1889 Heart of Stone

True darkness was Sunny's natural enemy.

However, to Saint, it was a weapon.

Because she had been born in the Underworld, where darkness reigned.

[Heart of Darkness] Attribute Description: "A vestige of an ancient darkness dwells in this Shadow's heart, granting her tenebrous powers."

[Mantle of Darkness] Ability Description: "Darkness embraces this Shadow. When surrounded by darkness, and true darkness more so, her swiftness and might will increase. Her wounds will be healed, and her heart will grow fuller." [Blade of Darkness] Ability Description: "The true darkness dwelling in this Shadow's heart can be summoned in the form of a fearsome weapon, as long as the Shadow has mastered the use of that weapon. The Blade of Darkness can slay those of flesh and those of spirit; it never dulls, never falters, and never breaks. Alternatively, the darkness can be summoned to augment a mundane weapon." ...When Revel summoned the tide of elemental darkness, Sunny's powers were suppressed. Fiend and Serpent were weakened, as well.

But Saint only grew stronger.

There were not one, but three sources of true darkness around the graceful stone knight — the Lightslayer and two Reflections who had mirrored her Aspect. Therefore, Saint's heart was overflowing with power. Her body was nourished by the darkness, growing stronger, faster, and more enduring.

Most importantly of all, she wasn't blinded by the darkness — instead, her perception had only become sharper.

That was why Sunny had abandoned his usual ways. In most battles, he himself played the role of the main blade of the Shadow Cohort — while the Shadows supported him, it was his task to deliver the fatal blow.

But in the sea of elemental darkness, Saint was the best and only option. The rest of them were not only an inferior choice, but also a liability... so, Sunny had chosen to remove himself from the battle, betting everything on Saint.

The taciturn knight was already empowered by the darkness. Now, three of his shadows had bestowed their blessings upon her.

And, lastly, Sunny did something that he had never done before — turning into a shadow, be wrapped himself around her stonelike body, hoping to add the fourth blessing to the other three.

Surprisingly, it worked.

Sunny felt himself... fusing with Saint, like his shadows had done in the past. It was a strange and indescribable feeling — not unpleasant, though. Rather, it felt natural and even a little euphoric, as if he was doing something that he had always been meant to do.

Not that he could have, before becoming a Saint. Even now, Sunny did not know if something like that would have been possible if he attempted the fusion with his original body instead of a shadow incarnation.

Suddenly, he found himself split between two conscious states. One of them was that of himself — he was aware of his existence and identity, and although he could not quite sense the bounds of his intangible form, he knew that it was there. If he wished, he could move away from Saint, regaining his independence.

The other state, however...

He would have gasped if he possessed a mouth to do so.

Sunny had become one with the graceful stone knight.

He was not in control of her body, but he shared her perception of the world. He could feel the coolness of the intricate onyx armor where it touched his stonelike skin, the subdued depth of the great power dwelling in his flawless body, the warmth of the divine flame that burned in his chest like an eternal engine, the flow of ruby dust in his veins.

He could also hear everything Saint heard, which was more than even a Transcendent human could, and see everything she saw. His field of Vision was somewhat obstructed by the narrow slit of the Visor of his helmet, but still surprisingly wide.

Everything seemed different from how Sunny remembered it, not only because Saint's eyes were not at all like his, but also because she was much taller than any human, and her point of view was much higher.

Sunny could also feel the more esoteric parts of her perception — the mass of darkness that dwelled in his heart, the flow of it around him, and other things there which had no names in the human language.

It was probably what Cassie experienced when she used her Ascended Ability and shared all senses with another being.

Saint was much more similar to a human than Sunny would have expected. However, at the same time, the structure of her body and her senses were entirely alien, and would have made him dizzy if not for the fact that Sunny had already become accustomed to inhuman perspectives through Shadow Dance and his extensive use of Shadow Shell.

Only, this way, he was submerged into the alien point of view much deeper, further, and more comprehensively than ever before. It was quite a revelation. In any case, it was... exhilarating. Sunny's own body was a well—oiled machine tempered in countless battles to be a perfect vessel for him, a pinnacle of athletic achievement — it was responsive, strong, nimble, enduring, properly conditioned, and most of all Transcendent. However, Saint's physicality was something different.

She was a masterpiece created by the Demon of Choice, after all.

Her being was more solid, monolithic, and purposeful. It was a work of art as much as it was a living thing, and now, its power was further enhanced both by the darkness and by the shadows.

Sunny could also sense faint echoes of Saint's unshakeable will.

He could feel it...

Her calmness, her cold confidence, her pride. A hint of recognition she felt while facing Revel... because Revel was a Beast‘s spawn, and Saint had battled others of her kin in the great war of old.

'How strange.‘

Sunny could not read Saint's thoughts, but he did understand something about her. It was that the memories of her past life were not entirely gone. However, they weren't entirely there, either... not quite erased, by dim and faint, like a distant dream. A dream that someone else had dreamt, perhaps.

Before she was a Shadow.

It was a mercy, no doubt, considering that most of those memories were tainted by the madness of Corruption.

As a Shadow...

Saint gripped the hilt of the Soul Serpent. The black odachi rippled and shifted its form, turning into a heavy straight sword. Then, a stream of darkness flowed from under her gauntlet, enveloping the sharp blade and fusing with the stygian steel.

She turned her head and faced her two enemies — Princess Revel of the Great Clan Song and the abominable creature that mirrored her existence.

Then, Saint stared them down with cold indifference, calmly raised her sword, and struck it twice against the rim of her shield.

Sharing her senses, Sunny trembled with excitement.

'...I think I understand why she does it now.'

Honestly, it felt rather cool.