1732 Luxurious Ride

Nephis was wearing inconspicuous civilian clothes... well, there was a medieval flair to them, since the fashion trends had changed in that direction after the advent of the Dream Gates. in the past, only Legacies dressed that way, and even then only for special occasions. But now, it wasn't strange to see people in the affluent districts of NQSC wearing capes, waistcoats, and gambesons.

Neph's neat ensemble was tailored to fit her figure perfectly. She wore pristine white, her half-shoulder cape embroidered with golden thread - of course, it covered her shield arm, leaving the sword arm free. All in all, she looked exactly how one would imagine a princess of a great clan should look like - beautiful and breathtaking, her clothes blending modest restraint with opulence.

She looked out of place in the dirty desolation of the outskirts. Or, rather... the outskirts looked out of place when near her.

As Nephis was looking around, Sunny moved and emerged from the deep shadows, stopping at the border between darkness and light.

"Lady Nephis."

She turned to him, then took a few steps and bowed slightly,

"Lord Shadow, I am sorry for making you wait.”

Then, she tilted her head a little and studied him. Her gaze briefly explored his onyx armor, then drifted to the emotionless mask

After a short pause, Nephis asked:

"Don't you think that your attire is a bit unsuitable for the waking world?"

Sunny smiled behind the mask, then raised his chin a bit.

"Why? I think I look quite good. Don't you?"

She seemed to be startled by the question. Of course, her expression remained calm, with none of that bafflement finding its way onto her face but after spending some time with Nephis in Bastion, Sunny was slowly relearning how to read her emotions.

Eventually, she said:

"You look... unique. I guess."

Her tone was flat.

Sunny grinned behind the mask, the darkness nestling in its eye remaining cold and inscrutable.

Honestly, he was glad to have the mask hiding his features. Recently, he had been spending a lot of time with Nephis in Bastion, and most of it was... emotionally charged and intense enough that maintaining a calm facade was somewhere between a burden and a torment. He was tired from trying to keep his feelings in check or hiding them when all else had failed.

Playing the role of an aloof Lord of Shadows was a bit of a relief.

He nodded.

"You look stunning as well, Lady Nephis

She gave him a strange look.

Sunny wanted to chuckle, but held himself back. Remembering his previous blunder, he briefly considered adding that Ki Song's daughter could not compare. But after contemplating the matter deeply, he wisely decided not to remind Nephis about them at all.

"Shall we?"

She gestured to the luxurious PTV and walked back to the passenger door.

The interior of the vehicle was just as opulent as its exterior. The seats were upholstered with genuine Nightmare Creature leather, while natural wood was used for the fittings and fixtures. There was even a refrigerated bar with various beverages and a table with refreshments.

Sunny stared at the refrigerated bar, momentarily lost in studying its construction. Was it purely electrical or used spelltech? If so, which kind?

While he was lost in contemplation, the PTV softly drove off.

'Right, I forgot to ask where we are going, exactly.’

As if reading his mind, Nephis spoke in a calm tone:

"The elders were surprisingly open to most of your terms. Still, a few detalls still need to be discussed. We are going to meet with a representative of Clan Valor and reach the final agreement.

Sunny stared at her silently.

The PTV was much smaller than his dearly missed Rhino, but still more spacious than most civilian vehicles. Therefore, although they were sitting on the same seat, Nephis was regrettably a bit far.

Would it have killed her to sit closer?

He asked evenly:

"Are you not a representative of Clan Valor, Lady Nephis?"

She smiled faintly.

"I am. However, there are people who represent it more."

After that, both of them kept quiet for a while. The PTV made its way out of the outskirts and passed the great barriers of NQSC, bypassing the usual inspection procedures entirely. The Great Clans stood high above the most privileged of classes, so those associated with them enjoyed a lot of convenience,

Of course, all of it was a little ironic.

The PTV, the warm clothes Nephhis wore - all of it was a masquerade that people like them willingly upheld. In truth, she did not need to wear a cape in the winter cold, because no mundane cold could bring discomfort to a Saint.

As for the vehicle... Nephis could fly, while Sunny could breach great distances with Shadow Step. More than that, both of them could run much faster than the PTV could drive. So, using one had little point.

He lingered for a few moments, then asked:

"Why are you dressed so warmly?"

She seemed to have understood his meaning and shrugged with a faint smile.

"Helps me feel human."

Sunny tilted his head.

Indeed. There was a purpose for the masquerade that went beyond simple convenience.

However, he was sitting here clad in battle armor. His demeanor and actions seemed to go against such conventions... so, what did Nephis think of him? That he wasn't human, or that he did not care to feel like one?

Sunny turned to look at the partition separating the passenger side from the driver's cabin. Even though he could not see who was driving the car, he could sense their shadow. It was a familiar one, belonging to one of the Fire Keepers.

The PTV was also decently armored and fitted with sound isolation materials, so he could probably speak freely.

After hesitating for a few moments, he asked:

"I was thinking about one of our previous conversations.”

Nephis glanced at him with a hint of curiosity.

"Oh?”

Sunny stared ahead indifferently.

"You said that if one wants to kill a Sovereign, they need to become a Sovereign. Hypothetically speaking, of course. Do you really think that there is no other way?"

She seemed calm. But then again, she always did.

...Unless Effie was involved.

After a long stretch of silence, Nephis looked away and shook her head.

"It is not only a necessity, but also the only acceptable way."

Sunny did not say anything, knowing what she meant. The Sovereigns... had covered their backs, indeed.

Nephis sighed:

"There are hundreds of millions of mundane people living across the two Domains, by now. Their number is constantly increasing. There are many more Sleepers each year, as well, but not nearly as many as there should have been. Because those who enter the Dream Realm through one of the Sovereign Gates are protected from having to undergo the First Nightmare, As long as they don't leave the borders of their Domain, the Spell won't call upon them."

Her expression darkened.

"So, what will happen if a Sovereign falls, and their Domain collapses? All those mundane people will Instantly be taken by the Spell. The casualties will be harrowing, and the nascent human civilization in the Dream Realm will be decimated. The only way to avoid such a result is for another Supreme to take the place of the one who fell, and for a new Domain to rise from the ruins of the one that was destroyed."

She looked at Sunny somberly:

"Do you see, Lord Shadow? You asked me how I would fight a Sovereign. Killing a Sovereign is tremendously hard, but not impossible... killing one in a way that I can stomach is much more vexing. You might not harbor similar concerns, but... something tells me that you do. So, you see in the hypothetical situation you presented, becoming a Supreme is not only what has to be done, but also what needs to be done. I won't have it any other way, nor can I."

As she finished speaking, the PTV came to a halt.

Nephis smiled.

"But let's not discuss such dreadful matters anymore. We have arrived."

Sunny nodded and prepared to exit the vehicle. As he did, he asked with a hint of indifference:

"Who are we meeting?"

Nephis opened the door and climbed out, then said without turning back:

"Oh, didn't I mention? We are meeting my sister…”