1420 Unexpected Complications

On the far side of the island, the misty forest was less thick. The trees stood further apart from each other, and were not as tall as in the other areas. The ground, however, was more rocky and uneven. It rose and fell, forming steep hills and deep ravines — not that it mattered. Usually, terrain like that would make it hard to see a potential enemy in advance, increasing the risk of walking into an ambush...

But with the damned fog veiling everything around, why did it matter? Every kind of terrain was just as bad here.

Sunny still commanded Nightmare to slow down, afraid to encounter another chasm and plummet down without ever having a chance to stop. Flying through a thick forest at breakneck speed was already thrilling enough, and he really didn't want to fall into a nest of monstrous millipedes due to the lack of caution.

Riding the black steed through the mist, Sunny held the Guiding Light high and followed its shine.

His breathing was heavy.

Just a few minutes ago, he had fought a Corrupted Monster and killed it. The creature had almost sent him into the next revolution — it was not particularly strong, as far as Corrupted abominations went, but rather insidious.

Its camouflage was good enough to make Sunny unaware of the imminent attack right until the moment thick roots sprouted from beneath the ground, and a rotten tree that he had been riding past suddenly moved to envelop him with creaking branches.

If not for Shadow Step, Sunny might have been caught, swallowed, and digested by the creature without being able to put up any resistance. Since he managed to escape its grasp, though, a short and violent clash followed.

The abomination looked like a monstrous tree and was as resilient as a tree. It had no organs to destroy and no blood to spill. Even after cutting it down, Sunny had to summon the Cruel Sight and burn it with divine flame — only when all the branches, the rotten trunk, and the roots of the monster had turned to ash did the Spell announce a kill.

Slaying that thing had been a lot of work... but Sunny was still satisfied

with the result. At least he learned that there were normal Nightmare Creatures on Wind Flower. If he had to face another Great abomination, his patience would have run thin.

'I feel like I'm not far from the edge of the island, now.' If so, Effie couldn't be too far away.

Unless she was not on Wind Flower...

Frowning, Sunny jumped to the ground, allowed Nightmare to turn into a shadow, and continued forward on foot.

Now that he was so close, his heart was heavy. Dark thoughts creeped into his mind.

What if he finds Effie... only to discover that he was too late? What if what he finds is her mangled body?

Sunny was not sure that he would be able to endure something like that. At least not without something inside him breaking.

Cresting another hill, he spent some time searching for a way down, and then slid down the wet moss. At the food of the hill, he used a pile of rocks to stop himself, sending a few of them flying. Then, Sunny looked up

It was then that he noticed a vague shape in the mist... And it seemed to notice him.

Almost before Sunny could react, something shot in his direction with astonishing speed. Cursing, he barely dodged the flying object. It hit the slope of the hill behind him, pierced the thin layer of soil, and struck the bedrock beneath.

The impact was so severe that it produced an explosive shockwave. A moment later, pieces of rock, dirt, and moss rained on him like hail. Sunny was already moving to attack... but then froze.

The thing that had flown past him was now embedded deeply into stone, trembling.

It was a strange-looking spear with a shaft of grey wood and a long spearhead of deep crimson color.

Since its passage had torn the veil of mist, he looked forward and saw the vague figure clearly.

In the next moment...

His eyes widened.

"Ef—Effie?! What the hell?! You almost killed me!" She stared at him in shock, too.

"Doofus?! What the... why on... how are you here?!"

Indeed, it was Ascended Raised by Wolves, huntress Athena.

She looked a bit more tan and wild than usual, covered in dirt and scratches, but there was no mistake. The dewy olive skin, the perfectly sculpted, lean muscles, the tall and beautiful figure, the long brown hair...

Effie was not clad in her Transcendent armor, instead wearing a crude garment made out of something that looked like shark sin.

And there was something different about her... Gradually lowering his gaze, Sunny answered: "How else? I came on... on a... ship..."

He stuttered and grew silent.

His mind was momentarily blank.

'Huh?'

There was indeed something different about Effie. Her entire build was different... or rather, certain parts of it. Her already generous figure had become even more outstanding, but much more glaringly than that... her belly was round and protruding forward, so much so that she was supporting it with a hand.

'Just... just how much did she eat? Gods, that gluttonous... gluttonous... woman...'

Sunny's mind was refusing to work properly.

No... the reason for why Effie's belly looked so large had nothing to do with eating too much food.

But it couldn't be...

Suddenly, he remembered a small remark that Jet had made while describing their lives as river nomads:

'Oh... and we fought plenty of Nightmare Creatures. Well, I did, at least.'

He had not paid it attention before, but now, it seemed strange. Why would Jet say that she was the only one who had fought a lot of abominations?

Staring at Effie's round belly, Sunny finally realized why. By then, his eyes were as wide as saucers.

"Effie! Why... why are you pregnant?!"

She stared at him in bewilderment, then glanced down and suddenly flinched.

"What?! When did this happen?!"

Effie's voice sounded frightened and shocked.

Then, she gave him a mischievous glance and suddenly burst with laughter.

When her bright laughter died down, Effie coughed and looked at Sunny with a sheepish smile.

"Sorry. It was a joke. Why am I pregnant? Well... how do I explain... you see, Sunny, when a man and a woman love each other very much..."