2299 Name of the Shadow   
  
Looking at the dazed expression on Kai's face, Sunny couldn't help but smile.  
  
'Ah, yes. This is it. This is the feeling!'  
  
He had been right. This adventure was going to be just like the good old days… Ignorant of the quiet satisfaction Sunny was feeling, Kai finаlly managed to shake off his confusion. He remained silent for a few seconds, then asked in a tone of pure bewilderment:  
  
'Sunny? Your name is… Sunny?'  
  
Sunny raised an eyebrow.  
  
'Yeah. Well, I guess it's technically a nickname. Why?'  
  
Kai blinked a couple of times, then smiled slightly.  
  
'No, it's just… a bit ironic, considering that you are the Lord of Shadows. Not the kind of name I would have expected the Lord of Shadows to have.'  
  
Sunny gave him a peculiar look.  
  
'You didn't really think that when I was born, my mom gave me one look and went… oh, you name will be the Lord of Shadows! Did you?'  
  
Kai tilted his head a little, a thoughtful look on his face.  
  
A few seconds later, he sighed dejectedly.  
  
'Now that you say it, it does sound preposterous. But somehow, that seems to be exactly what I thought. How stupid of me.'  
  
He smiled.  
  
'Not that I gave the matter of your birth a lot of thought… I just sort of imagined you crawling out of a dark cave as a fully formed adult or being born in a sinister dark temple somewhere in the Dream Realm. Stuff like that.'  
  
Sunny stared at him, lost for words.  
  
'I was born in a rundown public hospital a few blocks away from here. It was a completely normal birth.'  
  
Seeing Kai nod in understanding, Sunny thought for a moment, then added nonchalantly:  
  
'Well, to be fair, a huge shadow did swallow the sun the moment I was born, plunging the entire world into darkness. But that kind of stuff happens all the time, right?'  
  
Total solar eclipses were not that rare, after all.  
  
Kai fell deathly silent, for some reason.  
  
It seemed that astronomy wasn't his strong suit!  
  
Sunny glanced at him and shrugged.  
  
'If it makes you feel any better, my full name is Sunless.'  
  
The charming Saint suddenly seemed much more at ease.  
  
'Ah! Supreme Sunless. That sounds far more fitting.'  
  
Then, he gave Sunny a long look and added hesitantly:  
  
'But, I must admit… I did hear a few things about how you really look from Effie, and yet, to think that you would hide such a face behind a mask, Sunless! That mask really doesn't do you justice. So numerous things are making sense now!'  
  
Sunny raised an eyebrow.  
  
'Like what?'  
  
Kai smiled.  
  
'Well, uh, this and that. Shall we go now?'  
  
Sunny shrugged and grabbed his shoulder.  
  
'Sure… let's go.'  
  
Kai concentrated, pulling on his tether. A cold wind suddenly blew across the alleyway, toppling a pile of garbage nearby.  
  
And then… nothing happened.  
  
Sunny looked at Kai with a silent question, prompting him to cough in embarrassment.  
  
'That… I am sorry. It seems like I can't carry you to the Dream Realm. It feels like trying to move a mountain.'  
  
It made sense, in hindsight. It would have already been hard for a Saint to transport a Sovereign across the realm boundary. But Sunny was also carrying tens of thousands of shades, many of them of the Supreme Rank, within his soul - not to mention the Sacred shade of Condemnation. It was no surprise that Kai couldn't carry his weight.  
  
Shaking his head, Sunny sighed.  
  
'That's a bit inconvenient.'  
  
Kai seemed genuinely concerned.  
  
'So… will you have to traverse the Hollow Mountains? Or bring your entire Citadel to Ravenheart?'  
  
'Not really.'  
  
Kai let out a relieved sigh.  
  
'Thank the… wait. Who said that?'  
  
He spun around and looked at a second Sunny who had appeared out of shadows a moment prior. The newcomer raised a hand in greeting, then placed it on Kai's other shoulder.  
  
Soon enough, the three of them were standing in a secluded ravine in the wilderness outside Ravenheart. The second Sunny gave them a somber look, then turned away.  
  
'Well, I'll be off.'  
  
A moment later, he was gone, disappearing into the shadows.  
  
Sunny looked around with a curious expression.  
  
'Huh, The fields are this close, already?'  
  
Kai, meanwhile, stared at him with a distant expression.  
  
'Lord of Shadows… Sunless… Sunny. What just happened?'  
  
Sunny lingered for a few seconds, distracted by observing their surroundings.  
  
'Oh, that? It was just a different incarnation of mine. Actually, I have seven tethers spread around the Dream Realm. This guy is still tethered in Ravenheart, even though he's mostly staying in Bastion these days. So, he brought us here and left… poor bastard! Now, he'll either have to get Cassie to bring him back or travel all the way to the Mirror Lake on foot.'  
  
Then, he added in a grumbling tone:  
  
'But that's the least that punk deserves! Out of all of us, he has the nicest job.'  
  
Staying with Nephis and relaxing on the Ivory Island. Even though that avatar was merely a part of Sunny, Sunny still envied him… himself.  
  
Kai blinked a couple of times, slowly digesting what he heard. Then, he frowned suddenly.  
  
'Wait… but if you had a tether in Ravenheart, then why did you ask me to pick you up in NQSC?'  
  
Sunny gave him a dubious look.  
  
'Because I could? Listen, Nightingale… the logistics of operating seven bodies at the same time are no joke. The least you can do is make my life a little easier.'  
  
Kai seemed thoughtful for a few seconds, then nodded.  
  
'That must be tough. I am sorry… I must say I am surprised, though, to know that one of your incarnations has been tethered in Ravenheart all this time.'  
  
Sunny shrugged.  
  
'Why not? I lived here for four years.'  
  
Kai seemed surprised.  
  
'You did?'  
  
Sunny smiled, then nodded.  
  
'Sure. I even watched a majestic dragon fly across the sky from time to time.'  
  
Kai coughed.  
  
'Oh… I see. It's a bit peculiar, though - as you know, I have great eyesight. I think I would have noticed someone like you looking at me.'  
  
Sunny chuckled.  
  
'Well, I was living in the shadow of a mundane girl back then. I only ever came out when no one was watching.'  
  
Noticing that Kai was looking at him with a odd expression, he frowned.  
  
'What? Why are you looking at me like that?'  
  
Kai let out a long sigh, then shook his head.  
  
'It's… nothing. Are we going to take a look at the volcano first?'  
  
Sunny nodded.  
  
'Yes. You can fly there… I'll follow.'  
  
With that, he dismissed his human manifestation and hid himself in Kai's shadow.  
  
Kai shivered, for some reason, and then forced out a pale smile.  
  
'Oh… alright. Make yourself at home, I guess.'  
  
With that, he rose into the air and flew toward the fuming volcano.