2397 To a Flame  
Sunny froze.  
He was not being subjected to a distressing attack, and yet, that did not make him feel any less alarmed. If anything, he felt more shaken than he would have if the Puppeteer had thrown all its profane power into an obliterating assault.  
  
Because despite the fact that the world had changed, and Sunny himself was vastly more powerful now than he had been before, one truth remained the same since the turbulent days of his youth. It was that among all the horrors of the Nightmare Spell, none were more sinister and harrowing than the ones who could speak like humans.  
  
'Damnation.'  
He glanced up and studied the motionless Puppeteer, who loomed far above him like a black insectile cliff.  
'Don't answer, don't answer, don't.'  
Then, his lips moved on their own:  
".Who's speaking?"  
  
There were a few seconds of silence, and then the soft voice resounded from nowhere - it was as if the wind itself was answering:  
"I am Moth."  
Sunny narrowed his eyes, unsure what to say. The Cursed Tyrant was talking to him. The frightening moth perching atop the mountain was engaging him in conversation, and on top of that, it was polite and soft-spoken.  
'What the hell.'  
He exhaled slowly.  
"Why are you talking to me, though?"  
The Puppeteer remained silent for a moment, then answerеd with a question of its own.  
".Why not?"  
Sunny could not help but let out a stifled chuckle.  
'This is ridiculous.'  
His Flaw still forced him to answer, though.  
"Because you are a Abomination. An Nightmare Creature. You and I are enemies, no?"  
  
The huge moth moved its antennae faintly. ".Are we enemies? Why?"  
Sunny laughed. "Why? Oh, actually, you raise a good question. You, creatures of Corruption, are all completely overcome by a demented need to eradicate anything and everything that is good and pure. I have no idea why, so now that I have the chance, let me ask you instead. Why the hell are you, vile fiends, so hellbent on destroying us humans?"  
  
The Puppeteer remained silent for a while, this time. Eventually, he seemed to sigh.  
"Words have power, Liberator. The power of names is even greater still. And yet you use that power with such violence. You force them upon the world."  
The giant moth tilted its head down, looking at Sunny with its enormous black eyes. "Corruption, Nightmare Creature, fiend, vile. Pure, good. These words you use may not form existence, but they form you. They form everything you touch, as well. They even form me."  
The winds howled, and the glistening strands of black silk enveloping the mountain fluttered in it like a tattered shroud.  
  
The Cursed Tyrant spoke again: "What you have named Corruption is the influence of the Void. It does not corrupt things - it simply changes them. These things it changes are not malevolent or vile, just like the things it spares are not pure and good. They are merely different. However."  
When the Puppeteer spoke again, its soft voice sounded a little mournful. "There exists a contradiction between those of us who have been touched by the Void and those of us who have not, indeed. That contradiction gives birth to conflict. Those of my kind who are young and weak are not detestable. they are pitiful. They are neither of the Void nor of the Flame. They belong to both, but are welcomed by neither."  
The colossal moth moved its wings faintly, causing hurricane wind to blow across the silken mountain. Sunny shielded his face from the dаncing snow and grimaced.  
'This thing is really huge.'  
The Puppeteer continued: "Their existence is a battlefield, and the war they wage against themselves drives them mad. In that anguished state, they are lost and blind. All they can do is desperately seek salvation, like moths to a flame. They are consumed by the desire to possess the flame or to extinguish it. They are overcome by a misguided need to resolve the maddening contradiction and right everything that is wrong - with the world, and with themselves. Only then would they know solace."  
  
Sunny smiled darkly. "Solace? The reason for all this misery is that they seek solace? How truly ironic. No wonder someone told me once that solace is a sin."  
The Puppeteer stirred. "It is in the depths of the Flame. Life is war; peace is death. these are the laws carved into existence by the Incarnations of Flame."  
  
Sunny was getting a little confused. The way the Puppeteer spoke and the names it used were peculiar. The Flame. since the Puppeteer described the Flame as the opposite of the Void, it must have meant the vast universe created by the gods - the existence itself. Or did it mean the original Desire, from the flames of which the gods had been born? Possibly it was both. There was probably no distinction between the two for a creature like the Puppeteer. The Incarnations of Flame it mentioned were the gods, then.  
  
While Sunny considered the implication of these words, the soft voice spoke again, this time hiding a hint of enmity: "What a grotesque, cruel world they've created. Here, solace is indeed a sin. but more than that, it is a lie. There is no solace to be found - not for you, and not for me. Those poor wretches of my kind who are blinded by the Flame cannot see the truth, but I am different from them. I am not blind, and I am not drawn to the Flame. I have no desire to become ash."  
  
Sunny frowned, staring at the giant black moth with a peculiar expression. "So, what you mean to say is that only the weaker Abomination can't overcome the irresistible urge to devour and destroy anything not touched by the Corruption. But you are so much stronger and above them all that you can keep that urge in check. In fact, you are not beholden to the Corruption at all."  
  
The Puppeteer did not answer immediately. It remained silent for a while, and then asked suddenly, a hint of something strange and eerie seeping into its seemingly soft voice: ".You have never known anything but the Flame, Liberator, so you do not question its tenets. But let me answer the question you asked of me with a question of my own. Why do we have to be enemies? Is it because of me, a creature touched by the Void? Or is it because of you, a creature born of the Flame? Of the Flame."  
Where lifе was war.