1404 Another Round

'It's exactly the same.'

The Chain Breaker was leaning on a broken cliff, the mist swirling around it. Saint was standing motionlessly at the bow of the ship. Nephis had just stated that she would still be able to fight despite exhausting all her essence.

Sunny looked at her, then shifted slightly and threw a glance at Cassie.

'The last time, I noticed her troubled expression and asked if there was something wrong. She explained how her instincts were screaming of danger.'

He hesitated for a few moments and kept silent.

Nephis, however, did not. Noting that Cassie seemed concerned about something, she asked evenly:

"Have you sensed something?"

The blind girl shook her head with a frown.

"Nothing specific. I just have a very ominous feeling. This place, Wind Flower... every part of me is screaming that we are in danger."

Sunny's eyes widened slightly.

The wording had changed a little, but it was almost exactly the same response.

'...How?'

While Nephis and Cassie went about locating the direction where Effie supposedly was with the help of the Guiding Light, he observed them without saying anything. His mind was strangely split between two extremes — one part of it had turned cold and analytical, driven into a heightened state of utmost vigilance.

The other... the other was shaken and distraught, still reeling from the agony of dying to the ghostly blade. The shock of remembering his harrowing demise was so visceral that Sunny wanted nothing more than to topple to the deck and curl into a shivering ball.

Perhaps he had only managed to remain standing because he was frozen stiff.

"Sunny? Let's go... if you don't mind." He flinched and glanced at Nephis.

She was already leaping over the railing. Still slow to react, Sunny watched as Cassie awkwardly climbed on top of Nightmare and settled in the saddle. With her small stature, it was not that easy to accomplish.

'...I should adjust the stirrups.'

That ordinary thought finally broke his dazed state. Commanding his Shadows to disembark, he walked over to the edge of the deck and jumped down.

He was the last one to set foot on the white sand of the misty beach.

'I really seem to have traveled to the past. Or is it an illusion? Then again, that vision of death might have been an illusion instead. A vision... did I receive a prophetic vision meant for Cassie, somehow?'

His mind was in turmoil.

...Which was why Sunny flinched and took a step back when a human figure suddenly revealed itself from the fog. He had completely forgotten about the Sin of Solace.

'Right... that bastard scared me the last time, too. Now he's going to glare at me silently.'

The Sin of Solace did, indeed, glared at him silently for a moment.

But then, the apparition smirked and said in a contemptuous tone:

"You know... I am actually starting to enjoy this. Let's go for another round, shall we?"

Sunny looked at him in surprise. Apart from minute changes that had happened because of his inaction, this was the first thing that went differently than how it had in the... in the previous round.

A slight frown appeared on Sunny's face.

'Why is the bastard the only exception to the rule?' Walking past the apparition, he said quietly:

"Sure. Let's go for another round."

The wraith stared at him in surprise.

As they advanced through the mist, discovered the line of footsteps in the sand, and continued toward the cliffs, Sunny was thinking feverishly.

'Is it an illusion, or have I really traveled in time? If it's the latter... then why? And what do I do now that I have?'

There was too much to think about, and not enough time. His mental state was in shambles, as well. Sunny vaguely realized that he was still in shock, but didn't know what to do about it. He was probably missing a lot of vital things in this rattled condition.

For example...

Suddenly, Sunny felt incredibly cold.

'H—how... how have I not thought about that?!'

They were already ascending the stone steps... which meant that Jet was going to be attacked by Undying Slaughter in a matter of minutes. Seconds?

'Curse it!'

His mind ignited.

Thinking as fast and best as he could, Sunny cursed himself for being such a fool. He wasted almost an entire hour trying to understand why he had been sent into the past instead of considering how to deal with the future!

Even if he was in shock after having his soul torn apart and dying in agony, there was no excuse.

'What do I do now?'

He remembered his naive thoughts bitterly. He would pull through again, somehow? It was just another gamble?

'It seems I have finally become arrogant.'

And paid a heavy price for it. The heaviest price there could be.

'Doesn't matter! There's no time to feel regret, I need to decide what to do now!'

A small, cowardly part of him instantly had an answer. The safest thing to do was to abandon Jet and save himself from having to face Undying Slaughter. He knew that he would die in that clearing... so why go there at all?

But even knowing the danger... He couldn't let Jet die.

'Go there and fight, then?'

It was not such a foolish thought. The reason why Sunny had lost the last time around was because he had dove into the battle blind and without making any preparations. Now, however, he knew exactly what enemy he would be facing... and although there was very little time left before the clash, he could at least prepare a few things.

'I still don't know enough about Undying Slaughter.'

Fighting her now would be unwise. But he did not really need to... all he had to do was grab Jet and run.

At that point, the shadow he had sent to scout ahead finally heard it. The sound of clashing steel, followed by Soul Reaper's pained scream.

Sunny gritted his teeth.

'L—let's... let's do this.'