1442 Elusive Duo

Going straight to the tower might have saved Sunny and Cassie a lot of time, but it was also the most dangerous direction. Not only was Undying Slaughter prowling somewhere in the mist, but Devouring Beast was also not far away.

There were other horrors waiting for them in the forest, as well.

Luckily, there might not have been a more elusive duo than Sunny and Cassie in two worlds. With the blind girl riding Nightmare, they could move swiftly in the darkness. Since she was sharing his senses, they did not need to carry a source of light with them, thus avoiding unnecessary attention.

Sunny could detect most dangers far in advance, and Cassie's

supernatural intuition warned them about those threats that could not be perceived that easily. Added to the extensive knowledge of the island, that allowed them to avoid confrontations with its prisoners and advance inland stealthily.

Of course, it would not have been possible without the Fragment of the Shadow Realm. The silent understanding they shared also played a large role.

At some point, Cassie patted Nightmare on the shoulder. The black stallion slowed down and then halted, standing motionlessly in the flowing mist. Sunny leaned against the trunk of an ancient pine and listened to the muffled sounds of the forest, focused and calm.

"Do you sense a threat?" Cassie nodded.

"Something is approaching."

He swiped the surrounding woods with shadow sense, but did not find anything. Nevertheless... the forest suddenly seemed more eerie than it had been before. Sunny frowned, contemplating which of the horrors of misty island could be lurking nearby.

His expression dimmed.

"Can we evade it?"

The blind girl frowned, then hesitantly shook her head. "I don't think we can. There is not enough time." Sunny sighed and raised the Sin of Solace.

"We fight, then."

It was a shame... he really thought that they would be able to reach the Seeker's Tower alive.

Before Sunny could prepare himself for the inevitable — and most likely fatal — clash, Cassie was suddenly surrounded by a whirlwind of sparks. Even the familiar motes of light seemed dimmer in the darkness of the Fragment.

The blind girl remained silent for a few moments, focusing on something, then said quietly:

"We can't evade it, but we can try to lure it away."

Soon, the blade mannequin Echo weaved itself from light and hurried into the mist, intentionally producing a lot of noise. Cassie pointed in a different direction.

"Let's go!"

They rushed away, wanting to create as much distance between themselves and the unseen danger as possible. Sunny kept tracing the Echo with shadow sense... less than a minute later, something strange happened to it.

He still could not sense any movement in the shadows, but the blade mannequin suddenly halted. Its steel body convulsed, and then slowly rose above the ground, thrashing wildly. One of its arms fell into the moss, shattered and torn. Then, another... this one took a moment more to land.

Soon, pieces of torn metal rained from somewhere very high above. Sunny could not sense the shadow of the clockwork swordsman anymore.

It was simply gone.

A few seconds later, Cassie sighed.

"The Spell just announced that he is destroyed."

Sunny was frowning as he ran. Fortunately, the poor Echo had bought them enough time to slip away from... from whatever it was that had gotten the blade mannequin.

They could have taken a safer, but longer route. Perhaps he had been hasty in his decision to waste as little time as possible.

Despite Sunny's doubts, they did reach the tower alive. Cassie had to sacrifice the sybil Echo, as well, but they made it to the heart of the island in one piece. Standing between the ancient pines at the edge of the killing field that surrounded the black cliff, the two of them remained silent for a while.

Both were remembering the harrowing sight of the long tendrils descending from the mist to harvest their lives.

'That harvester... how do we avoid being noticed by it?'

Sunny had considered flying across the moat before, but now he did not dare to. The bridge seemed to be the only way, but even then... they would be in the open.

'Or we can swim.'

Sunny glanced at the rushing water and suddenly felt a chill running down his spine. Something told him that nothing could return from its depths alive.

He contemplated for a few moments, then sighed.

"I can manipulate the mist to hide us from the... the Harvester. We should be able to reach the bridge unseen."

Cassie tilted her head a little.

"But can we cross the bridge?"

The figures of the frozen Nightmare Creatures suggested otherwise.

Sunny studied the dark silhouettes with a grim expression, then concentrated on the black cliff itself.

"There. There are runes carved into the rock. Do you recognize them?"

If there was indeed an enchantment protecting the tower, then Cassie was the only one who could decipher it. Sunny knew a bit of runic sorcery, as well, but his knowledge of it was nowhere near that of the blind seer.

She did not answer for a while, thinking. Eventually, Cassie frowned.

"It is... hard to say. We can only see a part of the inscription from here. Does it encircle the entire cliff?"

Sunny nodded.

"I've passed the tower from various directions in the past, and every time, I saw these large runes carved into the cliff."

Cassie lingered for a moment.

"Then let's not hurry to reach the bridge yet. We should circle the tower and study the runes first."

They proceed with just that. Staying under the cover of the forest, Sunny and Cassie slowly moved around the black cliff. A few times, they had to retreat and hide — especially so when the familiar sounds of snapping trees resounded from the mist, informing them that Devouring Beast was wandering somewhere nearby.

In the process, both of them observed the progress of the other party tensely. Miraculously... Nephis and Jet emerged from the caverns alive. The two of them must have managed to slay the Corrupted Terror, after all. Judging by how bloodied their armor was, the battle had been a terrible one. Nevertheless, there were no wounds under all that blood —they had already been healed by Nephis.

Saint and Fiend were also in one piece, although the latter seemed worse for wear.

Guided by Sunny's shadow, Neph and Jet were now cautiously traversing the misty forest.

Around the time they found Effie — and were almost impaled on her spear — Sunny and Cassie finally returned to where they had started from. The blind girl dismounted and was now sitting on the ground, tracing unfamiliar runes in the wet soil. There was a frown on her face.

"Strange..."

Sunny waited for a long as he could, then finally asked: "Well? Can you make sense of them? Is it an enchantment?" Cassie hesitated for a while.

"It... seems to be. However, it's unlike any enchantment I have ever seen before — here in the Tomb of Ariel, in the Kingdom of Hope, and anywhere across the Dream Realm."

Her expression was suddenly troubled.

"There are runes that do not seem to be a part of the enchantment, as

well. The Spell does not translate them, so they are not exactly words. However... they are, in a way. It's like a code. Or a puzzle, I guess?"

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

"Can you solve that puzzle?"

Cassie nodded.

"Yes. It's not particularly hard... anyone knowledgeable in runic sorcery would be able to."

He glanced at the black cliff, thought for a few moments, and asked:

"So what do these runes say?"

The blind girl hesitated.

"It's a bit strange. I don't quite understand the meaning, but if I'm reading it correctly... they say..."

Cassie remained silent for a bit, then turned to him and shrugged.

"I am the tower that Aletheia of the Nine built."