1467 Just Like That

The members of the cohort remained silent for a few long moments, staring at the chunk of black rock with complicated expressions. Perhaps for most of them, what had just happened in the small spherical chamber did not hold a lot of meaning... but for Sunny and Cassie, it did.

Especially for him.

Letting out a shaky breath, Sunny suddenly felt like his legs were about to give out. Taking a step back, he swayed slightly and lowered himself to the first step of the narrow stairs. His eyes were still glued to the fallen black stone, but his gaze had become distant.

Cassie leaned on the Guiding Light, her face motionless. Nephis, Jet, and Effie watched them silently.

After a while, the huntress finally spoke:

"So... it's done? Just like that?"

Sunny looked up at her, struggling to answer.

'Just like that?'

She made it sound as if it had been easy. Well, of course... she had just learned about the existence of the loop this morning, and it was gone before dusk.

For him, however...

The memories of the countless harrowing deaths he had experienced and witnessed on Aletheia's Island flooded Sunny's mind. That first time being cruelly executed by Undying Slaughter... the hopeless despair of watching Devouring Beast's giant hand descend from the mist... and so much more.

All of it was behind him now, but not gone. Sunny wished he could have forgotten all this torment, like he had forgotten most of the nightmares about the Kingdom of Hope. But he couldn't. These memories were going to haunt him forever.

'They can stand in line and wait their turn.'

There was a vast museum of heartbreak and horror in his memory, already. What could a few more nightmares do?

He sighed, then nodded.

"Yes... the loop is destroyed. I can feel it."

Effie lingered for a moment.

"Uh... good, then. What's the plan now?"

Just as she said these words, Sunny felt something move in his soul, and a flood of essence poured into his cores. Somewhere outside the island, the seven suns were plunging into the Great River... it was dusk.

He relaxed a little.

The loop was destroyed, which was a great relief. However, it also meant that the future was once again unknown and unpredictable — Sunny felt much calmer now that his reserves of essence were swiftly replenishing.

Cassie kept quiet, so he answered Effie's question himself:

"It's like I told you before. We will hide in this tower and wait out the immediate aftermath of our actions. In the next few days, Aletheia's Island is going to be a battlefield... Undying Slaughter and Devouring Beast are going to go on a rampage."

He paused for a moment, then shook his head.

"Or rather, their rampage will continue, uninterrupted. They will either eradicate most of the Nightmare Creatures on the island, or be eradicated by them. In any case, we must ensure that these Defiled versions of you and Jet never return to the Great River."

Sunny had fought both the mist wraith and the bestial giantess many times. He died when he fought alone... he watched his companions die before being killed himself when fighting side-by-side with his allies. The Plagues were simply too dreadful to be defeated by them.

But that was inside the loop. Now that the loop was broken, the Flaws of the Defiled Saints could finally be exploited. Devouring Beast's hunger and Undying Slaughter's need to kill would become their undoing...

In theory.

In practice, it was not going to be easy to exploit these Flaws. Devouring Beast, especially, was going to have plenty of things to eat. Undying Slaughter was going to have plenty of things to kill, as well, but she could potentially expend a lot of essence in the process.

But this was a problem for another day. For now, Sunny wanted to rest.

When was the last time he slept? He couldn't even remember... which was not a good sign.

'A tired mind makes mistakes.'

He had no doubt he had made many mistakes already. Luckily, none of them had been serious enough to doom them — for now. Cassie had to be just as exhausted.

All in all, the two of them had done remarkably well, considering the situation.

Sunny took a deep breath, then stood up and looked around the spherical chamber one last time.

"For now, let's return to the first floor of the tower. We'll be spending the next few days, maybe even weeks there. We should clean it up, if nothing else."

They made their way above ground, where blood, rubble, and ghastly remains of the Great Tyrant's minions littered the floor. The Tyrant itself was still hanging from the broken ceiling, the terrible wounds dealt to it by the Serpent King in the distant past still as fresh as if they had been delivered a few hours ago.

Effie stared at the terrible corpse with apprehension.

"What is that thing, though?"

Sunny glanced at her, then forced out a smile.

"What else? That's your food for the foreseeable future."

The huntress visibly paled.

"Huh? Wait... you're not serious, are you?"

He shrugged helplessly.

"Why wouldn't I be serious? Weren't you jealous that Nephis and I feasted on the meat of a Great Monster? Well, here's an actual Great Tyrant! No need to thank me..."

Effie was so stunned that she actually stammered:

"B—but... but... wait, when was I ever jealous..."

Jet patted her on the shoulder and grinned.

"Bon appetit."

With that, the five of them went about cleaning the first floor of Aletheia's Tower. Sunny positioned several of his shadows to keep watch, knowing that this place was not as safe as it had been before. It was still impossible to cross the bridge, but the twisted currents of time that had been protecting the moat were gone now.

In theory, any Nightmare Creature could reach the tower with some effort. Getting inside was an entirely different matter, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

They cleared the rubble, incinerated the remains of the Tyrant's minions, and washed the blood off the stone floor. The interior of Aletheia's Tower had not become cozy or comforting after that, but it was already better than many places the members of the cohort had camped at in the past.

Jet and Effie, who had not spent a night on solid ground since entering the Nightmare, were especially appreciative of this stone shelter.

For once, things were looking up for the cohort.