2413 Catching Up (With Myself)  
  
Some time later, Sunny was in a magnificent council room of the Jade Palace - two of him, even. One was sitting on the Shadow Chair with his legs crossed, while the other was sprawled on a tastefully decadent couch, covering his face with a hand and groaning pitifully. Both were nursing a mighty headache.  
  
The incarnation on the chair was much better off than the other one, though. He was clean and neatly dressed, at least. His other self, the one who had just returned from a harrowing adventure in the realm of Ariel's Game, was covered in layers upon layers of ash, soot, dried blood, and dirt of all kinds. The hole in his chest barely healed, and the scar where his severed arm had been reattached was yet to disappear completely.  
  
All in all, the sight of him was quite pathetic.  
  
The first incarnation was a little disheveled too, though. That was because its body had gone through the agonizing process of inheriting the Flesh Weave as well - all of them had, really.  
  
"That bastard." Sunny gave himself a venomous look and shook his head.  
  
His other incarnation ignored him.  
  
Of course, the two of them were really a single person - once again - so whatever pain one of them felt, the other felt as well. The headache they were suffering from had been caused by the process of several weeks of isolated memories merging together, in fact. Still. If Sunny had an opportunity to appear composed and nonchalant while simultaneously throwing a tantrum and drowning in self-pity, he would be a fool to pass it up. To his quiet dismay, the intended audience was ignoring his masterful performance completely.  
  
Sunny sighed. 'What a waste of a good tantrum.'  
  
Nephis was paying him little attention, busy tending to Kai's wounds. Even though Sunny was almost entirely healed and even though he had caused the most severe of Kai's wounds himself, he was still unhappy with the lack of attention. Granted, the rest of the people gathered in the council room were all looking at him intently. One could even say that they were giving him death stares. To be fair. Seishan, Revel, and Hel had a reason to be unhappy with him.  
  
Sunny coughed. "What?"  
  
[Do you have to ask?]  
  
Even Cassie's voice was full of reproach. All those days ago, when one of his incarnations and Kai had vanished suddenly from the Toу Room of the Jade Palace and left the startled Song sisters behind, three Nightmare Creatures took their place. To be precise, a Cursed Tyrant and two Cursed Beasts took their place. Sunny had already been moving his other incarnations toward Ravenheart, stunned by the sudden loss of connection to the naughty shadow, but he would have never made it to the Jade Palace in time. The three Song sisters could have died right there and then.  
  
But they didn't. Of course, they would have never been able to defeat a Cursed Tyrant, let alone one commanding two Cursed Beasts. Luckily, the narrow confines of the Toy Room bought them a few seconds to save themselves and Seishan used those seconds quite cunningly.  
  
She lured the distressing creatures toward the Jade Queen's dollhouse, which swallowed them up just like it had swallowed her and her sisters decades ago. The Cursed Ones were still trapped inside of it. In fact, over the last two weeks, Sunny had spent numerous hours staring at the tiny figures of the detestable horrors wandering the gorgeously decorated rooms of the Dollhouse. Someone had to guard the two harrowing toys - the Dollhouse and the Jade Board - at all times, after all. So, Sunny had spent the better half of the month doing just that. After a while, Nephis joined him as well. they did not know what would come out of the Jade Board next, so having this much power concentrated in Ravenheart was a necessity.  
  
The missing incarnation remained lost, but it wasn't like they did not have any information about what it was doing at all. In fact, they could see the figures move across the game board twice a day just fine. Sunny could also feel every excruciating moment of his soul receiving damage, and saw new shades entering his Soul Sea from time to time.  
  
Powerful, harrowing shades. Oh, and then the shadow of Condemnation went and vanished entirely.  
  
His dastardly avatar seemed to be having great fun out there all by himself. All of this culminated in Kai stumbling into the Toy Room out of thin air. Before Sunny could let out a sigh of relief, though, he found himself in utter agony, feeling his flesh rebuild and rearrange himself.  
  
And as soon as he recovered, the prodigal incarnation returned, flooding his mind with the memоries of vicious battles, startling revelations, and truths so shocking that he was almost sent into a catatonic state. Luckily, he also regained memories of somewhat coming to terms with this new knowledge - initially, at least - so that episode did not last long.  
  
Sunny looked at Nephis, then responded Cassie's mental question.  
  
[I don't have to ask, but come on. They weren't even maimed that badly. How long do I have to spend in the dog house?]  
  
Whatever wounds the Song sisters had received were almost instantaneously healed by Nephis from a vast distance - that, too, was a reason they were alive and well. Sunny might have been a little reckless, but could he really be blamed? If Seishan had not told him about visiting the Toy Room numerous times as a kid and returning alive and more or less unscathed each time, he would have exercised more caution. Why would a Sovereign be extra careful in a place where literal children used to play?  
  
Kai was fully healed by now, so Nephis left him and walked over to the head of the table. Sitting down, she studied Sunny for a while - both of them in turn - and opened her mouth to speak.  
  
Before she could, however, Death Singer sрoke first:  
  
"Look, look! There's two of them. Changing Star, can I have one? Please? Pretty please?"  
  
Nephis closed her mouth and stared at her silently. Her face remained expressionless. But the curtains behind Death Singer seemed to have suddenly caught on fire, for some reason. "Ouch!" Death Singer shook embers out of her hair and gave Nephis a sorrowful glare. "Greedy!"  
  
Nephis stared at her for a few more moments, then took a deep breath, extinguished the curtains with a thought, and glanced back to Sunny.  
  
"So? What exactly happened?"  
  
He smiled awkwardly.  
  
"Well, do you want the short version or the long version?"  
  
Nephis shrugged.  
  
"Let's start with a short summary."  
  
Sunny scratched the back of his head.  
  
"Okay. Let's see."