1979. Sweet Dreams

Someplace else, Sunny slowly opened his eyes.

Pure sunshine was pouring through the tall arched windows, and the air was suffused with warmth. The sweltering heat of Godgrave was dispelled by a pleasant breeze.

The storm was long over, and the world was at peace.

His body felt refreshed and revitalized despite having been enveloped by a blissful fatigue not too long ago, and his mind was at ease. He had slept well... better than he had ever slept in his life.

Waking up in Neph's bed for the second time in a row felt quite amazing.

Of course, this time, he had not just fallen asleep atop the covers.

Feeling a tantalizing, warm softness pressing against his chest, Sunny raised his head and rested it on a hand, looking down.

Nephis was sleeping peacefully by his side, in his embrace. Her long, beautiful silver hair was scattered across the pillow, glistening in the sunlight. Her face was smooth and enchanting, more vulnerable than it had ever seemed before. Below it, her slender neck led to a round, alabaster shoulder... and beyond that, the alluring sight of her delicate clavicle was revealed, making his heart race.

To Sunny's chagrin, the rest was covered by a pristine white sheet.

Still, there was probably no sight more lovely in the entire world.

He remained motionless for a while, delighting in the breathtaking scene and listening to the subtle sound of Neph's tranquil breathing.

His mind was a little empty.

This moment, this feeling, this... closeness. He had been wanting it so desperately, and for long.

Being here, with her, was almost too meaningful to fathom.

And he did not really want to fathom it, either or anything, for that matter. He was in too good of a mood to spoil it with excessive thinking, and wished to simply enjoy the blissful beauty of the moment.

He wished that it would never end.

How fitting it was, for him to attain what he wanted so deeply in the tower of the Demon of Desire...

With a quiet sigh, Sunny lowered his head back to the pillow and closed his eyes, enveloped in Neph's smell and basking in the sensation of her warmth.

Perhaps... it was alright to sleep for a bit more.

He had almost drifted back into the gentle embrace of sleep when a tentative voice suddenly resounded in his mind:

[Uh... Sunny?]

Sunny opened one eye, startled a little and dissatisfied by the sudden interruption.

[What?]

Cassie remained silent for a few moments, then asked in calm tone:

[Are you guys coming down any time soon? Because, you know... you've been locked up there for a couple of days, already. And Nephis is technically in charge of this entire camp. There are some decisions I can't make alone.]

Cassie spoke in a composed, nonchalant tone... but that only made Sunny feel more embarrassed about what she had said.

For a split second.

Then, a satisfied smile crept up on his face.

'Why yes, we have...!

Sunny answered without opening his eyes, still lost in the softness, warmth, and sunlight.

[Sorry. Nephis is... a bit tired. We should probably let her rest for a while longer, but I'll be there shortly and lend a hand.]

With that, he decisively relaxed his mind, intending to sleep.

At the same moment, his shadow glided across the floor and slid out of the chamber.

Assuming a human form on the stairs, Sunny stretched his arms above his head, sighed sweetly, and walked down with a spring in his step.

Cassie was not too far away, buried under a pile of reports in her office. Walking in, Sunny picked one of them up and briefly studied the contents.

'Huh.

On a usual day, his mood would have been dampened, but today, Sunny simply put the report down.

"So soon?"

Cassie nodded.

"The royal legions of the Song Army are already on the move. The Seventh Legion will be departing for the battlefield in a few hours, most likely.”

She hesitated for a few moments, and then added:

"This time, Seishan and Beastmaster will be joining the fray, as well. Revel has not been seen on the surface since the battle for the Vanishing Lake, though... it is highly likely that she is leading an expedition to the Spine Ocean, already."

Sunny looked away, the darkness in his eyes growing a little bit deeper, and a little bit colder.

"What about the Sovereigns themselves?"

Cassie shook her head.

"It seems that they are not going to take direct action against each other until both of the remaining Citadels are conquered. For now, they will be serving as a deterrent for each other... although I am not sure if Ki Song can even be contained. Her power is an insidious one, after all."

Sunny nodded slowly.

"So... it is an all-out war."

Cassie leaned back in her seat and sighed.

"...Yes. We have received orders to set out west a few hours ago. Nephis, the Fire Keepers, me, Saint Tyris, and the warriors of the White Feather clan - we'll be traveling to the battlefront on the Chain Breaker."

He frowned.

Traveling aboard a flying ship was suicide in Godgrave. The only reason why such an order could have been given... was probably because of Sky Tide, who would be traveling with them.

Which also meant that she would be in the very thick of the bloodshed. Considering how important the role of Saint Tyris was, the champions of Clan Song would stop at nothing to eliminate her.

Pairing her with Nephis was probably as much for her own protection as it was for the safety of the Chain Breaker.

...And Sunny had to safeguard both Sky Tide and Nephis well.

He glanced at Cassie.

"What about the Lord of Shadows?"

She shrugged.

"I suspect that he will be summoned to participate in the first few major battles, at least. Beyond that, we will have to see what the King is planning."

Sunny smiled darkly.

He remained silent for a few moments, and then said with cold indifference:

"Let's give them war, then."

Hearing his words, Cassie nodded slowly.

"If that is the case, there are a lot of preparations that have to be done. Everyone is busy, so... I would appreciate some help."

She gestured to the pile of papers laying on her desk. Some were written in Braille, but some were not.

Cassie needed someone's eyes to read them.

Sunny silently walked to stand behind her shoulder and looked down.

He hesitated for a few moments, and then couldn't help but ask:

"Don't you have any questions, by the way? About, you know..."

"I don't!"

Cassie's swift response came before he could even finish the question.

Her voice was a little bit too loud, as well.

...Sunny could swear that the indomitable blind seer even blushed a little.

Where was her composure? Where was her nonchalance?

He grinned.

"Well, good. Don't be like Effie..."

Cassie took a deep breath.

"As if!"

He chuckled, then hesitated a little, and asked in a calm tone:

"How are things in Bastion?"

Cassie remained silent and motionless for a moment.

When she spoke, though, Sunny couldn't help but flinch.

"...Bastion is gone.”

Finally, a deep frown found its way onto his face.

"Gone? What do you mean? Have Mordret taken it already?"

Cassie sighed, then shook her head.

"No... I mean it is literally gone. The castle, the city, and the people."

Her voice grew somber:

"All that is left are the broken walls, the lake, and the shattered moon.”