1458 One Last Time

Sunny waited for a moment, then slowly straightened and looked around. The white mist of Aletheia's Island surrounded the Chain Breaker...

'The last time. This is the last time.'

He turned around and nodded at Cassie. Without wasting a single moment, she climbed into Nightmare's saddle and disappeared into the fog. Sunny, meanwhile, faced Nephis and asked.

"Are you alright?"

She was looking in the direction where Cassie had gone to with a frown on her tired face. Hearing his question, Nephis turned.

"...I'm fine. I can still fight."

He smiled.

"That's what I wanted to hear. Before you ask where Cassie had gone, let me explain a few things."

Taking a step closer, Sunny placed his hand on Neph's shoulders and leaned forward a little.

...Her alabaster face had suddenly turned even more motionless than it usually was.

"First of all, this is not the first time we are having this conversation. You just don't remember all the previous ones. The vortex surrounding this island, you see, is not a mundane vortex. It is a whirlpool of time, and so, time moves in a circle on this island. The same day repeats itself endlessly, and we have lived it dozens of times already."

Neph's eyes widened slightly.

A different person would have been stunned into silence by such a bizarre proclamation, but not her. Only a few moments later, she asked evenly:

"How come you remember, and I don't, then?"

Sunny pointed to her sword.

"It's because of the Sin of Solace. It remembers, and so, I've come to remember as well. After a while, Cassie did, too. Which is both a blessing and a curse. Neph... believe it or not, we have severely underestimated how dreadful of a hell this island is. We've already died countless times, each death more terrible than the last. Cassie, you, me... each of us was killed over and over again."

Nephis studied his face with a hint of indignation on her pale face. Before she could retort, though, Sunny grinned.

"However! That is in the past. This time, we have a plan — one that will allow us to break the loop, save Jet and Effie, and escape this hellish place once and for all. You just need to trust me... well, and fight like your life depends on it. Can you do that?"

She remained silent for a moment, then nodded slowly.

"Sure. But... as you can tell, my essence is utterly exhausted. I'm not exactly in the best shape."

He smiled.

"That's alright. Don't worry... you still look beautiful."

Seeing her face turn entirely motionless again, Sunny grinned and added:

"Oh, right. By the way, did I mention that Effie is pregnant?"

Finally, Neph's stoic expression cracked.

A moment later, her rattled voice resounded in the fog:

"W—what?!"

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This time, they did not wait for Cassie and Jet before leaving the Chain Breaker. Mere minutes after the blind girl rode Nightmare into the mist, Sunny and Nephis jumped down to the beach and set out east, in the direction of the bone orchard.

As Sunny walked, a vague figure appeared from the fog, almost scaring him.

The Sin of Solace looked bored.

"You still haven't given up? How pitiful. Or... wait! Did you really convince yourself that you would succeed this time? What a fool. You'll just die again... your friends will die again... it's hopeless. There is no escape."

Not even sparing the wraith a glance, Sunny walked past it. The apparition laughed and shouted at his back:

"Or, better yet! You might actually destroy the loop, only to watch your

friends die anyway! Forever, this time. Wouldn't that be a perfect ending for this tired farce?"

'What a bastard. Go die in a ditch!'

Shaking his head, Sunny continued walking.

With Saint moving in the vanguard and Fiend guarding the rear of their small formation, they made swift progress. As they walked, Sunny explained a lot of things to Nephis.

"...And so, that is what we must achieve today."

She remained silent for a while, thinking. Eventually, Nephis sighed.

"I see."

He had poured a lot of information on her, most of it utterly stunning. From the nature of Aletheia's Island to the truth about the Divine Realms, from the role that the Mad Prince had played in their journey to the true motives of the Six Plagues... it had to be a lot to take in. Sunny wasn't surprised that Neph was keeping quiet.

What was she thinking about?

After a few minutes spent in silence, Nephis finally looked at him and said, her voice even:

"It must have been hard on you."

Sunny raised an eyebrow, then smiled faintly.

"Well, yes. It wasn't easy."

Looking away, she lingered for a moment, and said:

"It must have been hard on me, as well."

Sunny's smile slowly disappeared.

'It must have been. Yeah...'

He knew it very well. No matter how torturous his deaths had been... in the end, watching his companions die had been so much more painful. Nephis did not remember any of the previous revolutions — but that did not mean that she had not lived them.

Every time Sunny had ventured into the mist and never returned, she would have learned of his deaths from the runes. She would have had a reason to keep an eye on them, after all, unlike him.

And so, she would have lived the rest of each revolution knowing that he had been killed.

Walking slightly behind him, Nephis took a deep breath.

"Sunny... I'll make sure that none of us dies, this time."

She paused, and then added quietly, white sparks igniting in her eyes:

"If this is really the last time, we might as well burn this entire island down."

He stared at her in amusement.

"How are you going to burn anything down? Get some essence back first, you maniac."

Nephis coughed.

After a few moments of silence, she suddenly asked in a perfectly even voice:

"So... in all these revolutions... has something else happened? For example... between us?"

Sunny glanced at her nonchalantly.

'Has it ever...'

After a few moments of silence, he shrugged.

"Well. You made me breakfast once. With dessert."

He could have sworn that Nephis almost stumbled.