1522 Break of Dawn

Driven to madness by wrath, Sunny was forcing his mangled body to move. His mind was muddled by fury and pain, and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't stand up, for some reason.

An inferno of dark, malignant rage was consuming his aching heart.

'No, no, no!'

The dragon... the hateful worm... was laying dead on the wet stones, stolen from him. Silver blood was pouring from his opened maw and obliterated eye, slowly spreading across the ruined courtyard. If only there had been more time... if only no one had interfered in their fight... Sunny would have been able to slay the Dread Lord himself. He knew he would.

But the dragon was gone.

And now that he was gone, Sunny's suffocating fury needed a new target.

'Kill, kill them... kill them all... I'll kill them...'

He could sense several shapes through the shadows. The loathsome fly that had stolen his prey, the crippled fiend who had come from the water, and a macabre abomination that had been spawned by a tainted shard of the fiend's soul.

And the most odious of them all... a pale young man wearing a nebulous black mantle, who was looking at him mockingly with a derisive smile.

"Look at you, fool. Mad as a hatter. How pathetic... how familiar... how distasteful..."

Sunny growled.

The abomination was staggering toward him, piercing him with the demented gaze of its rotten eyes. Glass claws were growing from its stump, and twisted fangs were growing from its bloodied maw.

He grinned.

'Good, good...'

He couldn't stand up, for the moment, so the creature was graciously delivering itself to him. Sunny was going to enjoy tearing it apart.

But before he could, a slender rapier pierced the abomination's chest, and a radiant hand grasped its head. The creature glowed with incandescent light, being incinerated from within, and then shattered like a broken mirror.

He howled, his hoarse voice full of indescribable rage.

'No, no!'

Another... they stole another from him! Thieves, traitors! He had to kill them, rip them, savage them, break them!

As Sunny growled and tried to push his mangled body up, someone approached and halted a mere step away. He looked up and saw a breathtaking young woman looking at him silently from above, her beautiful face devoid of emotion. Her silver hair was moving slightly in the wind, and radiant sparks were dancing in her cold grey eyes.

"I'll... destroy you..."

Sunny tried to summon the shadows to rip the young woman's body apart, but his muddled mind failed to contain the intricate patterns of the manifested forms. The vicious shadow hands crumbled and dissolved before taking shape.

The young woman studied him for a few moments, then kneeled and put a hand on his head, caressing his hair.

Her touch made Sunny shudder.

'I have to... kill her...'

The visage of the smoke streaming from the abomination's burned eyes flashed in his mind and disappeared, drowning in the sea of madness.

But, somehow... even though Sunny wanted nothing more than to see the young woman die, he hesitated for a moment.

It was then that she spoke, her voice sounding both strange and familiar.

"Sunny..."

He gathered his strength, preparing to lunge at her.

"Dismiss your crown."

He had not thought that a more profound rage existed, but when he heard those words, his entire being ignited with a harrowing fury. The thought of surrendering his crown filled Sunny with a boundless ocean of frenzied wrath, deep and dark enough to be unfathomable.

That wrath was far more scorching than the rage he had felt toward the odious dragon, and vaster than even the hatred he felt toward the thieves who had stolen his prey.

However...

The authority contained in the voice of the young woman was absolute.

It was nothing like the cold commands of the dragon, which had been oppressive and domineering to the point of being irresistible... but only nearly so.

There was a boundless abyss between nearly and absolutely.

Drowning in fury and at the same time filled with horror, Sunny felt his very soul respond to the young woman's order, following it obediently, as if he had no will of his own. He felt broken and violated, which only made his bloodlust and desire to kill explode more.

Despite that, though, he still could not even attempt to disobey.

'She... she ordered me.'

The Crown of Twilight dissolved into a whirlwind of sparks. And with it, Sunny's frenzied wrath disappeared as well. Leaving behind only horror.

Confusion, too... and pain.

Finally, the pain he had been ignoring caught up with Sunny, making him shudder and let out a tormented groan.

He was consumed by agony.

But then, the hand resting on his head ignited with a soft glow, and its comforting warmth chased the pain away. A wave of cleansing white flame spread through his body, mending his broken flesh and healing his harrowing wounds.

The sense of relief it brought was overwhelming. Which only added to Sunny's confusion.

Soon, he was left laying on the ground, disoriented and feeling lost. Everything that had happened since he activated the [King's Resentment] enchantment of the Crown of Twilight was like a blur, but the memory of it remained, etched into his mind.

'...What happened?'

Sunny felt incredibly tired, but he forced himself to raise his head.

Nephis was kneeling in front of him... wearing the Starlight Legion Armor, for some reason. Her striking grey eyes were calm and cold.

Behind her, the corpse of the Dread Lord towered above the ruined courtyard of the floating fortress. Kai was laying on a pile of rubble, heavily wounded. Mordret was there, as well, staring at the dead dragon with a grim expression.

The world was dark, with only a few rays of pale sunshine pouring through the veil of ashen clouds.

There was something else, as well... a black crow was perched on the remnants of the broken wall, staring down at them.

Sunny looked at Nephis, a storm of emotions raging in his heart. Noticing that he had regained his senses, she nodded simply and rose.

Turning away, she walked toward where Kai was laying, his ivory armor painted by blood. Soon, soft radiance flowed from her hands, healing the archer.

At the same time, Mordret sighed deeply and looked at Kai with a hint of resentment.

"Why did you do it? I almost had him."

Kai met his gaze somberly, and then said in a hoarse voice:

"That was why I did it."

The Prince of Nothing remained silent for a moment, then grinned with dark amusement and turned to Nephis. Waving his bloody stump in the air, he asked blithely:

"Don't I get healed?"

Her answer was cold and even:

"...Wait for your turn."

Sunny observed it all, too tired to move, and too numb to think.

Soon, two figures climbed over the pile of rubble that the wall of the fortress had turned to. They were Effie and Jet.

Effie was walking while supporting her weight with a spear, while Jet was carrying unconscious Cassie. When she appeared, both Crow Crow and the Quiet Dancer rushed to her side.

The wind tore apart the veil of clouds, and finally, the light of dawn illuminated the drowning fortress once again.

Sunny looked at the sky pensively.

A strange thought surfaced in his mind.

'We... won.'