1803 After the Fighting is Over

Back in the courtyard of the Nameless Temple, Cassie let out a heavy sigh and looked away, hiding her eyes. Sunny remained silent, waiting for her to come to her senses.

He hesitated for a few moments, then moved his chair back. The tea had grown cold; the refreshments did not look appetizing anymore.

The leaves of the lonesome tree rustled peacefully in the darkness.

After a while, Cassie's shoulders trembled.

"It has already begun..."

Her voice was distant.

Sunny lingered for a few moments.

This time, the memory he had shown her was not nearly as long as the previous one. The awesome desolation of the Burned Forest and the mysterious nature of the Nameless Temple were memorable and distinct - however, as expected, what had affected Cassie the most was the sight of LO49.

Of course, she would not know anything about that lunar observatory in particular. But it was unmistakably a modern building - there was no place for it in the Dream Realm. Knowing that, she would have instantly understood the meaning.

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

"You didn't know?"

She shook her head slowly.

He studied her delicate face, then let out a soft sigh.

Finally, there was something he knew that Cassie didn't. However, that did not bring him any joy.

After remaining silent for a while, he said neutrally:

"It was an old lunar observatory. L049. It used to stand on the southern edge of the Antarctic Center - well, designated south, at least. Obviously, every direction there is technically north of the pole."

Sunny paused for a moment, and then added:

"The staff and soldiers who were garrisoned there were wiped out during the early stages of the Chain of Nightmares, and nobody has seen LO49 since. I am the last human to have visited Antarctica, I think. But I never went that far south. So, I don't know when the observatory was swallowed by the Dream Realm."

He smiled darkly.

"It would be a bit funny... if it wasn't so terrifying. While wandering the Sword Domain, I often felt that it was safer than some parts of our own world. Now, the difference between the two realms is even more vague. Soon enough, there will be none."

Cassie did not respond, sitting motionlessly in the darkness. Eventually, she said in a quiet tone:

"I'm sorry... I need to process the news…”

Sunny leaned back and allowed her to think in silence. After a while, he said evenly:

"Does it change anything, though?"

The war was still coming.

Finally, Cassie faced him again.

"Of course! It changes everything. 1... 1'll have to rethink a lot of things. The human enclaves in the Dream Realm are hardly self-sufficient, after all. It is difficult enough to provide food and shelter for three hundred million people. To accommodate billions... even if it happens gradually over the span of a decade, a lot of development plans will have to be accelerated. Most communication still happens through the waking world. Data is stored digitally. The scope of it all is... is too much."

She let out a shaky breath.

"That is not even mentioning the fact that all the rules we know will become obsolete after our world is devoured by the Dream Realm. There will be no more Nightmare Gates, for example. No more division between the physical body and the spirit body... and so on. The Spell will have to change accordingly. It might very well plunge us into a new horror, one that would make everything prior seem like a gentle prologue."

Cassie was thinking as the right hand of a person who was supposed to take the throne of humanity. There was a heavy responsibility that came with the throne, of course.

But to Sunny, her train of thought seemed a little funny. Because they had not even come close to vanquishing the Sovereigns yet.

He smiled.

"You seem to have a lot of plans for what happens after the fighting is over."

Cassie faced him with a hint of surprise on her exquisite face.

"I do. Don't you?"

Sunny chuckled.

"Of course... more fighting."

Their woes would not be over with the fall of Anvil and Ki Song. If anything, the true battle would only start after the war was over.

She remained silent for a while, then nodded somberly.

"You are right."

A few moments later, the young woman added quietly:

"But, regardless of it all. I... am glad. That you found a reason to come back."

Then, Cassie faced him with a brittle smile.

"It might feel like the word has rejected you... but, Sunny. It needs you, as well."

Saying these words, she turned away.

"...As do I. And Nephis, most of all."

Sunny stared at her silently, a complicated mess of emotions rising in his heart. He wanted to say something, but didn't quite know what to say.

In the end, he simply shrugged.

"That is alright. Because I need the world, too. And Nephis. And you as well, Cassie."

She smiled.

"I'll remember."

With that, she stood up and sighed.

"Our time is up. If I linger any longer, some people in Bastion might grow suspicious of the purpose of my visit."

Sunny nodded lightly and rose from his chair.

He had brought Cassie here from NQSC. So, he had to bring her back, as well.

Soon, the two of them appeared in a deserted alley in the depths of the outskirts. Cassie could use her own tether to return to Bastion immediately, but hesitated for a while.

Eventually, she said with uncertainty:

"I'm... I won't say anything about what is happening between Nephis and you in Bastion."

Sunny suppressed an embarrassed cough, feeling grateful for her decision to refrain from discussing that matter. The situation... was strange and complicated enough, already,

Cassie took a deep breath.

"I want you to know something, though."

He raised an eyebrow.

"What?"

She lowered her head.

"About how it feels, on the other side. You see... 1 can't quite imagine how you feel, being forgotten by everyone. But I do know how it feels to have forgotten. It is a strange thing. When we first met, I didn't know who you were - by all accounts, you were a stranger. And yet, there was this strange sense of familiarity. As if we've known each other all our lives."

Cassie took a deep breath.

"There were... other feelings, as well. Subtle and faint, but undeniable. I won't describe them. But I am sure that Nephis is being swayed by these unconscious thoughts, as well. Even if she can't retain the memories of you, the emotions those memories stir remain. So... she wasn't just captivated by Master Sunless because he is charming, handsome, and pleasant to be around."

Cassie faced Sunny once again.

"You might think that her feelings are not quite real, because her knowledge of you is not quite true... and maybe you are right. But I still want you to respect them."

She remained silent for a moment, then nodded.

"...That is all I wanted to say, You can decide what to do yourself"

Before Sunny could say anything, she was gone. He stared at the empty space where Cassie had stood expressionlessly.

After a while, he sighed.

'Did I just... get the "if you hurt her, I'll kill you" talk?'

The tone wasn't quite the same, but somehow, it did feel like that.

Chuckling, Sunny turned around and pulled on his tether.

'If I hurt Nephis, she'll kill me herself. Well... at least she'll try. I am a bit hard to kill these days…’