1314 Revelations of Madness

Shielded by the Sin of Solace, Sunny was suddenly capable of pushing through the mist again. He backed away as the Defiled smiled wider.

"Where are you going, murderer? Don't you want to learn a secret? You won't regret knowing it... ah, maybe you will..."

Sunny did not know what was happening, but he was sure of one thing — whatever it was that the Mad Prince wanted to tell him was not something he should ever learn. Unless he wanted to become as mad and broken as the Defiled abomination was.

It was already crazy enough to be fighting for his life — or rather, for his humanity —within a dream.

Which he was dreaming inside the Third Nightmare.

Staggering away, Sunny called upon his Shadows.

Instantly, three figures rose from below. Taciturn Saint, scrawny Imp, and a tenebrous steed shrouded in darkness.

The Mad Prince exploded with laughter.

"Good, good... oh, this makes me feel nostalgic..."

'We will...'

...Saint was the first one to fall. Before she could even move, a sword suddenly flashed, followed by a turbulent whirlwind of surging mist. The graceful stone knight froze, a thin crack suddenly appearing on her onyx armor.

Then, as silently as she had been born, Saint crumbled into a thousand shards of black stone. A cloud of ruby dust exploded into the air, painting the still water crimson. "Saint!"

Sunny's eyes widened, but before he could do anything, the Sin of Solace pushed him away.

"Run, you bastard! She's not real!"

The Imp was second. The little fiend hesitated, visibly scared by the tattered figure of the mad Titan. However, then, it bravely jumped forward, reaching for the flesh of the Defiled with his claws. The invisible sword whistled again, and the scrawny figure suddenly staggered.

With liquid flames flowing out of Imp's mouth, he looked at Sunny with a frightened expression. Then, his eyes grew dim, and his little head slid off his neck, falling into the water with a quiet splash.

'Ah...

Sunny felt as if his own mind was on the verge of breaking. Pressing down the tempest of pain and guilt raging in his heart, he gritted his teeth and turned away.

His hand grasped Nightmare's mane, and with a stifled scream, he jumped onto the stallions back.

The dark courser was already galloping away, away... away through the swirling mist. The Mad Prince's laugh reached them from behind.

"Where are you going, murderer?! I am... not done... with you..."

Sunny did not turn to look back. Gripping the sides of Nightmare with his thighs, he raised both hands and pressed them to his ears.

'Don't listen... don't listen...'

However, he still heard it. The voice of the Sin of Solace, who said with a hint of resignation in his hateful, familiar voice. Sunny's own voice.

"Damn lunatic... are you trying to steal my job?"

He had never been so happy to have a wraith born from the whisper of the Demon of Dread stuck in his head before.

Nightmare flew through the mist, and soon, the veil of it obscured the Mad Prince and the Sin of Solace, muffling their voices until nothing except silence remained.

Sunny had also turned into himself... finally. He had a human body once again, as well as two human hands. The dark mantle was replaced by the soft silk of the Shroud of Dusk.

Looking down, he patted the black steed on the shoulder and let out a shaky breath. "I... I think we are safe now."

Then, he hesitated for a moment and added in a small voice:

"But do you think... that I can wake up now?"

Nightmare huffed and struck the surface of the still water with his hooves, soaring high into the air.

As they rose higher and higher, the mist grew thinner and thinner, until eventually a ray of sunshine broke through its blinding veil.

And as soon as it did...

Sunny woke up with a start.

"Argh!"

He sat up, covered in cold sweat. With his heart beating wildly, Sunny grabbed at his chest and froze, looking around the dark room of the desolate temple. Slowly, his panic started to dissolve.

'A dream... it was just a dream.'

Sunny slowly exhaled, then shuddered and shook his head.

No... it might have been a dream, but it definitely had not been just a dream. He did not know what kind of power could have allowed the Mad Prince — who was most likely

either dead already or far, far away — to appear in his nightmare. However, he was certain that the creature he had met in the dream was not a simple figment of his

imagination.

Sunny did not know whether the tattered abomination he had faced was the Defiled Titan himself or some echo left behind by his passing, but he knew that hearing the secret the abomination wanted to share would have been the end of him.

'Gods damn it... even the dreams aren't safe here.'

As his heart calmed down a little, he sat in silence for a while, trying to gather his thoughts. There were a lot of strange things about that dreadful dream... however, before he could consider them carefully, a sudden worry clouded his mind.

Sunny hurriedly sent his shadows to check on Nephis and Ananke. Making sure that both were sleeping peacefully in the neighboring rooms, he then shuddered at the memory of his Shadows being destroyed and proceeded to summon them one after another.

He called upon the dark courser first. As the Sin of Solace said, Saint and Imp should not have been real — the black steed could be summoned into his dream because that was the nature of Nightmare's powers, but the other two were different. So, only Nightmare had actually faced the Mad Prince... most likely.

The black stallion appeared in the shadows, keeping to his intangible form. He seemed agitated, but otherwise unharmed. Relieved, Sunny let out a long sigh.

"...Thank you, buddy. You really saved my hide there."

Dismissing Nightmare, he summoned Saint next. The graceful knight appeared out of the darkness, as stoic and indifferent as ever. She was unharmed. Feeling as if a great burden had been lifted off his heart, Sunny closed his eyes for a moment.

"You're safe. Thank the gods..."

Saint gave him a strange look, but remained silent... well, of course she did.

"Go back now... no, actually, stay here. Keep watch throughout the night, alright?" The graceful knight stared at him for a few moments, then turned away and silently left the room to stand guard in the corridor.

Sunny took a deep breath and rubbed his face.

Now, only Imp remained.

He summoned the scrawny goblin, then scratched the back of his head.

'Ah, right... that little rascal is still stuck digesting the armor of the Black Turtle. Damn it, when will he stop lazing around and...'

But before Sunny could finish the thought, a frightening figure suddenly rose from the shadows... towering above him like a demon forged out of dark steel and sharp blades...

"Argh, what the?!"

...Unbeknownst to Sunny, the little rascal had already awakened from his slumber.

Only he wasn't so little anymore.