2449 Dédales  
  
Sunny climbed out of the water and rose to his feet, looking at the desolate, moonlit landscape of True Bastion.  
  
The ruins of the great castle he and Cassie had explored once were completely gone, melted into a vast, eerily smooth plain of pale rock. Here and there, deep fractures marred its surface, harboring cold darkness. The rock itself was still radiating unbearable heat, making the waters of the lake seethe and boil—swimming to shore had not been a pleasant experience, to say the least. There used to be a dark, twisted forest on the other side of the lake; now, there was only cinders and ash, with towering bones protruding into the broken sky like charred pillars.  
  
A shattered moon was bathing the devastated land in silver light, reflecting from the restless surface of the dark water. The landscape felt eerie and alien, bearing little resemblance to the bustling city on the other side of the reflections. The fallen tower where Cassie used to wait for Sunny on their ventures into the Mirror Maze was gone. The walls of the castle were gone, as well—so were the ruins of the main keep that had served the King of Swords as a forge once.  
  
Sunny suddenly was painfully aware of the inevitable, merciless passage of time.  
  
Of course, True Bastion had not been reshaped by time; instead, it had been reshaped by a passing demigod... the Star of Ruin.  
  
A demigod not unlike himself.  
  
The pitiful remains of what had been a Demon's citadel once did not illustrate the eroding power of time; instead, they illustrated his own daunting power. Sunny was not that different from a force of nature now—in fact, by very definition, he was far more devastating than nature could ever be.  
  
'How odd...' He sighed deeply and turned into a shadow for a split second, leaving the water soaking his clothes and hair behind. A moment later, complеtely dry, Sunny assumed his human shape again.  
  
"Darn, damn, dammit, damnation, what the actual hell?!"  
  
His quiet contemplation was unceremoniously destroyed by Effie, who chose that moment to rise from the boiling lake, glistening drops of water rolling down the graceful lines of the steel armour that clung to her body like a second layer of skin. The white cloth she wore around her hips and chest stuck to the smooth steel, doing nothing to obscure the stirring shape below.  
  
She flipped her hair back, sending a scattering of droplets flying into the rays of silver moonlight, and looked around with a pout.  
  
"..Kai gets to have awesome hot springs in Ravenheart, but I get to be cooked alive in a boiling lake? I almost became soup! How is that fair? Man... Nephis really did a number on this place."  
Sunny sighed.  
  
“Yeah. The ruins are completely destroyed. It's strange, though... she mentioned that there would be no water in the lake, but it seems no different from before."  
  
Effie fanned herself, then gavе the vast expanse of fractured stone a peculiar look and shivered.  
  
“Actually, we destroyed most of the ruins with Morgan during the war. We dried out the lake, too—but water must be seeping through the reflections from the other side. It's a bit weird, no? Water flowing from an illusory lake into the real one. Can it even be called an illusion, then?"  
  
Sunny shrugged.  
  
“Well, it is an illusion created by the Demon of Imagination. Those can very well be more real than reality itself."  
  
He gazed across the dark expanse of water, then peered into its depths.  
  
“There's a drowned city on the bottom of the real lake here, right? But there is nothing like that in our version of Bastion. That is also curious."  
  
Effie sighed, then began heading away from the shore.  
  
“You've been to Rivergate, I presume? Well, there is actually a twin complex of great dams north of True Bastion. This one was utterly destroyed thousands of years ago, though—my theory is that it was by the same blow that shattered the moon and turned Imagination’s castle into ruins. That was how the city drowned, I think.”  
  
Sunny turned to look at her and raised an eyebrow.  
  
“There is another dam upstream from the Mirror Lake?"  
  
Effie nodded.  
  
"There is in True Bastion, but not in the illusory one. I think both dams were built by the Demon Imagination, and that they had something to do with the Mirror Lake. She seems to have been fond of playing with water, for some reason. It's such an ancient past that there is no way to know for sure, of course.”  
  
Sunny’s second eyebrow rose, as well.  
  
“Huh? Since when are you interested in exploring ancient history?"  
  
Effie chuckled.  
  
“Since I was put in charge of Bastion? I need to know the background of the city I am meant to rule to avoid unpleasant surprises. Ancient past tends to become present problems quite often here in the Dream Realm."  
  
Sunny sighed.  
  
“I couldn't have put it better myself."  
  
He lingered for a moment, then looked up at the shattered moon and asked:  
  
“Have you ever reached the boundary of this reflection?"  
  
Effie shook her head.  
  
“No, because when we fought here, Morgan had drawn True Bastion into reality to protect the illusory version—it just bordered the surrounding regions of the Dream Realm seamlessly, as if it had always been there. But I imagine that there's just nothing at the edges... something like the boundary of the Beast Farm.”  
  
By then, they reached the deepest of the fractures that broke the surface of the mountain—the dark fissure led all the way to the Mirror Maze.  
  
The piece of mirror Nephis had discarded was still laying on its edge, covered in soot. Sunny picked it up, studied it for a moment, then crushed it in his fist.  
  
Opening the fist to let the wind scatter the fine glass dust, he pointed to the fracture.  
“Are you going first, or should I?"  
  
Effie suddenly smiled.  
  
"Oh my! It's not every day that a man invites me to explore a deep cr..."  
  
Sunny smiled too, then raised a hand and calmly pushed her over the edge.