1252 Voyage, Voyage

At first, Sunny and Nephis were tense and fully focused, observing the feasting serpent with grim apprehension and a bit of dread.

But then, slowly... It got a little boring.

Even though very few people had ever gotten a chance to see a Great Beast devour a Great Monster — or maybe none at all — as it turned out, even such a macabre and awesome spectacle could grow old really fast.

The Black Turtle was just too enormous. Even though the azure serpent was gigantic itself, it still couldn't devour a significant portion of its carcass in a short amount of time, no matter how hard it tried. It would probably take the creature days, or even weeks, to put a dent in the floating corpse of the titanic monster.

Eventually, Sunny and Nephis found themselves sitting side by side on the green moss, looking silently at the Great River.

The two of them made for a striking contrast. Sunny was wearing a tunic of black silk embroidered with silver thread, his hair black as a raven's wing. Nephis was wearing a tunic, too, hers perfectly white and decorated with red accents. Her long silver hair was moving slightly in the wind.

One's eyes were like two pools of unfathomable darkness, the other's were grey, calm, and hid within them a boundless, immolating heat.

Both would have seemed too flawless and beautiful to a mundane human, with perfectly smooth alabaster skin and faces that seemed to have been chiseled from precious stone by a divine sculptor.

Surrounded by the vast expanse of a mystical river and sitting calmly atop the shell of a great monster, wearing no armor and holding no weapons in their hands, they looked like two transient deities that had descended from the heavenly realm to rest on the soft moss and enjoy the breathtaking beauty of this strange world.

...Of course, Sunny had none of these thoughts. Instead, he had an entirely different view of the current situation.

'This is... huh...'

Over the years, he had grown accustomed to being in the company of armor-clad Awakened, heavily armed soldiers, and military vehicles. Looking at the slender silhouette of Neph's body outlined by the light fabric of her tunic, and the weightless silk of his own Graceless Dusk, he couldn't help but feel a sense of strange incongruity.

They were currently in the most dire predicament of their habitually dire lives. And yet...

'What the hell. We look like we're enjoying a luxury cruise...'

Of course, leisure cruises and getaways on tropical islands had not been a thing since before the Dark Times. Sunny just found the idea amusing after randomly learning about that ancient tradition from Rain, and was reminded of that conversation right now. He knew that being surrounded by great abominations was not exactly one's idea of a relaxing vacation.

However.

The corpse of the Black Turtle was technically floating, so it was like a ship. At the same time, it was large enough to be an island. The food was delicious. The view was to die for.

The company was very nice, too...

If not for the blooded snout of the azure serpent rising above the water from time to time, he would have actually been... quite content.

'Huh?'

Sensing his strange mood, Nephis looked at him and raised an eyebrow.

"You... have that funny look in your eyes..."

Sunny coughed.

"Uh, I was just thinking that this entire situation is weirdly... peaceful? We are on top of a dead Great Monster and there is Great Beast slowly devouring that monster as it waits for a chance to munch on our souls, and yet... there's nothing to do?"

He scratched his head.

"Let me tell you, the start of my Second Nightmare was nowhere near as relaxing. Plus, this Black Turtle, it's kind of like a ship, isn't it? So... we're relaxing on a ship... I just think it's funny."

Nephis blinked a couple of times, then stared at the black expanse of the Black Turtle's shell.

After a short pause, she said awkwardly:

"Oh. You would know better. I... I actually was never on a real ship."

Sunny tilted his head a little.

'Oh... that's right. She was brought to Antarctica by Whispering Blade. She never sailed across the ocean on an alloy battleship, only flew through the sky aboard the Chain Breaker.'

He chuckled.

"Well, it's not that special. Mostly, you just stay inside and pray that the ship doesn't start splitting around you. Or that something from the outside doesn't come inside to pay you a visit. By the way... both of those things happened to me... so no matter how strange it feels to say, this feels much nicer."

Nephis hesitated for a few moments, then looked away. Her voice was even when she said:

"This is much nicer than the start of my Second Nightmare, too. Because I'm... not alone."

Sunny looked at her carefully.

A strange thought surfaced in his mind: 'Was she going to say... something else?' He suddenly felt tense again.

A lot of very complicated emotions that Sunny had done his best to avoid for a long, long time reared their heads in his heart.

'Was she...'

Luckily — or unfortunately — the azure serpent chose that exact moment to let out a frenzied roar and dive back into the water, sending a huge fountain of it flying into the sky.

It seemed that the old snake had been satiated, by now.

Full of renewed vigor, the serpent started circling the Black Turtle once again, raising its head from time to time to stare at them with deranged eyes.

Sunny sighed.

"This snake just never gives up, does it?"

Nephis silently nodded and then stood up.

Illuminated by the light of the seven suns and outlined against the blue sky, her lithe figure was like a painting.

"But it really can't overturn the carcass or break the shell. We don't need to keep watching it for now."

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

"So then... what should we do?"

She thought for a while, then glanced at the soft carpet of green moss and the mysterious landscape of the dark island.

Eventually, Nephis shrugged.

"...Whatever we want?"