camp of the Sword Army had lost her protection. That was why everyone had been forced to learn how to survive the annihilating gaze of the incandescent abyss —now, several weeks later, people rarely died when the clouds parted.

Of course, there were measures in place to alert them of the imminent danger in advance.

Sunny was not entirely sure how that was achieved, but there were countless talents in the Sword Domain, both mundane and Awakened. He did not doubt that someone would have come up with a method to predict the movement of clouds — granted, the warnings rarely came more than a minute before the cloudbreak, so the method clearly still required some improvement.

This time, the clouds parted while Sunny was searching for Cassie, leaving him no choice but to sit down and patiently wait for the danger to pass. It had been close to an hour since then, and the grey veil was finally starting to show signs of repairing itself.

Ten minutes later, the blinding radiance finally subsided, and Sunny furiously scratched his nose.

"Ah... damn it..."

He wondered if anyone in Godgrave had died from sneezing yet, then rose to his feet and looked around.

Sunny had already checked everywhere on the Ivory Island, including the underground level of the Ivory Tower and Cassie's personal quarters. He had checked every cabin of the Chain Breaker, as well, and asked around among the Fire Keepers.

No one had seen the blind seer, which could only mean one thing — that she was performing her duties as the Seneschal of the Great Clan Valor somewhere in the camp.

Unless something out of the ordinary had happened...

Frowning, he walked over to one of the seven chains anchoring the Ivory Island to the ground and descended by walking across it. Sunny was reluctant to unleash his shadow sense here, so his best choice was to go check personally.

Fortunately, Valor Keep — the stone stronghold that served as the headquarters of the Sword Army and the residence of the King — was not far. He reached it in a matter of minutes and hesitated at the entrance, feeling uncomfortable under the dubious gazes of the guards.

The thing was... Sunny had only ever entered the Keep while accompanying either Nephis or Cassie. He had never been here alone, and wasn't sure if he was even allowed inside.

Clearing his throat, he hesitated for a moment, cringed inwardly, and addressed the guards in a commanding tone:

"I am Sir Sunless, Knight Commander of the Ardent Wardens. Move aside."

'Gods, I actually said it...'

The guards stared at him some more. Eventually, one of them sneered.

"Oh, yes. We know precisely who you are... Sir Sunless."

The derision in his voice was not even hidden, but the guards did move aside.

Sunny glowered at them for a moment, then walked into the gate.

Halfway across the threshold, however, he halted, backed a few steps, and looked at the rude guard for a moment.

Then, a pleasant smile appeared on his face.

"...Do you, perhaps, want to challenge me to a duel?"

The guard paled a little, shivered, and slowly shook his head.

"N—no... Knight Sunless, sir."

Sunny's smile brightened menacingly.

"Thought so."

With that, he entered the stronghold without looking back.

Nephis was gone from the camp, as well, so people were getting braver as far as showing him their contempt was concerned. Sunny did not really mind, but it was starting to get tiresome. Perhaps it was time to teach them another lesson in humility...

But not now.

Sighing, Sunny found the nearest person wearing the colors of Clan Valor and inquired if Song of the Fallen was nearby.

He had not really expected a positive answer, but to his surprise, the man simply nodded and gave him directions to a certain chamber in the depths of the keep.

The chamber was guarded by several Knights, which gave him pause. Although nothing showed on his face, Sunny felt his whole body tense up for a moment, and his heart started to race.

Were these Ascended guards sent to protect Cassie as a sign of how highly she was valued by Clan Valor... or were they here to make sure that she couldn't escape? Was there a sorcerous cage inside the chamber that cut off her powers, similar to the one in which the two of them had spent an unforgettable time in the Night Temple?

This was the burden of being a double agent for a regicidal insurgency... Sunny never knew if he was one heartbeat away from having his treasonous ways revealed.

He lingered for a moment, then asked with decorum:

"Is Saint Cassia inside?"

One of the Knights looked down at him sternly... then nodded and turned around to knock on the door politely.

"You have a visitor, my lady."

Hearing Cassie's response, he opened the door and let Sunny inside.

The chamber was sparsely furnished, but quite comfortable. There was a soft sofa, several armchairs, a wooden table with succulent fruit and refreshments, and even a Memory keeping the air cool, not to mention a few bottles of beverages from the waking world. Vermilion curtains moved slightly in the wind, and sunlight was pouring through a narrow window.

Cassie was half-sitting, half-laying on the sofa, her beautiful face showing signs of extreme fatigue. One of the hands was lowered powerlessly, while the other was holding a silver goblet.

Sunny was worried for a moment, then determined that there were no wounds on her body and let out a sigh of relief.

The blind seer, meanwhile, turned her head in his direction.

"...Who is it?"

He frowned.

Shouldn't she know already?

Then again... their mental link seemed to be inactive, which meant that Cassie's Ascended Ability was suppressed, for some reason. If the same was true for her Awakened Ability, which allowed her to sense what would happen a few seconds in the future, then she would be truly and utterly blind.

Sunny's frown deepened.

"It's me, Saint Cassia. Master Sunless."

He threw a glance at her Ascended guards and unceremoniously closed the door. That would not prevent them from eavesdropping on their conversation, but it was better than nothing.

A pale smile illuminated Cassie's face.

"Sunny... it's good that you're here. I was just thinking about asking someone to escort me back to the Ivory Island."

Sunny took a deep breath, considered his thoughts for a moment, and then asked bluntly:

"What happened to you?"

He thought that he already knew the answer. In hindsight, it was quite obvious.

Cassie sighed, then dropped her head on the soft armrest of the sofa.

Her voice was a little tired:

"...Essence exhaustion."