2349 One Less Pawn  
'So… a deity only accounts for this much, in the end.'  
Looking down, Sunny did not feel too triumphant. Rather, he was troubled.  
Killing a Cursed Beast sounded like a startling accomplishment… and it was, in a sense. However, as a Supreme Titan, that was what he was supposed to be capable of. The true challenge would come when he had to face Cursed Demons, Devils, and Tyrants - the dreadful deities who were just as intelligent and cunning as he was, if not more.  
  
And then there were beings as distressing as Cursed Terrors and Titans. Like the Vile Thieving Bird, who had stolen his very fate from him.  
Sunny did not expect easy victories once he graduated to battling those creatures.  
  
Just as he thought about it, a chill ran down his spine. Feeling a cold gaze settle on him, Sunny turned back and glanced in the direction of the Axis Tree. He could not see the Devil resting on one of its branches, but knew that he was being watched.  
'I guess we had an audience.'  
Much worse was the realization of just how vast the divide between Great and Cursed beings was. Every Rank was progressively more powerful, and the gaps between them grew exponentially.  
  
And if the Cursed One were already this overwhelming, then just how terrible the Unholy Ones would be?  
Smiling darkly, Sunny took a step back and crouched, digging in the squashed remains of the Snow Worm with a disgusted grimace on his face.  
  
Just then, Kai landed near him in a gust of wind, having already reverted to his human form. Slayer was not far behind, either, walking over from higher up the ruined slope.  
The latter was concerned and calm, like she always was, but the former seemed stunned.  
'We… did we just kill a Cursed Beast?'  
Sunny hummed nonchalantly.  
'Indeed we did.'  
  
With that, he stood up and raised a hand, glancing at a tiny gem held between his fingers. It shone gorgeously in the twilight of dusk, its radiant depths peculiarly mesmerizing.  
His expression, however, was peculiar.  
'Would you look at that, Kai? This is the first Sacred soul shard I have ever gotten my hands on. But… why is it so tiny?'  
No, really. Sunny felt cheated!  
Kai coughed.  
'That… I don't think that the size of a soul shard matters, Sunny.'  
Sunny pursed his lips, then sighed and hid the radiant gem in his armor.  
'I guess. That said, buddy, I think you should turn back into a dragon.'  
Kai blinked a couple of times, then activated his Transcendent Ability once more. Sunny hurried Slayer, and once both of them jumped onto the dragon's back, shouted for Kai to fly up.  
  
A few moments after Kai rose into the air, the eruption began. This one was far more violent than the previous ones due to how severely damaged by the Snow Worm the mountain had been. It practically fell apart and then rose again, its slopes formed by the cooled lava.  
A new volcano stood in place of the collapsed mountain in no time, just as tall and seemingly indestructible as the mountain had been.  
Once the three of them landed, Sunny went about erecting a new shadow manor. He shook his head while building it, somewhat shocked.  
'That Ariel was really something, wasn't he? Who just goes around making mountains out of thin air? Unbelievable, truly mind-boggling. That's a real daemon for you!'  
Kai was observing him with a nonplussed expression. Hearing that, the charming archer shifted his gaze to the opulent manor that was rising from the darkness, as if summoned by magic.  
'Yeah… unbelievable…'  
This time, Sunny went for a modern style with panoramic windows that opened to the gorgeous sight of the starlit sea of clouds. Making manifested shadows transparent was much easier than imbuing them with color, so he went a bit crazy with the glassworks.  
Of course, an actual architect or a designer would shed tears at his clumsy attempts to build something, but it was more than enough for a temporary shelter that would be destroyed in a day or two.  
  
Once inside, Sunny rested on a sofa and sighed. He did not quite get its properties right, so the sofa felt both too hard and too soft at the same time. It was these little details that were the hardest to master - shaping the facade of a building was relatively easy, unless he wanted to adorn it with decorative elements, but making the interior feel real was very difficult.  
He was exhausted, both physically and mentally. Kai seemed utterly spent, too. After dismissing the outer layers of his armor, the charming archer lowered himself into an armchair and closed his eyes.  
Sunny took out the Sacred soul shard and studied it some more, enjoying the gorgeous glow.  
'Do you know why death was created, Kai?'  
Kai glanced at him in confusion.  
'Death… created?'  
Sunny smiled.  
'Of course. There was a time when death did not exist… well, actually, time did not exist back thеn either. Everything we know as the axiomatic laws of existence was actually created at some point by the gods to contain the Void. The Void was endless and everlasting, after all, so they needed to create some form of finality to cаge it. It just struck me as funny that our battle against the Snow Worm was a bit similar to that. A struggle between infinity and finality.'  
He remained silent for a while, then added:  
'Anyway, it was Shadow God who created Death, and nobody - not even the gods - liked him very much because of that. Death was initially a weapon against the Void and the eternal beings that dwelled in it. Even now, death dutifully destroys the Corruption, which is caused by the malignant influence of the Void. That is why we can kill a Cursed Nightmare Creature and retrieve a Sacred soul shard from its corpse.'  
Kai blinked a couple of times.  
'Oh. I… I never thought about that, actually. Now that I do, it does seem peculiar.'  
Sunny threw the soul shard into the air and caught it.  
'But really, if you think about it, death doesn't really exist. Or rather, death is not what people think it is.'  
Kai raised an eyebrow, confused.  
Sunny chuckled.'People think of death like it is the end, but actually, it is merely a transformation. Shadow God swallowed everything that died and… digested it, I guess, within himself. Ground it all into pure essence, then released it back into the world. He is gone now, but the laws he established still persist. So no one ever really disappears. They just… become something new.'  
Kai smiled faintly.  
'That is a soothing thought, I guess.'  
Sunny let out a quiet laugh.  
'Yes, but I've been thinking… what does that make me? After all, I am somewhat of a thief. The things I kill never reach the Shadow Realm. Instead, they simply remain in my soul forever.'  
He scratched the back of his head.  
'Maybe I can learn how to digest them, too. But if there is a way to do that, I have not learned it yet.'  
Kai let out a long sigh, leaned back in his chair, and closed his eyes again.  
'So, you want to learn how to digest dead beings after swallowing thеm. I see. Any particular reason why?'  
Sunny fell into deep thought and remained silent for a while.  
Then, his eyes gleamed.  
'Come to think of it, it is all because of that dastardly worm. I mean, that thing was huge, right? So I was really hoping to eat some worm meat today. But it just had to go and turn tiny in the end! No meat for us, damn it…'  
Hearing another deep sigh, he frowned and glanced at Kai with reproach.  
'What? Aren't you hungry? No way. Even if you're not hungry, I am!'  
There was no answer.