1466 Hidden Chamber

Sunny and Effie approached them quietly.

"Hey! Long time no see!"

Effie's energetic voice echoes across the canyon, prompting a weak response from the three Masters. Cassie flinched slightly, while Nephis and Jet turned to look at them with dim expressions. After a moment of silence, Soul Reaper forced out a smile.

"Ah. It's you, glutton... yeah, it's good to see you too."

The three were clearly shaken by their experience in the overgrown shrine. Sunny only knew that the creature that dwelled there was powerful and ancient — even Wind Flower did not know much about it, except for the fact that it did not possess a physical body. Therefore, Jet's glaive and Neph's purifying flames were their best bet to destroy it.

With Cassie's supernatural intuition and affinity to revelations, as well as Saint's dark blade, they stood a good chance of, if not prevailing against the shrine horror, then at least getting the enchantment key and escaping alive.

Walking over to the three Masters, Sunny studied their conditions for a few moments, then turned to Cassie:

"Did you get it?"

She nodded slowly and raised a hand. On it lay a strange gemstone engraved with countless runes. Unlike the soul crystal of the Guiding Light, this gemstone seemed to absorb light, not produce it.

The enchantment key.

Sunny let out a long sigh.

"...Good."

Then, fascinated, he asked in a curious tone:

"What was the creature inside the shrine like?"

Cassie shivered slightly and lowered her head.

"I... don't really want to talk about that thing. Right now."

Judging by the heavy expressions of Neph's and Jet's faces, they felt the same.

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

'Just how bad was it?'

Nephis was so out of it that she had not even reacted to Effie's protruding belly.

Nevertheless, he did not press the topic. The three of them had experienced all kinds of terrible things and faced all sorts of harrowing creatures... if they were that shaken by what had happened in the overgrown shrine, it must have been pretty bad. If so, he should be satisfied by the fact that they had made it out alive.

Cassie's two Echoes were nowhere to be seen, though. Hopefully, they were just damaged and not destroyed.

"Alright, then. Let's go... we should hurry."

They lingered for a while, then rose silently.

Soon, the cohort traversed the deep chasm and entered the caverns. The Terror that had created them was already dead — Cassie's group had slayed it on the way to the shrine. Sunny navigated the system of caves, following his memory. After a long time, they stopped near the wall of a cave that did not seem different from all the other ones they had passed.

However, this one was special.

Sunny remained motionless for a few moments, then looked up with apprehension. Eventually, he took a step to the side and sent his shadows to augment Saint.

"If you will..."

The graceful knight spared him an indifferent gaze, then walked forward and delivered a devastating blow to the wall of the cave. A net of cracks spread from the point where her gauntlet had struck the weathered rock.

Saint did not stop there, though. Without wasting any time, she bombarded the wall of the cave with crushing blows, each sending a thunderous boom traveling through the caverns.

Sunny covered his ears and winced. By his side, the other members of the cohort did the same. Only Fiend just stood there and stared, dim flames burning in his eyes.

Eventually, the wall collapsed, revealing an empty space beyond. White mist streamed into the cave through the opening, as well as a few thin streams of water.

Sunny gently pulled Nephis away from them.

"Follow me."

The open space beyond the broken cave wall... was the chasm of the tower's moat.

Now that the water was gone, it was empty. The deadly field of twisted time had disappeared, as well. In other words, they did not have to cross the enchanted bridge anymore — instead, they could cross the moat wherever they wished.

There was also no need to traverse the central area of the island, which teemed with harrowing Nightmare Creatures by now. Instead of risking their lives in the misty forest, the cohort had come to the black cliff from below.

They exited the caverns through the breach made by Saint, descended to the bottom of the moat, and made their way to its other side. Then, they scaled its vertical wall and climbed out of the chasm near the stone steps leading to the gate of the tower.

The wide bridge was now behind them, the terrifying abominations frozen on it still standing motionless. The runes carved into the sides of the cliff were still intact.

The cohort ascended the stone steps without looking back. Sunny opened the gate of Aletheia's Tower and let everyone inside, then closed it behind them.

Turning around, he saw that Nephis, Jet, and Effie had frozen, looking at the corpse of the Great Tyrant with complicated expressions. He could understand how they felt... he had been quite the same the first time he saw the dreadful corpse, after all.

Sunny sighed.

"It's dead. Don't worry..."

He told them not to worry, but was feeling agitated himself. Sunny was almost surprised that they had made it so far... the bone orchard, the caverns, the blood lake, the overgrown shrine — all of these steps could have ended in their deaths.

And yet, somehow, the plan he and Cassie had concocted went without a hitch. All the deaths they had experienced on this nightmarish island had not been for nothing, it seemed. Now, all that was left was to gain access to the secret chamber of the tower.

And destroy the loop.

Glancing at Cassie, he nodded and walked to the center of the hall. She followed, holding the enchantment key in her small fist.

When the two of them found themselves directly below the corpse of the Great Tyrant hanging from the ceiling, there was a strange sound, and the stones beneath their feet suddenly moved. That had never happened before... because they had never had the runic gemstone with them.

As the other members of the cohort approached, the floor of the tower rearranged itself, revealing a narrow staircase. Without saying anything, they descended into the basement of Aletheia's Tower.

There, a small spherical chamber was carved into the rock. Its walls were covered with sheets of polished metal, its surface etched with countless runes.

At the center of the chamber... Sunny's eyes widened a little.

A large, jagged piece of black rock was hovering in the air, radiating a sense of cold. It did not look special in any way... except for the fact that it was very similar to the Estuary Key.

In fact, he would not be surprised if his little chunk of black stone and this larger one had come from the same source.

'...What the hell?'

While Sunny was standing still, his thoughts in turmoil, Cassie silently approached the hovering boulder and walked around it. Eventually, she stooped, noticing a socket on the weathered black surface.

The socket perfectly fit the size of the runic gemstone she was holding in her hand.

The blind girl lingered, then turned to face them.

"I... I am going to insert the key now."

The members of the cohort nodded solemnly.

Cassie hesitated for a bit more, then gently pushed the gemstone into the socket.

Nothing happened for a few moments.

Then, the levitating piece of black rock trembled slightly... and fell to the floor of the chamber. It collided with the metal sheet and rolled a few times, raising a loud clangor.

When the echoes of the collision subsided, the cohort was left in dead silence.

Sunny took a deep breath. He could feel it — something had just changed about Aletheia's Island. A vague feeling that had been pressing down on his mind for so long that he had grown used to it was gone.

They... they actually did it.

They broke the cycle of twisted time that had reigned this place for centuries.

The loop was gone.