1399 Misty Shore

Sunny waited for a moment, then slowly straightened and looked around.

The Chain Breaker was laying on white sand, tilted awkwardly. It had shattered the side of a black cliff and was now leaning on it, which prevented the ship from turning over. They had gotten lucky despite the blind landing.

The fog was still there, obscuring the world, but it had become less thick. Sunny could make out the figure of Saint standing still on the bow of the beached vessel, as well as more cliffs rising high above them. It seemed that Nephis had guided the Chain Breaker to a small strip of sand at the very edge of the island.

Changing Star herself was leaning heavily on the steering oars. Her face was paler than usual, and the white flames were gone from her eyes —she had completely exhausted her essence to carry the ship across the dark abyss.

Sunny grimaced. It was very unfortunate to have one of them utterly drained of essence right now. No one knew what dangers were waiting for them on the misty shore... these first minutes could very well prove to be of vital importance.

Not that there had been a choice.

"I'm fine."

Noticing his gaze, Nephis forced out a faint smile and put a hand on the hilt of her sword.

"I can still put up a fight."

Sunny nodded, having no doubt in her ability to do just that, despite this weakened state. She was a seasoned slayer. Nevertheless, they had to be careful not to allow themselves to be wounded — it would be quite a while before Nephis could heal them again.

Cassie used the Guiding Light to pick herself off the deck and shivered slightly as the mist caressed her skin. Her expression was troubled. Noticing it, Sunny tensed as well.

"What is it?"

The blind girl had an intuition that was far superior to even his. It had saved their lives numerous times, so seeing her this nervous was not a good sight.

She lingered for a while, then shook her head with a frown.

"I'm... not sure. I just have a very ominous feeling. This place, Wind Flower... every part of me is screaming that we are in danger."

Come to think of it, he felt it too. An invisible, dark pressure emanating from all around them. All his instincts were telling him one thing — that there were dreadful predators somewhere close. Much more dreadful than even he himself was.

Sunny scowled.

"Aren't we always in danger?"

Despite saying those words nonchalantly, he summoned the Sin of Solace and called upon his Shadows. Saint, Fiend, and Nightmare got closer, surrounding the three Masters in a defensive formation.

Nephis had walked to the edge of the deck and was now peering into the fog, her expression impassive. After a few moments of silence, she turned to Cassie and said:

"Do it."

They had discussed what to do a long time ago. The first thing, unless they were attacked immediately after landing, was to make use of the Guiding Light. None of them really understood how the divine relic worked, but they had established that it could point them in the direction of not only Wind Flower, but also Effie... or, at least, its tip lit up when the person holding the staff thought about her.

However, it did not react the same way to Jet. That fact... had been a source of many dark thoughts for Sunny.

As Crow Crow landed on his shoulder, Cassie gripped the wooden staff tighter. Then, she lingered for a moment.

"Huh... that's strange."

Sunny glanced at the Guiding Light, which was still pointing to somewhere deep in the mist, and raised an eyebrow.

"What? It seems to be working just fine."

The blind girl shook her head.

"No, nothing. It's just that I have not asked it to find Effie yet. The light should still be pointing to Wind Flower... I thought it would disappear once we reached it."

She concentrated for a moment, and then the radiance of the enchanted crystal changed subtly. It was still pointing deeper inland, but at a different angle.

Sunny secretly let out a sigh of relief. He did not know if the Guiding Light truly pointed to Effie, her lifeless body, or something else entirely. And yet, seeing it shine was a relief.

'That gluttonous woman... she'd better be alive. Or else... or else I'll be very cross with her.'

He scowled, then took a step forward.

"Let's go, then."

Jumping over the railing, he plummeted down and landed on the sand. A moment later, Nephis was by his side. Saint and Fiend landed with a bit more noise than the two of them, and lastly, Nightmare leaped from the deck of the ship, carrying Cassie on his back.

The six of them remained motionless for a few moments, listening to the silence of Wind Flower.

There were no sounds around them, no movement. Only the soft white sand and the black cliffs faintly visible in the fog. A piece of rock fell from the shattered crag and rolled down, the noise both dampened and made louder by the mist. It echoes, making them tense.

Sunny took a deep breath. His vision was obstructed by the fog, and strangely enough, so was his shadow sense. It was not entirely gone, but the range was limited to about as far as he could see. Beyond that, the shadows felt vague and unreliable.

He didn't like being that vulnerable at all.

At least the fog itself did not feel dangerous. It was a nuisance, sure, but far from being as senselessly terrifying as the mists of the Hollow Mountains.

'Curse it all...'

Frowning, Sunny took a step forward.

...As he did, a human figure suddenly revealed itself from the murky veil of the fog.

He flinched to tensed, ready to attack, but then froze.

Black eyes, porcelain skin... the Sin of Solace was looking at him mockingly.

"What, did I scare you? Ah, how tiresome."

It was the damned apparition.

Sunny gritted his teeth and walked past the sword wraith, heading straight for the cliffs.

At the same time, he sent three of his five shadows in different directions, ordering them to cautiously scout ahead.

'Slow and steady... slow and steady...'

Effie and Jet had already been on this island for more than a year. They would have to wait for a few hours, or even days, more. If Sunny, Nephis, and Cassie were too hasty and proceeded recklessly, they could very well die before finding the lost members of the cohort.

He was not going to underestimate the perils of Wind Flower. ...But he was going to find his friends, no matter what.

'There can't be any mistakes...'