2180 Reasons to Live  
  
Standing by his side, Nephis sighed and said quietly:  
  
"You seem to know so much about me, but I... I barely know anything about you. I always hesitate to ask you about your past. Because I am afraid you won't answer."  
  
She was still thinking about his knowledge of how deep her grudge against the Sovereigns went, it seemed.  
  
And other things, as well. Nephis had never pried into his past and never mentioned the oddities of his existence, but she must have been aware of how strange their relationship was.  
  
It was a relationship built on mutual attraction, passion, and affection... but it was also light and ephemeral, as if it would be dispelled by merely mentioning something they were both aware of, and therefore chose to never speak aloud.  
  
Sunny hesitated for a few moments, then smiled.  
  
"What's so good about the past? Ask me about the future, instead."  
  
Nephis smiled slightly.  
  
"Alright. What will you do once the war is over? Provided that we've won, of course... which we will, no doubt."  
  
Sunny pondered for a few moments.  
  
"Well, let's see..."  
  
He considered his plans. Honestly, the war had preoccupied him fully, so he did not know what he would do and in what order, exactly.  
  
But he had some thoughts, of course.  
  
"First of all, I have to resolve the issue of my newest Shadow... one way or the other. Then, I want to forge a shadowbound Memory for myself. I hoped to do that before the final battle, actually — who knew that bastard, Jest, would throw a wrench in my plans."  
  
Sunny scratched the back of his head.  
  
"Then, I have to take care of a few people. Aiko needs stable employment... gods know she suffered in that regard enough already. Then there's my disciple, whom I need to introduce to a good sorcery teacher — actually, that disciple of mine is so much work! Not only do I have to invent a way for her to Ascend naturally, I also have to make sure that nobody kills her to prevent that knowledge from spreading. Its going to be a real mess, no doubt. There are a few other acquaintances I want to look after, too."  
  
He looked into the distance, remained silent for a few moments, and said:  
  
"But those are just minor issues. There are a few places I must visit and a few things I must find, as well. Each expedition will be a serious undertaking. I need to explore the ruins of true Bastiоn. I also need to delve into the Jade Palace and the ice caves below Ravenheart. Then, there is the Night Garden — I've never seen it with my own two eyes, but I am sure that exploring it would become a dreadful adventure, somehow."  
  
Sunny winced.  
  
"Finally... there is the Underworld. There is something I must find there, as well. This one will be the most troublesome — not only because it's one of the most frightening Death Zones in existence, but also because that place is more or less made to render me powerless."  
  
He sighed.  
  
"Oh, right... and I have to explore the Shadow Realm. But that is just a side project."  
  
Saying that, he looked at Nephis and hesitated for a few moments.  
  
"There is one more place, as well. I haven't decided if I really want to return there, though."  
  
He was talking about the Tomb of Ariel, of course.  
  
It seemed like he was destined to come back there, considering that he had met the future version of himself in the Estuary. But then again, Sunny was currently free of the chains of fate. So, his future could very well change...  
  
Probably.  
  
Nephis studied him for a while, a hint of amusement shining in her beautiful eyes.  
  
"That is all? I see... you are an ambitious man, Master Sunless."  
  
...But there was a hint of something else there, as well.  
  
Dissatisfaction? Displeasure?  
  
Sunny fumbled for a few moments, trying to understand what exactly he had said to make her displeased.  
  
Then, it was as if a lightbulb turned on in his head.  
  
'Oh!'  
  
No, really... was he an idiot?  
  
It was not what he had said... it was what he had not said.  
  
Sunny put on his most handsome, charming smile.  
  
"Oh, t—that... you must remember that I have eight bodies now! I can do many things at the same time. Obviously, I am also planning to stay with you... my lady. I will be right there by your side, helping you consolidate your power, govern the vast expanse of the Dream Realm, battle Nightmare Creatures, and prepare for the eventual assimilation of the waking world."  
  
Nephis stared at him for a few moments and nodded with satisfaction.  
  
Then, she looked away and asked:  
  
"And prepare me delicious food?"  
  
Sunny blinked.  
  
"Why, of course."  
  
She smiled.  
  
"How about giving me massages?"  
  
He coughed.  
  
"I'm glad that you mentioned that. I was thinking of giving you one right now."  
  
Nephis laughed quietly.  
  
"What about romantic dates? Visiting theaters or going on boat rides. And sparring."  
  
Sunny was a bit confused about how sparring had ended up between visiting theaters and rowing boats, but he wisely chose not to voice his doubt.  
  
"Of course. We... will do all these things, and more, together. I wouldn't have it any other way."  
  
Nephis nodded with a smile.  
  
"Good."  
  
As he looked into the distance, though, her smile slowly dimmed, turning faint and brittle.  
  
After a while, she said:  
  
"Make sure not to die then, Master Sunless. You promised."  
  
Sunny wrapped his hand around her waist and pulled her closer.  
  
Her body felt hot against his own.  
  
"I am quite hard to kill, you know. Unless my soul is completely destroyed, I have plenty of spare bodies to retreat into."  
  
She turned her head and looked into his eyes. Her alluring lips were entirely too close.  
  
"Let us survive, then. Both of us. Shall we?"  
  
Instead of answering, Sunny leaned forward and kissed her.  
  
Their kiss was deep, intimate, and desperate...  
  
That was the best answer he could give, anyway.  
  
Who would want to die and never taste her sweet lips again?  
  
Sunny wanted to survive. He had to survive, no matter what.