1444 New Ways to Die

Not only were the Nightmare Creatures on the bridge coming back to life, but the thunderous noise created by Sunny's arrows had to have attracted all kinds of abominations from the depths of the island. The enchantment surrounding Aletheia's Tower might have been destroyed, but the situation was dire.

He could already hear the pines falling in the forest, which meant that Devoring Beast was approaching them.

'Damnation.'

Sunny stared at the stirring Nightmare Creatures for a moment, then dismissed his bow and dashed to Cassie.

"Sorry!"

Grabbing the blind girl by her thin waist, he effortlessly lifted her off the ground and jumped into the saddle. A moment later, Nightmare had already left the cover of the trees and was flying toward the bridge.

"S—Sunny?! W—what..."

The mist boiled and surged into the killing field, obscuring the swift silhouette of the black stallion. Sunny hoped that this would protect them from the being that hid in the skies... but he couldn't be sure.

Pressing Cassie against himself so that she was not thrown off Nightmare's back, he readied the Sin of Solace.

"Either we get inside the tower, or die. So... hold on tight!"

The abominations on the bridge had already caught their scent. Sunny had hoped to slip past them before the creatures fully regained their senses, but it seemed that he had been too optimistic. There was only a second or two left before Nightmare reached the moat... and yet, there was already a Great Nightmare Creature eyeing them as it blocked the way.

'Curse it!'

At the last second, Sunny gave his steed a command to turn left.

At the same time, the deep darkness surrounding them stirred and came alive, surging forward like a tide. Just when Nightmare would have plunged into the rushing water, the darkness solidified, turning into a

tangible surface.

A bridge built of shadow had appeared to the side of the stone bridge, and they were already crossing it. Sunny saw something fly at him from the direction of the Great abomination and lashed out with the Sin of Solace — the impact was powerful enough to almost tear his arm off, but he did manage to deflect it.

A moment later, they were past the Nightmare Creatures. Sunny even imagined that they could actually make it... But then, something was wrong.

The further Nightmare advanced across the moat, the worse Sunny felt. His body had somehow turned weak and frail. His thoughts turned cloudy...

'What... what is happening?'

Cassie's golden hair, which was flying into his face a moment before, was now white for some reason. Pressed against him, her body felt unnaturally thin and fragile.

The Sin of Solace slid out of his grip and fell into the water.

Looking down in confusion, Sunny stared at his hand. His skin had turned wrinkly and translucent, like that of an old man... it was just like Ananke's hand when he had first seen her.

His teeth felt loose in his gums, as if ready to fall out.

"Sunny..."

Cassie's faint voice was almost too quiet to hear.

The other side of the moat was so close.

But before they could reach it, Sunny's vision suddenly turned blurry. Then, he was standing on the deck of the Chain Breaker once again.

Turning slowly, Sunny looked at Cassie. The blind girl was standing behind him, shivering. Her beautiful face was deathly pale, but her hair...

It was golden once again.

He slumped against the railing, let out a shaky breath, and forced out a smile.

"I guess... we really do have to use the bridge." She nodded slowly.

"Yes. Let's... try to make it, this time." \*\*\*

Sunny had always wanted to die of old age, but definitely not in such a cruel manner. It seemed that his previous suspicion that diving into the moat would be lethal was correct — however, as it turned out, passing above it was just as deadly.

'At least now, I know that Masters can die of old age, too.'

It was actually an interesting piece of information. It was common knowledge that Awakened had longer lifespans than mundane humans, but no one really knew by how much. The Spell had only descended on the waking world around half a century ago, after all, and it took a while for the first Ascended to appear. The first Saints appeared even later, after Sunny had been born.

'I'll put it in my exploration report... if we ever make it out alive...'

Not letting the eerie death slow them down, Sunny and Cassie made another attempt to enter Aletheia's Tower.

In the end, it took them a dozen more revolutions to succeed. Getting near the water flowing in the moat was a death sentence, since time around it went utterly insane. Flying was suicidal because of the Harvester. So, the only way to reach the black cliff was to cross the stone bridge.

However, the Nightmare Creatures trapped on it were too deadly. As soon as the enchantment was destroyed, they were released from its hold and turned their attention to the two humans. Sunny and Cassie tried fighting them, and perished. Then, they tried to evade them, but were caught and killed.

Eventually, it was Sunny who came up with a way to deal with the abominations. With Devouring Beast on their heels and the Nightmare Creatures in front of him, he simply made sure that the former and the latter collided with each other before they caught him and Cassie.

Then, while the bestial giantess was dismantling the dreadful abominations behind them, Sunny and Cassie stealthily ascended the steps cut into the cliff. There was more deadly magic on those steps, but after dying to it several times, they finally found a way to reach the

tower.

Finally, they stood in front of its gates. They were shut tightly, and even if Sunny had a key, there was no lock to insert it. Luckily, he was already familiar with this type of door. Placing his hand on the surface of the gate, he sent his essence flowing into it.

The ancient door opened slowly.

Hearing a furious roar chase after them from the bottom of the cliff, Sunny did not waste any time. Grabbing Cassie's hand, he entered Aletheia's Tower and pulled the blind girl inside.