2250 Flames of Hope  
The nightmare creature was about to finish off Felise, whose dress was soaked with blood by then, and Sid was not swift enough anymore to stop it…  
It was then that a soft radiance suddenly illuminated the darkness, chasing it away.  
Sid's heart raced.  
'...Lady Nephis?'  
Was she close? No… the last she had caught a glimpse of her, Changing Star was disappearing into the black sky, too far away to heal the dying soldiers with her soothing flames.  
But there was no mistaking it. Sid knew this feeling well, having relied on it to stay alive for many years, across numerous battlefields.  
Granted, the warmth spreading through her body, washing away the pain, was far more potent than usual. Her wounds were healing much faster than they usually did when bathed in the gentle white flame.  
That was not all, either…  
There was a soft radiance glowing beneath Sid's skin, and she felt… powerful, invigorated. She was brimming with power, her exhaustion gone. It was as if her body, which had already been at the pinnacle of what an Ascended could achieve, grew twice as strong. Even her soul felt empowered by the white radiance.  
'Thank the gods!'  
Activating her Aspect Abilities one after another, Sid rammed the abomination with her shoulder and sent it flying back.  
'Felise…'  
Turning to look at the Handmaiden, Sid could not help but grin.  
Felise was emanating the same soft radiance, and her wounds were healing as well.  
No…  
It was not just Felise. It was everyone.  
All around them, hundreds of soldiers — both of the Song and the Sword Domain, not that there was a difference anymore — were being nurtured by the pure white flames. Their wounds were healing, and their power grew.  
And further away, it was the same.  
Sid's eyes widened.  
'How…'  
Before, Lady Nephis could only bestow the gift of her flames to her most loyal followers, and only if they were close to her. She had developed that ability over the years,increasing its range and potency — until she could heal entire swathes of the battlefield, thousands of soldiers at the same time.  
But now, it was not just thousands… it was hundreds of thousands.  
The entire vast mass of the two great аrmies was being healed and empowered, while Lady Nephis was nowhere in sight.  
But even without seeing her, people knew who had saved them.  
Voices rose here and there, full of gratitude, relief… and hope.  
"Changing Star!'  
"It's Lady Changing Star!  
"Immortal Flame is with us!"  
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Sitting among the wounded soldiers that the petite fairy had rescued with the help of her terrifying cottage, Ray suddenly flinched.  
'What the?!'  
The interior of the cottage was suddenly much brighter than it had been before.  
All around him, people were glowing…  
He was glowing, too.  
A familiar warmth filled his body, and the scrapes he had received during the battle disappeared without a trace. The same thing was happening to Fleur, and the two Sword Army Masters that had helped them survive.  
In fact, the only person who wasn't shining with a soft radiance was their fairy hostess, who floated in the аir with a confused expression on her impishly pretty face.  
Ray recognized this feeling…  
It was the same warmth he had felt while being healed by Lady Nephis.  
Outside the window, the soldiers of the two great armies were all being mended by the white flames, descending upon the sea of Nightmare Creаtures with renewed vigor.  
One of the two Sword Army Masters was the first one to stand up, summoning his sword and pointing to the door with a determined expression.  
"My fair lady, the benevolent mistress of the cottage… I, Tristan of Aegis Rose, am eternally grateful for your kindness. However, my honor compels me to rejoin the battle now that my wounds have been healed. Please, command your cottage to open its door!"  
Ray and Fleur exchanged glances.  
Rani and Tamar were still out there, somewhere, fighting for their lives.Master Tristan must not have recovered from the blow to his head yet, considering his bizarre manner of speech, but the gist of what he had said was right...  
They could not hide away while their comrades were fighting and dying out there on the bloody battlefield.  
When Fleur nodded subtly, Ray sighed and rose to his feet.  
The rеst of the soldiers slowly stood up, as well. They turned to the hostess of the monstrous cottage and waited, their eyes were full of somber resolve.  
The petite fairy looked at them strangely.  
There was a pause, and then, she said:  
"The door has a handle, you know. You can just open it yourself…"  
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Rain stumbled and looked at Tamar with wide eyes.  
It was not every day that she saw her friend… glowing softly with a beautiful white radiance, as if she was a celestial being.  
'No, wait…'  
Why was the Feather Knight glowing, as well?  
Why was everyone?  
…Everyone except for Rain herself and the towering steel fiend, that was.  
Their wounds were healing in front of her eyes, and their movements had turned swifter, the bite of their blades deeper.  
For a few moments, the Nightmare Creatures were actually pushed back.  
Rain remained still for a moment.  
'...It has to be Nephis, right?'  
Her head turned, and she stared into the distance.  
At the grotesque, harrowing, beautiful creature that towered above the shattered battlefield like a mountain.  
Queen Song…  
Just as Rain looked at her, a fiery white meteor suddenly pierced the darkness of the black sky and crashed into the towering figure of the Queen, causing a titanic explosion to shake the entire world.  
That was Changing Star, returning from the heavens.  
But there was something different about her now.  
Rain could not see from the distance, however, she knew one thing — the Queen actually staggered from the blow despite not having been bothered by any attack befoгe.  
'W—wait…'  
A moment later, Rain forgot all about Queen Song.  
And about Changing Star, as well.It was because she sensed something… something that made her hair stand on end.  
She sensed the shadows all across the battlefield growing deeper, darker, and infinitely colder than before.  
As the great armies bathed in the warmth of the white flames, a sudden chill spread across the battlefield, as if death itself had let out a frigid breath.  
And then, the shadows moved.