1416 Invisible Scars

As Nightmare carried him away from the graveyard of horrors, Sunny managed to regain some of his composure. By then, they were moving deeper inland, following the light of the sacred staff. Effie was supposed to be at the end of that light.

As time passed, he couldn't help but think back to the Hollow Butterfly.

The Great Monster must have landed on the hidden island a long time ago — but also only a few hours ago — to lay eggs. Then, it was caught in the time loop and somehow ended up with its soul destroyed.

Sunny had never heard about a Nightmare Creature becoming Hollow, but it was not impossible. The question was... how had it happened?

The obvious answer was that the gargantuan creature had been attacked by someone who could destroy souls. When a soul was destroyed, the body usually died with it... but on rare occasions, it survived. That was how Hollow humans appeared, so the same thing could have happened to this Great Monster.

There certainly could be a creature capable of shattering souls on this hellish island... and powerful enough to slay a Great Monster. In fact, Sunny did not even need to ponder long to think of one.

Wasn't Undying Slaughter a perfect candidate?

Killing a Great Monster was all but a hopeless endeavor for the members of the cohort, but to the mist wraith, it would be no different from what facing Carapace Centurions had been for the Sleepers of the Forgotten Shore.

Fatally dangerous, but not at all impossible.

There could be more soul breakers on Wind Flower, as well.

That said...

Somehow, Sunny did not think that that was what had happened.

Not because he didn't think that Undying Slaughter was incapable of slaying the Dark Butterfly, but because he didn't think that she was capable of doing so without leaving any trace of the battle.

The Dark Butterfly was a Great Monster, and as such, it possessed two Corruption Cores. That meant that the Defiled wraith had to deliver at least two blows to its soul in order to destroy it. Would the aerial horror have remained idle while it was being killed?

Not a chance. If it had been attacked, the whole place would have been turned upside down with one flip of its enormous wings.

And yet, there was no trace of destruction around the monstrous butterfly. The bones surrounding it were unharmed, and the ground was unbroken. All its eggs were whole.

It was almost as if...

The Great Monster had simply ceased to be, peacefully and without even noticing.

The same went for the revolting larvae.

'How could it be?‘

Sunny felt a cold shiver run down his spine.

He had no reason to make this conclusion... but he felt that he had an idea.

Was it because of the time loop?

Riding through the mist, Sunny gripped the Guiding Light tighter.

The Sin of Solace had asked him before how many deaths Sunny would be able to endure before turning into a drooling fool. The answer was... quite a lot. But there was no question that he had a limit.

After spending a few years on Wind Flower, his mental state would inevitably deteriorate. Although his flesh was miraculously restored every time he returned to the starting point of the loop, the mental scars remained.

What about spiritual scars?

Sunny did not know a lot about souls, but he knew that they could be damaged. They could also be healed, and possessed the ability to slowly mend themselves, just like flesh did.

And just like flesh... there was a limit to how much punishment souls could withstand. So, what was going to happen to his soul after he spent a long time being killed and reborn in the loop? Would it be covered by scars and gaping wounds?

Was it going to collapse, eventually?

Maybe it would take a year, or a few years, or a few hundred years. Or a few months. When would his soul reach its limit?

Sunny was unique, because he had become aware of the loop and kept his memories after returning to the past. As far as he knew, no one except him bore the mental scars of the previous revolutions. Their minds were wiped clean.

But maybe their souls weren't, at least not entirely.

So, if the Dark Butterfly had landed on Wind Flower countless years ago... maybe even the soul of a Great Monster could not withstand the terrible curse of the whirlpool of time.

'I... I have to be careful.‘

If a Great Monster — a creature with a soul infinitely more vast and potent than his — had been made Hollow by the time loop, then Sunny would be, as well.

He had never consciously relied on the nature of the repeating time, but deep down inside, Sunny was consoled by the thought that his failures would be erased, and he would get another chance.

And then another, and another, and another...

But all this time, he was most likely on a timer.

Time was merciless, and even when it repeated itself, living beings were not meant to be eternal.

'l have to make each revolution count.‘

Steeling himself, Sunny looked into the surrounding mist and forced himself to calm down.

Right now, he needed to survive the trip into the depths of the island, find Effie, and return to the Chain Breaker. That was all he had to think about.

There were many harrowing creatures hiding in the fog, without a doubt. But he was one of the most elusive Awakened in the world... even in the Antarctic Center, when everyone had perished, Sunny managed to escape alive.

He might not be able to slay Undying Slaughter, the dreadful giant wandering the mist, and the other abominations trapped on Wind Flower... but he would at least have a chance to run away from them.

'Not the most courageous statement, but who needs courage, anyway? Being a coward is what keeps people alive.‘

He vaguely remembered lecturing Master Roan on the topic. That past seemed so distant… Sunny wondered how the White Feather Clan was doing. By now, Antarctica must have been completely decimated. Had Saint Tyris and her people been able to evacuate in time, or were they gone, too?

Shaking his head, he threw all unnecessary thoughts away and concentrated on his surroundings.

Nightmare had carried him far inland, by now. They were once again in the pine forest, but... did it only seem that way, or was the mist less thick here?

Somewhat surprised, Sunny realized that he could see much further in the fog than he had before. The ground was also inclined, as if they were climbing a hill.

The higher they climbed and the closer to the center of Wind Flower they traveled, the less Oppressive the mist became.

And then, when they finally crested the hill...

Sunny stopped Nightmare and looked up, feeling a cold shadow fall upon him.

In front of him, some distance away, a tall tower rose into the sky.

Its windows were dark, except for one.

At the very top of the lower, a single window shone with a bright, warm, welcoming light.