1680 Spirit of Light

The unconscious Sleeper slowly opened her eyes, staring at Nephis with a dazed look. She smiled reassuringly and rose, picking up her sword again.

There was not much time left. The enemies were approaching.

Towering above the three of them - Nephis and the two teenage girls - the Lord of Shadows said coldly:

"It's sweet that you promised to save them. But how are you going to do it? Once we start fighting with those abominations, a single shockwave will be enough to finish these two off."

Nephis climbed out of the pit and helped the girl she had healed up. Tamar followed.

'Good question.’

There was no time to run away, because the asuras were faster than them. Flying away wasn't an option, either, because they would be perfect targets in the air. One toss of a diamond weapon, and there would be no escape.

Even if Nephis could evade, she had to carry at least one of the Sleepers, and neither of the girls would survive the crushing pressure of such maneuvers,

She considered countless strategies in a single second and looked up at the Lord of Shadows,

"You take them and retreat. I'll hold the enemy off, and then join you."

He remained silent for a moment, and then said flatly:

"I refuse."

Nephis blinked.

Huh!

She had not expected that answer.

"Why?"

The shadow demon bent down, bringing his onyx helmet level to her face. The darkness nestling inside it was deep and impenetrable.

"You might be fine dying for these Sleepers, Changing Star. But I am not fine with you dying."

One of his onyx claws pointed at her.

"You still owe me a favor, remember? Wouldn't I be cheated if you died before repaying me?"

Nephis tilted her head.

At that moment... she thought that she felt a hint of desire from the Lord of Shadows. Some people's longing was like a spark, some people's longing was like flame. His, though... to her, it felt like a towering pyre that dwarfed everything around.

As it turned out, the Lord of Shadows was a man of dire passion behind that cold exterior.

She couldn't make out the details of what exactly he yearned for, but his unwillingness to see her dead - before she made good on her promise, at least seemed rather sincere.

It looked like the favor he intended to ask from her was not simple.

A moment later, his soul was shrouded in darkness once again, and she couldn't feel anything.

Nephis sighed.

"What do you propose, then?"

The Lord of Shadows lingered for a moment.

Then, he scratched his horned head, the onyx claws scraping piercingly against the surface of his helmet.

Finally, he sighed.

"I'll take them to the Nameless Temple and return. You... stay alive while I'm gone."

Wasn't that basically what she had suggested?

Nephis raised an eyebrow.

"How long will it take you to make it back to the Citadel and return, Lord Shadow?"

He raised one of his four hands and bent a few fingers, then answered evenly:

"...About six seconds."

She stared at him silently.

Then... she stared some more.

'Huh?"

"You could make a trip from the Citadel to here in three seconds, this whole time? Why did we fight our way here through the jungle, then?"

Usually, Nephis had to make an effort to put emotions Into her naturally deadpan voice. But now, she was actually struggling to maintain composure and make it sound calm!

It was an extremely rare occurrence.

The Lord of Shadows shrugged indifferently.

"It would have consumed too much of my essence. Carrying these Sleepers is fine, but you... are too heavy of a burden."

Nephis stared at him silently for a moment, then glanced down involuntarily.

Her body was lithe and slender, like it had always been.

Definitely.

‘...Huh.'

The Lord of Shadows remained silent for a moment, too, then added suddenly, his cold tone suspiciously close to sounding a tiny bit rushed:

"Because you are a Transcendent. Your soul is too vast and powerful, that was what I meant."

He took a step forward and placed two of his four hands on the shoulders of the speechless Sleepers.

"Anyway... time is of the essence... so, I'd better go."

A moment later, the three of them dissolved into shadows, leaving Nephis alone in the small clearing.

'A spatial movement Ability.’

She remained motionless for a second, then looked at herself again.

A quiet mumble could be heard:

"...Did I gain muscle?"

Sure, she was not as delicate and pretty as Cassie. And not as elegant and graceful as Seishan. But Nephis was pretty confident in her figure... granted, it wasn't as generous as Effie's...

‘What am I even thinking about?'

Just at that moment, the jungle around her exploded, and seven ghastly golems lunged at her from all sides, the world groaning in agony from the violent force of their passing.

Nephis was still looking down.

Before they could reach her, though, her body exploded with a brilliant radiance, and their towering figures were consumed by blinding light.

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Nephis had transformed into a spirit of light.

In that state, her graceful body seemed to be woven out of immaculate white radiance. That radiance contained an unfathomable ocean of furious flame instead of flesh and bone, and was a beautiful vessel for her fiery, titanic soul.

She was like a brilliant star that had taken the form of a human,

The moisture permeating the humid air instantly evaporated. The rotten leaves blanketing the ground turned to ash. The remains of the dead tree blackened and caught fire, being consumed at startling speed.

But the speed with which the mystical wood was being consumed by the white flame was nothing when compared to the speed with which Nephis moved.

Unconstrained by the limitations of mundane flesh, her power exploded.

The whole clearing was flooded with blinding light, and the towering figures of the asuras dissolved in that light. They weren't destroyed, but the red moss covering their cracked armor was immediately incinerated. The mummified flesh within the stone carapaces blackened and smoldered.

The seven diamond weapon fell in unison, but Nephis effortlessly danced out of the way.

Almost at the same time...

She was suddenly in front of one of the abominations, her radiant fist brushing lightly against its stone breastplate.

The massive creature was thrown back. The armor on its chest cracked and melted, and the thick armor plate on its back exploded, shards of stone turning into molten rain as they fell to the ground.

The world was stark and clear, awash in annihilating pain.

'Three more seconds...'

Nephis wondered how many of these Nightmare Creatures she would be able to kill before the Lord of Shadows returned.