1807 Dream Come True

They parted soon after.

…For a little bit.

Sunny might not have known a lot about women, but he knew enough not to try taking Nephis on a date immediately. Women had their mysterious rites and rituals, after all - if he invited her anywhere without giving her a chance to clean up and change out of her loungewear into something more flattering, he would have earned the scorn of the entire womankind.

Granted, those light clothes of hers were flattering enough, already. Although not exactly sparse, they did a splendid job of accentuating every...

'Pure thoughts!’

In any case, the brief parting worked in his favor, as well. While Nephis returned to the Ivory Island to get ready, Sunny scrambled to arrange a few things. About an hour later, he was waiting by the riverside dock, holding the familiar picnic basket in one hand.

It was a blessing that there were two bodies at his disposal here in Bastion. Otherwise, he would have never managed to prepare in time. Not only did he have to make arrangements, but he also had to quickly assemble a delightful meal for a romantic getaway. One body had been running around and outside the city, while the other had been busy in the kitchen.

Luckily, he managed to finish everything in the nick of time.

Suppressing a hint of nervousness, Sunny couldn't help but look up at the graceful silhouette of the Ivory Tower hovering among the clouds. He almost expected to see a beautiful figure descending from the sky in a mantle of sunlight... but due to the location of where they had arranged to meet, Nephis decided to be less conspicuous.

If Changing Star had indeed landed on a lively street in all her radiant glory, the commotion caused by her arrival would not have been small. Therefore, she simply walked up to him like a normal person, appearing from an alley.

Of course, there was still a big reaction. A Saint was not someone who could be ignored... and Nephis was not just any Saint. Wearing a simple white summer dress and no jewelry, she was still stunning. The passerby couldn't help but react to her beauty, and a lot of heads had been involuntarily turned.

Sunny felt his heart skip, knowing that today, that beauty was just for him.

As she approached with a light smile, he heard a quiet and melodious ringing. He had not told her a lot about the destination of their date, but he did tell her that it would have something to do with water-so, Nephis summoned the familiar pair of silver anklets, which were a Memory she had used on the Great River to help her move in the water

Sunny couldn't help but smile when looking at her.

Nephis walked over, stopped near him, and asked in a light tone:

"So, Master Sunless... where are you taking me?"

He hesitated for a moment.

Out there in the waking world, it was winter, and bitter cold haunted the snowy streets. But here in Bastion, it was still summer. The entire city was bathed in smoldering heat.

People were seeking shelter from the incandescent sun in the shade and longing for cool drinks. Of course, as Saints, both Sunny and Nephis could ignore the sultry weather... but that did not mean that they would not enjoy the refreshing feeling of cooling down their bodies.

He smiled.

"To a beach."

Nephis tilted her head a little.

"...A beach?"

Sunny nodded.

"It might sound a little silly... but actually, I've always dreamed of going to the beach. It's just that there were none where I grew up... actually, I'm not entirely sure if there are any left in the waking world."

He paused for a moment, and then added with a smile:

"But I've learned that there is actually one not far from Bastion. So... would you mind making a dream of mine come true, Lady Nephis?"

She looked at him with a hint of mirth.

"How would I dare refuse? I remember you telling me that you'd given up on having dreams. Fortunately, you seem to have found one, so I'd be delighted to help you fulfill it."

The corner of Neph's mouth twisted upward, and she added with a hint of teasing in her tone:

"However... are you sure that you don't just want to see me in a bathing suit, Master Sunless?"

He looked at her seriously.

"I promise that I don't just want to see you in a bathing suit."

His tone was earnest... but there was a subtle accent on the word "just".

She laughed.

"If you say so. Then... how do we get to this beach?"

Sunny offered her his arm.

"Follow me."

Once she wrapped her arm around his, he guided her to the dock.

There were several rivers feeding the Mirror Lake, and one it gave birth to. That river was much more modest than the great River of Tears that flowed through the entire Song Domain, but it was still deep and full. Its destination was also the same it flowed south, toward the Stormsea.

Bastion was much further south and closer to the Stormsea than Ravenheart, so the river wasn't very long. It could be quite dangerous for the same reason - powerful sea monsters sometimes entered the estuary and swam far upstream, attracted by the smell of human souls.

They never reached the Mirror Lake, though, because the Citadel of Clan Dagonet stood between Bastion and the sea. The powerful abominations from the depths always died trying to breach the river fortress.

Nevertheless, the length of the river between Bastion and the stronghold was not entirely safe. But Sunny judged that nothing in this tamed region of the Dream Realm could seriously threaten him and Nephis. Very few things out there that could.

What he cared about was that there was a wild beach not too far down the river. It was beautiful, peaceful, and remote... a perfect place for a date on a hot summer day.

That was where he wanted to take Neph.

There were several wooden longships tied to the pier, their bows carved to resemble dragons and serpents. These drakkars belong to Clan Dagonet, and were used to patrol the river and guard the trade ships coming from the Stormsea. There were also several barges meant to deliver supplies to the river fortress and the town that had grown around it.

Most Importantly, there were plenty of small river boats.

‘Thanks, Alko…’

Sunny guided Nephis to one of the boats, which he had rented from the owner in advance. It was just large enough to fit two people and a bit of cargo, with a single pair of oars at the stern.

She looked at it curiously.

"Are we sailing down the river?"

Sunny hesitated for a moment, then smiled helplessly.

"Well... more like rowing down the river? Oh, I'll be the one handling the oars, of course. Why, you don't like it?"

'Should I kill Aiko? A little.’

Nephis looked at the boat, then at the river, and finally back at him.

Eventually, she smiled.

"No. I love it."

Sunny let out a relieved sigh.

'Aiko can live. Should I give her a raise?’