1245 Smashing Problems with a Hammer

Climbing out of the fissure, the two of them — and the ominous figure of the Sin of Solace — studied the calm surface of the Great River. By now, it seemed like a sea of blood. The patch of red water surrounding the dead behemoth was growing larger as it was slowly washed away.

Just then, an ominous shadow moved through the blood, and a giant, cloudy eye rose from the red liquid to stare at them with hatred and burning malice. Sunny shivered and felt the desire to take a step back.

Nephis remained unmoved.

After a while, she spoke in a somber tone:

"...Strong."

He sighed.

"It is a Great Beast. Of course, it's strong."

At that moment, the Sin of Solace smiled.

As they escaped the suffocating gaze of the azure serpent by jumping back into the fissure, the sword wraith spoke:

"But... isn't it just a Great Beast? Where is your fighting spirit, Sunny? Go! Kill it! Like you always do..."

Sunny threw an irritated glance at him and thought:

'Shut the hell up.'

The apparition laughed.

"Why? Can't I make a joke? Of course, a pathetic waste of a Divine Aspect like you has no hope of surviving a fight with this creature."

It grinned and added:

"That is why it's funny."

Sunny frowned and glared at the Sin of Solace, then started to think of a response. However, at that moment, Neph's voice distracted him from the conversation:

"Sunny? Who are you talking to?"

Startled, he flinched slightly and turned to her. His face grew slightly more pale than usual.

"You... you heard that? I spoke it aloud?"

She lingered for a moment, then nodded.

Sunny let out a small laugh and scratched his head, feigning embarrassment. In truth, he was a little frightened — it seems that the effect of the Sin of Solace on his mind was not as tame as he had thought.

'Damn it.'

"That... my primary weapon Memory has a peculiar enchantment. Basically, it's a voice that doesn't miss a chance to explain how wrong everything I do is. Right... something like that."

Nephis stared at him for a while, and then a hint of a smile appeared on her face.

"Oh."

Sunny frowned.

"Wait, why are you smiling? It's very annoying!"

She simply shook her head.

"It's nothing. I was... just suddenly reminded of an old fairy tale I once heard."

He gave her a dubious look.

"Really? What is that fairy tale about?"

Nephis pondered for a bit, as if trying to recall, then said with uncertainty:

"It is about a mischievous doll who ran away from home. Every time the doll lied, his nose would grow bigger. And there was a cricket who followed the wooden boy around, trying to explain what is right and what is wrong to him."

Sunny blinked a couple of times, perplexed. What kind of weird story was that? And why would a doll be alive? Was it actually an Echo? Or a Nightmare Creature?

He frowned.

"That's one strange fairy tale. I do see why you would remember it, though, not that I have any problems with the length of my nose. So... how does it end?"

Nephis thought for a while.

"I guess the doll learns how to be a good boy and returns home with the cricket? That is not the original ending, though."

Sunny felt a little better about himself after hearing that. Curious, he raised an eyebrow and asked:

"Yeah? What happens to the doll in the original, then?"

She sat down and shrugged with an indifferent expression.

"He kills the cricket with a hammer, then gets hanged from a tree and dies."

Sunny's eyes twitched.

'What the hell?'

Lowering himself to the ground, he scoffed.

"That doesn't even make sense. Isn't that doll made of wood? Why would he die after being hanged from a tree? Ridiculous... not to mention that a talking wooden doll would have been at least a Demon. There's no way a Demon would die from being hanged."

He looked at Nephis and abruptly realized how ridiculous that conversation was. Sunny cleared his throat, and then added:

"Anyway... that Memory of mine has grown stronger once we entered the Nightmare. I have a couple of ideas why, but am not certain yet. So, that peculiar enchantment has become more annoying, too. I guess what I am trying to say is... don't mind me."

However, he couldn't help but glance at the Sin of Solace and add with a bit of venom in his voice:

"As for the fairy tale... now that we established that the doll wouldn't have died from hanging, I must admit — I wouldn't mind smashing that annoying cricket with a hammer and watching it die."

The apparition mockingly raised an eyebrow. Neph, meanwhile, frowned slightly and asked:

"Why do you keep looking to the side when talking about that enchantment?"

Sunny froze.

"Well... that... at first, there was only a voice. But now there's an illusory figure following me, too. In fact, it looks exactly like me, and uses my own voice to berate me. It's fine, though. Just... annoying."

Nephis remained silent before asking in an even tone:

"So... there are two Sunnys here right now?"

Sunny grimaced, then nodded with a bit of reluctance.

"In a sense. One is just a foul-mouthed hallucination, though."

Neph stared at him for a while with a funny expression.

Then, she tilted her head slightly...

And stared at him some more.

Sunny suddenly felt a bit weird under that gaze.

"...What? Why are you looking at me like that? I'm not crazy!"

No... what was it hidden in the depths of her calm grey eyes? Was it... amusement?! Nephis suddenly took a deep breath, and then shook her head.

"I know that you are not crazy. That Memory should be the Sin of Solace, right? It is tied to Ariel — and, therefore, to the Tomb of Ariel. Even though the pyramid doesn't seem to exist in this Nightmare, it might come in handy."

Sunny slowly exhaled.

"Right."

Nephis had access to the list of his Memories, so she would know about the Sin of Solace.

But that reminded him...

Growing serious, Sunny said in a somber tone:

"Speaking of which... I think we should try to figure out where we are. And, more importantly, why we are here. I think that if we pull all the information we have together, we might be able to find out a few things."

She nodded.

"Okay. I was thinking the same thing. There have to be hints in the descriptions of some of the Memories we received during the Chain of Nightmares. I can tell you which ones of mine seem important."

Sunny too thought that this was the best course of action, at least for now — the azure serpent didn't seem to have plans of climbing onto the carcass of the black turtle, and the current was pulling it downstream. Even if they tried to fly away, their speed wouldn't be much greater than that of the dark island.

So, they might as well try to better understand the situation first. However...

He gathered his willpower, hesitated for a few moments, and forced out an indifferent smile:

"Uh... before that... I think you should summon a new armor Memory. So, you know... this one could restore itself."

Nephis frowned, then looked down at herself.

The black garments she wore were singed and torn, revealing more than a fair bit of her smooth alabaster skin. She remained motionless for a bit, then shifted slightly.

"Turn ar... can you turn around?"

She phrased it as a question instead of a request, but Sunny nevertheless obediently faced the wall of the fissure.

"I can."

After a moment of awkward silence, another question followed:

"...Can you also make your shadow turn around?"

He forced the gloomy shadow to face the black rock, too.

"No problem."

The Sin of Solace rolled his eyes, then shook his head and followed their example.

"You are a pitiful man, Sunny. You know that? Ah, don't bother responding... gods, I wish you did squish me with a hammer. Then, I wouldn't have to endure your..."

Sunny ignored him.

Soon, the dark fissure became a little brighter — Neph's clothes turned into a swarm of white sparks.

Then, the fissure was illuminated again as she summoned another armor. Sunny let out a shaky breath.

'What is this sense of déjà vu...'

"Are you done?"

She answered after a short pause:

"Yeah."

He smiled.

"Alright. Let's do some research, then!"