1664 Search and Rescue

Sunny was internally cursing himself for deciding not to wear Weaver's Mask today.

Someone else was cursing him, as well.

The Fire Keepers were keeping their voices down, but they underestimated the hearing of a Saint.

"That guy... who does he think he is, critiquing our lady's appearance?"

"Says the man who hides his face behind a mask!"

"He must be as ugly as a toad! Frivolous! And shallow!"

He gritted his teeth behind the visor of the onyx helmet.

"What toad?! What the hell is a toad?! My face is so handsome that it can fund an entire business, you good-for-nothings!"

What did these fools know?!

Outwardly, though, he remained cold and detached.

Even if it took some effort.

"Having a secure base in an otherwise deadly region is already enough of a boon. If Valor wants to claim my temple, they can come and conquer it. Or rather.., they can try,"

The last words sounded especially sinister. His tone didn't change, but it sounded exceedingly threatening all of a sudden.

Nephis kept silent for a bit, then shrugged.

"I see. Do you know of any other Citadels in Godgrave, then? Advance knowledge of their locations can be just as Important."

Sunny glanced at the black skeleton.

...There are none on the surface. There are a few in the Hollows, though. I've seen a couple from afar. As for the sea of ash, even I am not brave enough to descend there."

She seemed interested in what he had said.

"You've explored the Hollows?"

Sunny nodded.

"Somewhat... but not extensively. It is a deadly place."

The Fire Keepers paled. If even a Saint who lived in a literal Death Zone called a place deadly, then it had to be worse than hell.

Nephis lingered for a while.

Eventually, she nodded.

"I think I know enough to make a report to the elders. It's time for us to return..."

Before she could finish the sentence, though, there was a loud noise, Fiend shifted slightly, the infernal flames igniting brighter in his eyes. At the same time, a tall and graceful figure appeared at the entrance of the temple.

It was Saint.

However... right now, her dark elegance was nowhere to be seen.

That was because she was carrying something on her shoulder. That "something" was resisting and cursing desperately, powerless against the Shadow's stone grip.

"L-let me go, abomination! If you want to kill me, Just do it quick! W-why are you tormenting me?!"

Sunny blinked.

...Human language?"

Why was there someone cursing in human language here, in Godgrave?

Nephis and the Fire Keepers were similarly stunned.

Saint walked toward them and unceremoniously dumped her burden on the floor. The person rolled on the marble tiles and scrambled to their knees, crawling back in fear.

"S-stay back, demon!"

It was a very young, and very dirty youth, his face smeared in mud and dried blood. He wore a torn armor that seemed to be a Dormant Memory, his body riddled in deep leasures.

A moment later, the back of his head crashed into Neph's knees,

He froze for a moment, and then slowly looked up, his eyes widening in terror.

Then, an expression of utter shock appeared on his childish face, It was as if the young man's brain temporarily ceased all function.

"Uh...

He blinked.

"S... s... Saint Nephis?"

She stared at him silently. The young man looked at her, then at the Fire Keepers, then at Sunny. Finally, his gaze was pulled back to Neph's beautiful face.

His cheeks blushed uncontrollably.

"W-what are you... am I dead? Is this paradise?"

She tilted her head a little, then said neutrally:

"This is the Dream Realm. Are you a Sleeper?"

Sunny had already guessed that the dirty teenager was a Sleeper. Last year, he had discovered a handful after the winter solstice and sent them to Song. This year, though, he had not found anyone in the vicinity of his territory. He had assumed that either all of them perished in other parts of Godgrave, or the Spell did not send anyone here this time around, to begin with.

Sunny was unclear on what motive the Spell had to send Sleepers to Godgrave, really. They had absolutely no chance to survive here... the last batch had only lived because of him.

But then again, it might have been precisely because of his presence that the Spell threw them here, It was a bit strange, to imagine that he was powerful enough to be a factor in the decisions made by the Spell,

In any case…

The young man gulped.

"A Sleeper? Yes, I am... walt, you are Saint Nephis! Changing Star of the Immortal Flame! Lady Nephis! What... what are you doing here?!"

He paused for a moment, then added shyly:

...And where is here? Are we close to Bastion?"

She kneeled in front of him and gently placed her hands on his shoulders. A soft radiance enveloped them, spreading into the Sleeper's body. The wounds covering it started to heal, and an expression of deep relief instantly appeared on his face.

The Sleeper stared at Nephis with wide eyes.

His eyes were full of stars.

Sunny shifted slightly.

"What is that bastard staring at, with that expression?'

But then, he had to mentally slap himself. Was he really feeling jealous of a poor Sleeper?

Nephis spoke in a tone that was considered soft, for her:

"We are in a distant and extremely dangerous region of the Dream Realm. My warriors and I are here on an important mission. You are fortunate to have met us, young man... otherwise, I'm afraid your fate would have been sealed."

The young Sleeper remained silent, looking at her with a strange expression.

Sunny sighed.

"I did not think that any of the Sleepers survived this year. Last solstice, I happened on a few and helped them escape. There seems to be just one survivor this time.

His voice sounded cold and uncaring

Nephis spared him a glance, then turned back to the young man.

"Don't worry. The worst is behind you. You are safe now... we will take you back to the waking world

He took a shallow breath, closed his eyes for a moment... then desperately shook his head.

"N-no! No, you mustn't! I'm... I'm not the only one! There are others, as well... we hid ourselves and clung to life for many days, but then, there was no more water. Someone had to go out to try and find help, and I volunteered..."

Sunny sighed behind his helmet, already knowing what was about to come.

The Sleeper grabbed Neph's arm and said hoarsely:

"Please, Lady Nephis! You... you are Changing Star. Please save the others!"

Sunny was indignant.

"The Spell... it has some nerve!"

First, it had abandoned him. Now, it was using him as a babysitter for unfortunate Sleepers.

He shook his head slightly, then asked, his voice grim:

"Those others you mentioned. Where are they?”