2297 A Night in Bastion  
  
The sun was already setting above Bastion by the time Nephis returned to her spacious chamber at the pinnacle of the Ivory Tower. The horizon was burning with a radiant conflagration of red and golden hues, while the sky above the Mirror Lake had already turned a deep shade of indigo, many stars glistening on its satin canvas like silver jewels.  
  
The pale disc of the full moon was already rising, too…  
  
The shadows had grown deep and vague, embracing the world.  
  
As Nephis walked to the balcony and glanced down, Sunny rose from her shadow and hugged her from behind, resting his chin on her shoulder.  
  
'Long day?'  
  
Nephis inhaled deeply, then let out a long sigh.  
  
'Yeah.'  
  
Both of them watched the reflection of the moon move across the surface of the water in silence. After a while, Sunny tightened his embrace a little.  
  
'You can rest easy tonight. I am keeping watch.'  
  
In truth, Nephis did not always stay in Bastion. Most of her time was spent on various battlefields - in the nebulous waters of the Stormsea, in the harrowing reaches south of Godgrave, in the lethal cold of the frozen hell west of Ravenheart. If not there, she was leading humanity to war in the waking world, even if the world itself suppressed her powers and rejected her presence. She was fighting hard to postpone the collapse of human civilization on Earth and prepare the Dream Realm for the arrival of countless refugees who would flee their dying world. Above all else, she was relentlessly searching for more Citadels - those of them that had not been discovered and conquered yet, all in order to strengthen the Human Domain as much as she could and pave the way for the human Sovereigns who would come in her wake.  
  
Sunny was fighting, too, albeit in a more clandestine manner.  
  
But every month, when the full moon rose above Bastion, both Nephis and Sunny had to be here.  
  
That was because the Cursed Demon they had unleashed upon the true Mirror Lake to stop Mordred was still there, hidden in reflections. It stayed safely contained on the other side of the Great Mirror most of the time, but on these few days when the boundary between the two versions of Bastion grew thin, its dark influence sometimes escaped the reflection of the moon.  
  
That was why they had to keep watch.  
  
Nephis put her hands on his and leaned back a little in his firm embrace, allowing herself to be supported by his body.  
  
'I am not that tired. I slept well last night.'  
  
As Supremes, they did not have to sleep every night, or even often… in theory. However, Nephis was under constant strain because of her Flaw, so Sunny encouraged her to rest and recuperate as much as her impossibly busy schedule allowed.  
  
As the last light of day was drowning in the encroaching darkness, she asked:  
  
'How did your battle go?'  
  
Sunny chuckled.  
  
'It went fine, I guess. I managed to kill one of the Tyrants, so I will get to their nests soon. However… my Shell was dismantled in no time. I was completely overwhelmed. Even though I was stronger than any individual Nightmare Creature there, and none of them possessed a will more firm than mine, the collective willpower of the swarm was like a dark tsunami. The more I moved, the more it felt like I was drowning in a mire. It was as if a great weight was pulling me down, making my steps slower and my arms weaker. Even though I could cut them, I struggled to land my strikes.'  
  
Nephis remained silent for a while, then said thoughtfully:  
  
'It is probably because you wield your Will like a blade.'  
  
Sunny raised an eyebrow.  
  
'What do you mean?'  
  
She considered her words for a moment.  
  
'I only realized it recently, but the Will… it is not a uniform force. Rather, everyone wields their own version of it. Your will, Sunny, is especially biased. It is built entirely around your killing intent - I am not even sure if there is a difference between the two. So, you wield your Will like a weapon.'  
  
He chuckled.  
  
'What is wrong with that? What happened to 'the essence of combat is murder'?'  
  
Nephis smiled softly.  
  
'It is murder, not a weapon. The sword you wield is important, but so is the hand that holds it. Ultimately, the true weapon is your body… what I mean to say is that you should wrap your will around your entire self, not just infuse your blade with it. That way, you might find it easier to move even when facing an overwhelming foe.'  
  
