2440 Knowledge of Passion  
  
  
Invoking the Name of Passion was far more difficult than any other Nephis had ever invoked.  
  
Perhaps it was because, unlike the other Names, the source of this one was Nephis herself.  
  
Her own longing, her own desire, her own yearning, her own passion… she had to know them, to burn with them, to admit them starkly without pretense or falsehood. Then, she had to infuse them into the Name, and channel that Name with her soul.  
  
Shaping the world in accordance with the melody of her heart, and forcing the two to resonate with each other.  
  
The act itself was an immensely difficult one… after all, what human was completely honest with themselves? Completely honest about themselves? Who wasn't scared of bearing themselves and laying the truth of who they were out in the open for the world to see?  
  
For them themselves to see?  
  
The first step was difficult, but the second one was arduous. Invoking the Name of Passion meant drawing it out of herself, and channeling it put more strain on Neph's soul and willpower than she had ever felt before while Shaping.  
  
But she endured.  
  
She endured the cruelly honest moment of self-reflection, with all her selfishness and weakness put on display, and she endured the strain of channeling the Name of Passion too.  
  
She invoked it.  
  
She finally succeeded!  
  
And when she did…  
  
It was as if blinders had been removed from her eyes.  
  
Nephis heard the Spell whispering into her ear, but she did not have to listen to its loathsome voice to know that she had mastered another branch of her Aspect Legacy, the Memory of Light.  
  
She had mastered the Knowledge of Passion.  
  
Just as it had happened with the Knowledge of Fire and the Knowledge of Destruction, she could enjoy the fruit of her labor — a torrent of information poured into her mind, as if a seal had been broken, completing and complementing what she had already intuitively understood.  
  
An underlying understanding of a multitude of matters, an instinctual grasp of subtle secrets and intricаte techniques, a collection of Names related to passion and desire…  
  
It was as if she had spent a lifetime striving to explore and fathom something in theory while simultaneously applying that wealth of knowledge in practice — and was now receiving the fruits of this lived experience without the memories themselves.  
  
But that was not important at the moment. Nephis could assess and consolidate the boon of mastering another branch of her Aspect Legacy later… right now, she was still reeling from having invoked the Name of Passion.  
  
Channeling that Name was like adding fuel to her already scathing desire. Ignited by the invocation of Passion, it flared with even greater intensity, emboldened and empowered by her sorcery.  
  
Her desire, in turn, augmented and emboldened her Will, making it so much more potent.  
  
It was like a comprehensive enhancement of her fiery spirit… a cheat-like, self-fulfilling prophecy. It was like something that she had always been meant to possess, but was denied until now. The cornerstone of her entire Aspect, or maybe a missing piece that had been preventing her from making the next step.  
  
Nephis suddenly felt incredibly alive.  
  
Even the terrible agony of her Flaw seemed less torturous, for a moment. The pain was the same… but the suffering it brought her felt not as meaningless, and therefore more bearable.  
  
Doubtless, uncompromising, burning with passion…  
  
Her Will blossomed with unreserved heat, and that was enough to break the stalemate between her authority and that of the Cursed Demon.  
  
The world, which had been torn in two, was finally restored to being whole again.  
  
The frigid hell of Abjuration's creation was vanquished, and the incandescent inferno of purifying flames was actualized, settling to take its lawful place in reality.  
  
And so…  
  
Just like Nephis had promised...  
  
Abjuration burned.  
  
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[...You have slain Abjuration.]  
  
Having assumed her human form, Nephis fell to her knees and gasped, clutching at her chest. She tried to draw air into her scorched lungs, but there was no air left for her to inhale — all of it had been burned away, turning the ruins of True Bastion into an incandescent, suffocating desert.  
  
The crumbling castle was no more, turned into a vast plain of glowing, white-hot slag. The lake was gone, too, its dark waters turned into clouds of superheated plasma. The remains of the city that had been hidden below the lake, and the bones of its former citizens, had turned to ash.  
  
'Aargh…'  
  
Nephis tried to groаn, but without air to carry her voice, there was no sound.  
  
She closed her mouth and gritted her teeth, enduring the pain in silence.  
  
Even after she had overpowered the Will of the Cursed Demon by invoking the Name of Passion, their battle lasted for a long while. She had dealt the insidious abominations plenty of grievous wounds, and received more than a few of them herself in return.  
  
Her body was immaculate and pristine, but her soul was in shambles. She had burned her soul cores, as well, damaging a few of them almost to the point of breaking.  
  
But since she was a halfbreed who was born of two worlds, belonging to neither, she could absorb the soul fragments of Nightmare Creatures slain by her flames just like she would those of humans. Abjuration had been a Cursed Demon, and an ancient one at that… so, her cores were now rebuilding themselves, having received a generous infusion of soul fragments after the abomination's death.  
  
'...Just Abjuration, huh?'  
  
It seemed like the Spell did not deem it worthy to even mention the Rank and Class of Cursed Nightmare Creatures when announcing their deaths.  
  
It made sense, really. After all, there was… there had been only one Abjuration in the world. It was one of a kind, so no one would confuse it with some other horror bearing the same name.  
  
Nephis looked around, drowning in the heat of the brilliant hell of her own creation.  
  
It was going to take a long time for True Bastion to cool off…  
  
And there was no reason for her to remain here anymore. On the contrary, there were plenty of reasons for her to leave as soon as possible.  
  
Even though she was not channeling the Name of Passion anymore, she could still feel its aftereffects. Usually, she would be drained of all feelings and emotions after abusing her Aspect so thoroughly… but today, Nephis was full of them instead.  
  
She wanted to return to illusory Bastion. She wanted to revel in delicious food, to satiate her thirst with fragrant wine, to soothe her tired body with the cold caress of water and luxuriate in its embrace…  
  
She wanted to meet Sunny.  
  
She longed for him with such intensity that it felt a little frightening.  
  
'Let's go...'  
  
Holding her breath — she had no choice but to — Nephis rose to her feet and looked around one last time.  
  
The corpse of Abjuration had turned to ash. There were no soul shards left to collect since she had already absorbed the sоul fragments. She was standing near one of the deep cracks formed on the mountain during the siege of Bastion… it was dark and seemingly bottomless, leading far down.  
  
There was nothing left for her to do here.  
  
Nephis turned, intending to return…  
  
But then, something scraped beneath her feet.  
  
Frowning, she bent down and picked up a small piece of broken glass that had been laying on the edge of the fissure — the only cold thing in the white-hot furnace of the annihilated ruins.  
  
The piece of glass was blackened by soot, but when she scraped it with a nail, a fiery white eye looked back at her fгom beneath.  
  
It was the reflection of her own eye, and the white flame dancing in its depths.  
  
'A mirror?'  
  
Nephis threw one last look into the dark fissure, her frown growing deeper.  
  
Then, she tossed the fragment of the shattered mirror away and turned around.  
  
It was time for her to leave.  
  
Ravenheart awaited...