1414 Bone Garden

Nephis and Cassie were talking about the Guiding Light. With no one noticing his hollow eyes, Sunny lingered for a while, then walked over to Nightmare. He reached to adjust the stirrups and froze.

After a moment of hesitation, Sunny climbed into the saddle instead.

His companions looked at him in confusion.

"Sunny?"

He stared into the mist.

"Stay here for a while. Please. I’ll... I'll be back soon. "

With that, Nightmare leaped off the deck of the Chain Breaker and carried him into the fog.

'Damn it, damn it, damn it...‘

The ghastly leopard had already been bad enough, and yet... Sunny felt that the cohort would have been able to slay the dreadful creature, if at a steep cost.

But that bloodied hand...

They had not even caught a glimpse of the nebulous being that wandered the mist, snapping the towering pine trees like matchsticks. It had torn a Great Beast apart and obliterated them so casually... how was Sunny supposed to contend with something that oppressive and ineffable?

It felt as though something was pressing down heavily on his heart.

Was it... fear?

'Damn it!‘

Gritting his teeth, Sunny guided Nightmare into the misty forest.

He spent some time searching for Jet, found her, and brought her back to the Chain Breaker.

He waited for her to explain how she had ended up on Wind Flower, then told everyone about the time loop. There were some deviations from the previous conversations, but mostly, it went almost exactly the same.

In the end, Nephis suggested going after Effie once again.

Sunny stared at her in silence, remembering the brief, but gruesome moment of all of them being crushed under the giant, bloodied palm. Then, he shook his head somberly.

"We tried already. As I said... it didn't end well."

Nephis met his gaze, a subtle frown twisting the beautiful lines of her face.

"We can do better this time. What's the alternative? Give up and run?"

She shook her head.

"No, we can't even run away until nightfall. Before then, you won't have enough essence to empower the Chain Breaker and carry us across the vortex."

Sunny sighed and rose to his feet- Glancing at his companions, he said:

"I agree, we must continue trying. But we don't need to keep trying the same thing. Our combined strength is not enough to brave the mist, at least not when we don't know anything about the dangers it hides."

Jet leaned back, then winced when her wounded back touched the bulkhead and returned to her previous position.

"So, what do you suggest?"

Sunny shrugged.

"Use speed instead of strength. The group of us was intercepted and killed, but a single swift scout can make it through. Basically, I'll go retrieve Effie the same way I retrieved Jet. You three stay here, recover, and treat her wounds."

Nephis lingered for a while. It was hard to read her expression, but she seemed reluctant to let Sunny take all the risk.

"I don't like it."

He shrugged.

"What does that have to do with anything? Like it or not, that seems to be the best option right now."

They discussed the situation some more, but in the end, Sunny managed to convince the other members of the cohort to stay hidden aboard the Chain Breaker.

It wasn't that unreasonable, anyway. Nephis was suffering from essence exhaustion, Jet was heavily injured, and Cassie did not possess a lot of physical prowess — despite her insidious Aspect, she was at her weakest in battles against overwhelmingly powerful adversaries.

Considering her lacking physicality, an enemy who was fast, strong, and inevitable enough would leave no opportunity for the blind girl to exploit. Sensing a few seconds into the future was useless if those seconds did not allow her to change anything.

"I'm going."

Saying those words, Sunny once again rode Nightmare and dove into the mist.

'I can do it... I can... can I do it?‘

This time, he was holding the Guiding Light in his hand. The softly shining crystal at the tip of the sacred staff was pointing deeper inland.

However...

Sunny couldn't follow its guidance directly. Somewhere out there in front of him, Undying Slaughter was hiding in the mist. To his left was the territory of the Great Beast, the decaying leopard. That was also where they had met the harrowing giant the last time. So, this time, Sunny turned right.

Reaching the end of the beach, he and Nightmare turned into shadows and scaled the black cliffs. Sunny had passed this way once already, the first time he had carried Jet back. However, that time, they had been moving along the outer border of the island, so he did not know what was waiting for him on the surface.

There was only the same forest, and the same fog. Leaving the shadows, he sent Nightmare running across the narrow strip of land between the edge of the cliffs and trees.

It was some time before the trees receded, and the forest suddenly came to an end. Sunny stopped his steed, looking forward tensely.

In front of him, the pine trees gave way to an open field. Most of it was obscured by mist, but he could see vague shapes rising from it like tall pillars. They emanated a chilling, dire, and vaguely familiar feeling.

Sunny hesitated for a while, then turned into a shadow and cautiously slithered forward. Soon, the tall shapes revealed themselves fully. He grew somber after recognizing them for what they were — the towering pillars were, in fact, giant bones.

The entire shore in this part of Wind Flower was littered by them, as if it was a graveyard for all kinds of gargantuan beings. From the look of the ancient remains, the leviathans that had left them behind were all Nightmare Creatures — abominable, dreadful, and appalling dwellers of the depths.

Sunny was both shocked and unnerved by witnessing the skeletal remains of so many depth dwellers.

Had their bones been carried here by someone? Had the abominations come to this shore to die on their own over the ages? Or had there been a titanic battle here that led to all these monstrous creatures being slaughtered by an unknown assailant?

He did not know.

What he did now, however...

Suppressing his panic, Sunny hid in the skull of an especially large creature and looked ahead.

There, no more than two dozen meters away from him, something dark and massive had just moved in the fog.