2300 First Intern  
  
Teasing Kai was fun. It felt warm and familiar, so much so that Sunny even managed to forget that he was forgotten, for а while. He felt like he had gained his friend back once again… But at the same time, it was also faintly bitter. Just as bitter as being around Effie and Jet felt… and Cassie, as well, to a lesser extent.  
  
And even though the sweetness hid the bitterness most of the time, so did being with Nephis. Hiding in Kai's shadow, Sunny reflected on his strange existence.  
  
Did it even matter if the people he cared about remembered him?  
  
He was still with them. He was still there to help and protect those he wanted to protect. Some of the new relationships he had built with them were no less meaningful than what they had been in the past… almost. But it all felt incomplete. Even though Sunny wanted to deny it, he could not close his eyes to the truth.  
  
A more enlightened person might have been satisfied with simply being by their side, but Sunny was greedy. His avarice knew no bounds. He wanted to be known, remembered… and loved.  
  
However, the cold hard truth was etched into his heart, no matter how much he wanted to deceive himself. It was just as what he had realized back there, on the shattered battlefield in Godgrave, after learning that being worshiped and loved by humanity would become its doom. Nobody could truly love him… because nobody could truly know him.  
  
'Argh. How come I am suddenly in such a grim mood?'  
  
In truth, Sunny did not feel the bitterness most of the time. He did not feel like an outsider when spending time with Rain or weaving elaborate schemes with Cassie. He did not feel like the affection Nephis felt for him insincere… even if it was not quite as deep as the affection he felt for her. He was still the first, one, and only man in her heart.  
  
His fateless life was not at all unpleasant. So it was peculiar to find himself falling into the whirlpool of negative thoughts all of a sudden.  
  
But really, Sunny knew why.  
  
It was because of what Eurys had told him about the Apotheosis. Because for the first time in a long while, he had been forced to acknowledge the inevitability of the choice he would have to make. Regain his fate or refuse it.  
  
Bind himself to someone, or remain free from everyone.  
  
'Freedom… is a lonely place, I guess.'  
  
'Sunless?'  
  
Sunny belatedly noticed that Kai had already reached the crater of the great volcano. Rising from the shadows, he felt a fiery heat caress his skin and waved a hand, trying to dispel the suffocating smoke that surrounded them. He could taste ash on his tongue. Frowning, Sunny manifested the Jade Mantle and hid his face behind a helmet.  
  
'So, there seismic anomalies coming from below?'  
  
Kai had summoned his ivory armor.  
  
'Yes. I've been told that you can sense what is happening deep inside the volcano. Oh… I've been told that I'll need to accompany you on a clandestine mission, as well. I'd feel better if we ensured the safety of the city first.'  
  
Sunny nodded. 'I can indeed perceive things from great distances. Let's get closer to the main shaft first.'  
  
As they ventured to descend lower into the crater, he asked:  
  
'Can't you see through things, though? Why didn't you just peer into the depths of the volcano yourself?'  
  
Kai hesitated for a few seconds. 'I did. But then I stopped… fearing that whatever dwells there will feel me watching.'  
  
Most of his face was obscured by a helmet now, but Sunny could still tell that Kai smiled.  
  
'Please don't misunderstand… I am ready to face and destroy that creature. But destroying it without causing an eruption or an earthquake that would damage the city might prove problematic. Having a Supreme nearby seemed like a wise precaution.'  
  
Kai paused, then asked carefully:  
  
'As for that mission we are supposed to accomplish… might I inquire about its nature? As well as why you would require my assistance with it?'  
  
Sunny smiled faintly. 'We'll be searching for something in the Jade Palace. I am not entirely sure what that object is, but recovering it will probably involve some measure of danger.'  
  
He remained silent for a moment, then added calmly:  
  
'As for why you need to help me out personally - well, first of all, I am not omnipotent. I may require assistance. More importantly, though, it is a chance for the two of us to spend time together.'  
  
Kai blinked a couple of times.  
  
'And do the two of us… need to spend time together?'  
  
Sunny chuckled. 'That depends on you, really. Think of it as an internship.'  
  
Before Kai could ask, he explained the issue in more detail:  
  
'You should know by now that a couple of Supremes will not be able to protect humanity once the true crisis comes. Nephis and I will have to attempt Apotheosis sooner rather than later… meaning that we will have to challenge the Fifth Nightmare, most likely. However, there is no guarantee that we will survive. Even if we do, conquering it is bound to take considerable time.'  
  
His expression darkened.  
  
'But things are already this bad, and they'll only get worse in the future. As the only Supremes defending humanity at the moment, we can't abandon our responsibilities and disappear. So… new Supremes will have to rise before we attempt to become Sacred.'  
  
Kai contemplated his words in silence, then asked somberly:  
  
'I guess you are telling me this because I am a candidate?'  
  
Sunny nodded.  
  
'Who else? You, Jet, Effie, Cassie… perhaps some of the Song sisters or Morgan, if we can find where she is. But the four of you first and foremost. If you are willing, naturally.'  
  
Kai laughed quietly.  
  
'I don't think we have a choice. Or rather, we made that choice a long time ago. So, yes… I can't speak for the rest, but I am willing. Even if it kills me.'  
  
Sunny gave him a long look.  
  
'That's great. However, the point is to make sure that it doesn't kill you. So, that's why you get an exclusive adventure with the world's most handsome Supreme.'  
  
Kai smiled.  
  
'None of us have seen the one on the moon yet, so technically, we don't know who the most handsome Supreme is.'  
  
Sunny looked at him with a scandalized expression.  
  
'Listen. I know that we are best friends… but that was a profound betrayal…'  
  
Kai seemed to flinch, then mumbled in a stifled tone:  
  
'He does know it… he believes that he knows it? Is he immune to my Flaw?!'  
  
Sunny laughed.  
  
Soon, they reached the edge of an abyssal, smoke-filled chute. Somewhere far below, an angry glow was painting the world red. Sunny closed his eyes for a moment and extended his shadow sense down… down and down, into the depths of the earth.  
  
Soon enough, his expression changed subtly.  
  
'There's a creature down there, alright. Nothing too horrible, though… feels like a Corrupted Tyrant. Killing it quietly should not prove a problem.'  
  
He hesitated for a few seconds, then sighed.  
  
'Feels like a downgrade, really. The last time I went for a swim in a volcano, I was hugging a Corrupted Titan.'  
  
Kai just gave him a silent stare.  
  
Eventually, he simply forced out:  
  
'Oh. I… hope you cut that creature down, Sunless.'  
  
Sunny shook his head.  
  
'Cut it down? No, not that one…'  
  
He stretched, as if preparing to dive down.  
  
'That one, I gnawed to death with my teeth.'  
  
Leaving stunned Kai behind, he jumped into the dark chasm.