1742 Good Reason

Sunny grinned behind the mask.

"What can I say? I wasn't always a recluse. She contemplated for a few moments, and eventually nodded.

"Alright. Then, my next question. Let's presume that you are correct, and I do, indeed, harbor such an interest. But what about you? What is your reason?"

Sunny chuckled.

"Would you believe me if I said that my reason is exactly the same as yours?"

Nephis thought for a moment, then shook her head.

"Not really."

He tilted his head a little.

"Well, fair enough. It's not. In truth, I don't have as great a grudge against the Sovereigns as you do. I do despise them a great deal, true, but to answer your question... I guess it has to do with what I desire."

She pierced him with a heavy gaze.

"And what is it that you desire, Lord Shadow?"

He laughed coldly.

"Oh, nothing much. A nice house with a scenic view, somewhere warm and pleasant, Tasty meals and good company. Enough money for a comfortable life. Safety and well-being... stuff like that."

Nephis blinked a couple of times. She seemed quite surprised by that answer.

"You live in a dark temple in the middle of a Death Zone, surrounded by dreadful Nightmare Creatures. But all you desire... is a nice house and tasty food?"

Sunny stared at her emotionlessly.

"Don't forget the good company."

He paused, then added evenly:

"You might think that it's a simple wish, Lady Nephis. But that is the thing... in this world we live in, even a simple wish like that is insurmountable. One would have to be a god to live without worries. No. Actually, even becoming a god might not be enough."

She frowned.

"What does it have to do with your enmity against the Great Clans and the Sovereigns?"

He remained silent for a few moments.

When he finally spoke, his voice sounded dark and sinister:

"The root of my enmity lies in the fact that they insist on dictating the shape of the world where I live, while not possessing enough competence to keep it safe, Their methods, their callousness, and their hubris are both misguided and loathsome. What better proof there is than this war they are about to start?"

Sunny shook his head.

"In other words, I disdain the notion of allowing the Sovereigns to decide my fate. I would rather have the power to make such decisions for myself. I've fought long and hard to gain it."

Kai nodded silently, signaling to Nephis that he was telling the truth.

She took a deep breath and looked at Sunny silently.

Slowly, white sparks ignited in her eyes, and a faint smile appeared on her face.

"Next question, then. You could have moved independently or made alliances with all kinds of other people. Yet, you chose to build a relationship with me. Why?"

Sunny stared at her for a few moments, then shrugged.

What was he supposed to answer?

"...Because you are Changing Star."

Noticing a silent question in her eyes, he added somberly:

"You know... people these days tend to dismiss the value of a proper education. Take basic language skills, for example, Very few make an effort to earnestly learn the runic languages of the Dream Realm, relying on the Spell to do the translating for them. If they did, however, they would have known what your True Name really means, Lady Nephis

Sunny smiled, hiding behind the motionless mask.

"You are not a star that changes, but rather one that causes change. A star that brings ruin and misfortune, but also opportunity. We live in a time of great upheaval, and is there a better person to forge an alliance with than someone who is fated to be at the center of all these calamities?"

He chuckled.

"Someone like me, who is not fated for anything, can do worse than to attach myself to someone like you. It's even better if I place you in my debt. A common enemy, a shared fate, and a little bit of leverage... is the perfect foundation for a lasting alliance, don't you think?"

Sunny finished speaking and looked at Kai. The charming archer hesitated under his gaze, then nodded slowly.

‘There. That should be enough.’

...However, this time, Nephis did not look to Kai for confirmation.

Instead, she stared directly at Sunny and said:

"You are lying"

He frowned, taken aback.

After a long pause, Sunny said in an even tone:

"Hasn't Saint Nightingale just confirmed that I'm not?"

She shook her head lightly.

"Kal has the ability to discern lies, but he is too honest, and too decent. There are many ways to deceive someone by telling the truth, and that is what you are doing, Lord Shadow. You are not telling me everything... which is fine. I don't need to know all your secrets. But I do need to know if we really share a common enemy, and why you've decided to become my ally."

Sunny remained silent for a while.

'Damn it.'

She had forgotten him, so why had she not forgotten all his lessons in deceit?

Eventually, he sighed and looked away.

Sunny lingered for a few moments, then allowed the mask of indifference the Lord of Shadow wore to crack a little, revealing a glimpse of sincerity.

"Someone... told me once that people like me are born to destroy things, not build them. That this world needs killers and destroyers more than it needs saviors and builders. Well, they were right."

He looked at her, hiding behind an expressionless mask.

"I am indeed best at killing. However... you know, there are people building things all over the Dream Realm today. There is a young girl building a road somewhere in the Song Domain right now. Elsewhere in the Sword Domain, a young father is developing a farm to feed his wife and child. These people might not be as powerful as me, or as ambitious as me. They can't slay Nightmare Creatures as well as me. But they matter, too Sunny grimaced and added evenly:

"That young girl, that farmer's child, and countless others like them. Ah, It's a bit embarrassing to admit... but I hope that all the killing i do will change the world into a shape that allows them to live their lives building new things. Even if they have to build them on the ruins that people like us, Changing Star, leave in our wake."

He leaned forward a little:

"How is that for a reason?"

She remained silent for a long while, looking at him calmly.

Eventually, it seemed as if Nephis accepted his answer.

She sighed, then asked nonchalantly:

"Do you serve any of the three Supremes?"

Sunny shook his head.

"I don't."

She nodded.

"Are you planning to betray me?"

He chuckled.

"Not particularly,"

Nephis raised an eyebrow, Then, she smiled slightly,

"Are you hiding anything from me, Lord Shadow?”

"A great deal of things."

She looked at Kai, received his confirmation, and then leaned back in her chair.

"Fine. This is acceptable. Then... I'll be honest, too."

At that moment, the door opened, and someone who Sunny had very much not expected to see entered the room.

Jet glanced at him with a scowl, then turned to Nephis and said, her voice harsh:

"This guy reeks of death."

A crooked smile twisted her lips.

"...I like him.”