1436 Heavy Burden

Sunny was on the deck of the Chain Breaker once again. He straightened and looked into the mist, his eyes sunken.

"Doesn't work... that doesn't work. Should we abandon the caverns route?"

His bleak voice was quiet enough to not be heard by Nephis and Cassie. Although Sunny had been careful not to overwork himself too much again, the strain of surviving... and failing to survive... on Wind Flower was slowly getting to him.

It was hard, to keep himself from succumbing to hopelessness and numbness. Sunny had known many bitter defeats, but being crushed over and over again still burdened him. More than that, his mindset was slowly deteriorating into not caring about whether he lived or died at all...

Why would he care if all that waited after death was another revolution, and then another, and another, endlessly and without reprieve?

If there was one thing that kept him grounded and served as an anchor for his sanity, it was the fact that watching his companions die was always an agony. Even knowing that they would be reborn in the loop did not ease the pain and desperation Sunny felt each time he micalculated and led them to their deaths.

If he was by himself, he probably would not have given up... but his focus and determination would have deteriorated much faster.

He had to take the members of the cohort away from Wind Flower, though... Jet, Cassie. Effie and her baby. Nephis...

That thought kept him motivated.

He was the only one who could. Due to a random twist of fate, Sunny possessed a cursed sword which made him able to remember the previous revolutions. That alone placed him ahead of everyone else on the island... in fact, simply knowing that they had to escape was already half of the victory.

It was just that the other half had turned out to be insurmountable. And it was hard, to carry all that burden all by himself.

"No, the cavern route is the safest, which makes it the fastest." Sunny remained silent for a few moments.

"It's simple. Since nothing works, I have to explore more possibilities... the Mirror of Truth, that is the answer. I should make it reflect more Nightmare Creatures... ah, but not Beasts, and Monsters, and Demons. Only Devils and those above them will do."

Sunny was motionless, going over the collection of horrors stored in his mind.

There were not that many beings on Wind Flowers that both fit the criteria and could be caught in the reflection of the Mirror of Truth without getting him killed. The Cavern Terror was one of them... the creature hidden in the port, as well, although escaping from it alive was not easy...

Of course, there were Undying Slaughter and Devouring Beast, as well. But they were even more deadly.

Suddenly, a strange disharmony entered his thoughts. Sunny frowned and tried to discover its source... what was it? Why did he feel that something was wrong?

It took him some time to realize that Cassie and Nephis, who were supposed to be discussing the Guiding Light behind him, were strangely silent.

Looking back, he saw that the blind girl had already used the sacred staff to determine where Effie was located. Nephis was studying the vague shapes of the dark cliffs.

His frown deepened.

'It... changed? Why?'

Sunny was sure that they had not heard him muttering to himself. Had he done something else to affect the usual flow of events, or failed to do something to keep it stable?

'I don't think I did, though...'

Sunny rubbed his face. Perhaps his posture or presence influenced Cassie and Nephis without him noticing?

"Sunny?"

He shook off his confusion and looked at Nephis.

"Yeah... I'm fine. Actually, there's something I need to do. Stay calm. I'll summon the Fragment of Shadow Domain in a moment..."

The world was devoured by the primordial shadow once again. Sunny mounted Nightmare and left the Chain Breaker once again. He found Jet and brought her back once again.

This time, he did not use the Mirror of Truth to copy Soul Flame and heal her right away, though. Although it was a little cruel to Jet, Sunny could not allow himself to waste the miraculous Memory that way. Her wounds would be healed by Nephis in a couple of hours, regardless.

Everything went as usual... however, when he returned to the Chain Breaker, the strangeness continued. The conversations seemed to be the same, but something felt out of place.

It was only when they reached the bone orchard and started rending the Hollow Butterfly that he finally figured out what was wrong. Jet and Nephis were resting while he and Cassie were busy splitting the tough chitin on the Great Monster...

And the blind girl seemed strangely distracted, moving slower than she was supposed to.

'Right. It all started when she failed to make her usual remarks about the Guiding Light.'

He had only noticed that Cassie was behaving strangely that late because she usually kept quiet while the others talked. Her subtle reactions, however, had been different from the familiar ones all along.

'What is going on?'

Sunny stopped what he was doing and stared at Cassie with a slight frown. Eventually, he asked:

"Cassie? Is everything alright with you?"

She froze, then turned to face him and lingered for a few moments. "Yes? I think so... I just have this strange feeling."

He raised his eyebrow.

"What feeling?"

It was an ominous sign that their oracle was having a strange feeling. Cassie's premonitions were never trivial, and were usually the harbingers of terrifying events. But what could have triggered this premonition?

Nothing was supposed to change on Wind Flower, unless Sunny was the one to change it.

He waited tensely to hear her response, all kinds of dreadful theories flashing in his mind.

However...

When Cassie finally answered, all those thoughts disappeared, replaced by stunned silence.

She shrugged.

"It's nothing serious. I just can't get rid of this feeling of deja vu."

Sunny stared at without saying anything.

'Deja vu?'

Wasn't that... wasn't that how he himself had first come to recognize the twisted nature of time on Wind Flower?

He blinked.

Was Cassie becoming aware of the loop, too?