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He was startled by that question. It had come out of nowhere, completely crushing his expectations of what she wanted to talk about... both the best and the worst of them.

Sunny remained silent until the pain of the Flaw made it difficult, and then nodded slowly, choosing not to say anything else. The more he said, the higher were the chances of her asking him something that he was unable to answer.

Nephis sighed, then explained calmly:

"I started to suspect it after meeting the Lord of Shadows for the first time. He... you... were too strong to have come out of nowhere. A Saint as powerful as that simply had to have left a mark on the world. And when I asked who had taught you my family‘s swordsmanship, you answered that... that nobody had. I did not note it initially, but later, something seemed to click in my mind."

She paused for a few moments, took a deep breath, and then spoke:

"The memories of everyone who had entered the Third Nightmare with me are... affected. We don't really know every detail of what happened here. But there, in Godgrave, I guess something."

Nephis paused before adding:

"The Tomb of Ariel. You were..."

However, before she could form the question, Sunny interrupted her by raising his hand.

There was a complicated expression on his face.

Inside, he was full of intense happiness at the thought of Nephis knowing that they had challenged the Third Nightmare together. It was not exactly the same as remembering him... but it was something, at least. Something infinitely more meaningful than the nothingness of his current situation.

But he also knew that she would not be able to remember his answer.

And, unlike Cassie, who was able to retain the memory of having forgotten something due to her Aspect, Nephis would not be able to do even that.

So, instead of confessing the truth, Sunny said quietly:

"Before you say anything else, I must confess something. There are... certain things that my Flaw prevents me from sharing. So, please... some words are better left unsaid."

Nephis studied him intently for a while, then let out a heavy sigh.

"I see. I... think I understand."

She turned away and smiled faintly.

"That explains it. Why Cassie put so much trust in you. And why her condition has improved so suddenly..."

Sunny turned away quietly.

Had misled her with his warning. But it seemed that his deception had led her to the right conclusions, at least.

Nephis looked at the distant Ivory Island again.

"I won't say that I am not disappointed. But if this is how it is... I won't ask, then."

Her back was very straight.

After a while, Sunny heard her even voice again:

"I will ask you something else, though. Sunless."

He took a deep breath, suddenly feeling nervous.

This was the moment of truth.

'How ironic. ’

"What?"

Nephis turned around and smiled.

Her voice was calm and even:

"I'm leaving Bastion in seven days. So... will you take me on another date? In Godgrave."

Sunny looked at her breathlessly.

Suddenly bashful, Nephis glanced down.

"I... I know that it is not the most romantic location..."

But he interrupted her again.

Breaking into a smile, Sunny nodded.

"Yes. Yes, I will... I'll be delighted to."

He paused for a moment, and the added:

"In fact, I have no choice but to follow you to Godgrave, Nephis."

She hesitantly raised her eyebrow:

"You don't?"

Chuckling, Sunny nodded.

"Of course."

He took a step forward and offered her his hand.

"After all... I am still contractually obligated to forge that sword for you. How can I leave your side before it's finished?"

She smiled...

And took it.

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And that was it.

Their strange, tentative relationship had not ended despite the many secrets they were keeping, the heavy burden of the forgotten past, and the dark shadow of the imminent war. It was going to continue tenaciously despite the uncertain future.

Which made both of them happy... Sunny, at least, felt incredible joy.

It was both strange and wonderful. The circumstances couldn't be any worse... the timing was absolutely atrocious, as well.

But when had it not been?

In hindsight, there had always been something standing between them.

Neither Sunny nor Nephis had any time to think about their feelings on the Forgotten Shore. Then, they were separated for two long years. After Nephis returned, they only spent a month together before he left for Antarctica. And after Antarctica, he was forgotten by everyone, including her.

The had only had a few fleeting moments to be together in peace, in the depths of the Third Nightmare.

So, strangely enough... despite having known her for almost ten years, this was the first time Sunny had enough maturity to not only know what he wanted, but also be able to express his feelings.

So what if the timing was terrible, and there was a war approaching? If he decided to wait for a good moment to act on his desires, he would have had to wait forever... . After talking some more, he showed Nephis out and returned to the Brilliant Emporium while whistling an upbeat melody.

However, once he was inside, he was met by Aiko‘s chilly gaze.

"What are you so happy about?"

Sunny grinned and suppressed the desire to pinch her cheeks.

Instead, he said happily:

"I just agreed to follow Lady Nephis to war."

The petite girl glared at him silently.

"... There's going to be a war?"

Sunny nodded.

"Oh, right. You didn‘t know. Yeah, there is."

Aiko kept silent for a while, then let out a long sigh and sat down.

"And you‘re going with Nephis to that war?"

He gave her a carefree shrug.

"It seems so."

Aiko sighed again, then covered her face with both hands and groaned.

"Gods... not again! Why... why is this keep happening to me? ! No, really... why? !"

Sunny looked at her guiltily, then walked over and patted the petite girl on the head.

His voice sounded bright:

"Aiko... don‘t worry too much. It‘s going to be fine. Let me ask you something..."

When she looked up at him with teary eyes, he grinned and asked cheerfully:

"... Have you heard about the wonderful world of war profiteering‘?"