Sunny thought about it.  
  
Will was a force, and like any other force, there was a difference between simply wielding it and wielding it effectively. That difference was technique. Both he and Nephis were novices in that area, so they often shared their insights and helped each other improve.  
  
'I should not be too biased toward killing in order to be a better murderer, huh?'  
  
He smiled, amused by the contradiction.  
  
'I'll try it the next time I have a chance.'  
  
Then, Sunny pulled her back gently.  
  
'Come inside. Even if you are not going to sleep, at least meditate a little. With what is happening in the Western Quadrant, you will most likely have to return to the East. We both know how draining it is to linger аt home.'  
  
They returned to the chamber and soon found themselves on a sofa, his hands still wrapped around her waist. Nephis relaxed, closing her eyes, while Sunny stared at the wall.  
  
After a few minutes of comfortable silence, she asked:  
  
'What are you thinking about?'  
  
Sunny chuckled.  
  
'Me? Oh… I was just thinking how boring our lives have gotten.'  
  
Nephis shifted and looked up at him, her gray eyes glinting with a hint of amusement.  
  
'Boring? Our lives?'  
  
He nodded.  
  
'Well, true, we are probably the busiest people in the wоrld - two worlds, even. Apart from Cassie, that is. But thinking back to how I lived before becoming Awakened, actually, there was much more entertainment involved. Bread and circuses, right? Free food and entertainment - that has been the formula for pacifying a restless population from before the Dark Times. Only it's synthpaste and network comics now, I suppose. The government wisely made both easily accessible even to people in the outskirts.'  
  
Sunny let out a sigh.  
  
'But when was the last time we read a fun book, enjoyed a comic, swooned over a drama, or watched a movie? I can't even remember. Most of these things can't even be done in the Dream Realm… granted, we seem to have electricity now. Who knows? Maybe there will be a movie theater in Bastion soon, or at least a radio station.'  
  
Nephis studied him for a few seconds, then smiled and closed her eyes again.  
  
'There might not be a movie theater in Bastion, but there are plenty of theaters. There are also printing presses in most Citadels now - nobody has published a novel yet, but there are already newspapers and magazines. Some are even publishing serials. Oh… and there will be the Dreamscape here soon, too. As long as we can figure out how to ward off the horrors who keep invading it.'  
  
She paused for a moment, then added wistfully:  
  
'But I get what you mean. To be honest, I can't remember the last time I simply listened to music, either. A radio station… having a radio station would be nice…'  
  
Sunny laughed quietly.  
  
'Three billion people are pouring their longing onto you, but little do they know, all their goddess wants is to be able to fangirl over her favorite idols in peace from the safety of her heavenly island…'  
  
Nephis smiled sleepily.  
  
'Yeah… that'd be great…'  
  
Sunny remained motionless for a bit, then carefully unwrapped his hands from around her and reached into the shadows. Instead of a sword, however, what he pulled out of them this time was a black flute.  
  
Bringing it to his lips, he blew into it tentatively and then placed his fingers on its smooth body.  
  
Soon, a soothing melody spread across the chamber gently, lulling Nephis to sleep.  
  
Night settled over Bastion. Sunny continued to play the flute while watching over the city below.  
  
Somewhere in the city, Rain was sleeping soundly, having shunned her dormitory bunk for the lavish guest room of Tamar's family manor.  
  
Beth and Quentin were having a romantic dinner on the deck of a restaurant boat.  
  
Effie and her husband were tucking Little Ling to sleep.  
  
Sunny's thoughts were peaceful and lazy.  
  
'I might not be Night of Night&Gale, but if she wants to listen to music, I can make her wish come true.'  
  
And speaking of Kai…  
  
Back in the waking world, he was about to meet the dashing Saint for the first time in a long while.  
  
Then, the two of them would go on an adventure.  
  
'Argh, it will be like the good old times. Nothing bad or awful will happen, I am sure…'