1908 Contemplating Mortality

Eventually, Sunny dismissed Saint to let her continue her recovery in the dark silence of his soul. Able to see once again, he looked around a pondered what he had learned.

Saint seemed to have gained several new powers. One was to summon a pool of elemental darkness, one was to turn into a torrent of it, one was to manifest a suit of armor, and the last two had to do with reducing her weight and size.

However, Sunny was not sure if these were truly new Attributes and Abilities, or simply evolutions of those she had already possessed. The suit of armor forged from pure darkness, for example, was a logical extension of her [Blade of Darkness] Ability. The power to summon a flood of elemental darkness might have been simply the result of her [Heart of Darkness] growing stronger.

Sunny was not sure. More than that, he did not even know if these new powers Saint had shown him were the full extent of her change. Neither did he know how many shadow fragments she had received after absorbing her old suit of onyx armor.

She definitely seemed... stronger. Her presence had grown deeper, the cold crimson flames burning in her eyes had become fiercer... even though Saint had not evolved to a new Class, it felt as if she was much closer to becoming a Tyrant now.

The problem was that Sunny had no way of knowing the details of what had changed about her.

His [Handy Bracelet] imitated the shimmering runes, but what they read came from Sunny's own head, not the omniscient reservoir of knowledge that the Spell possessed.

So, there was only one way for him to fully understand Saint's new powers — it was to ask Cassie to take a good look at her.

However...

Doing that was a problem in and of itself.

That was because Sunny had been unable to contact Cassie from the moment Revel and her sisters ambushed the Saints of the Sword Domain — or maybe even from before that, since he had not spoken to her for some time prior to the ambush.

As soon as Sunny discovered that he could not hear Cassie, his incarnation in the warcamp of the Sword Army had been searching for her. But

Master Sunless did not manage to find the blind seer yet.

Looking at the subterranean lake through the smoke, Sunny sighed.

'I wonder what she's up to.'

The smoke was irritating, so Sunny turned into a shadow and glided to the edges of the smoldering ruin, where the air was cleaner.

Taking a deep breath, he looked at the water.

The dim darkness of the Hollows was illuminated by the orange glow of the towering pyre, and dancing flames reflected on the surface of the lake. It was quiet and pretty — a soothing scene after the violent fury of the recent battle.

Looking at it, Sunny felt that an emotion he had been suppressing ever since the daughters of Ki Song retreated finally broke free.

A tide of dark, terrifying fury escaped from its cage and flooded his heart.

'...Black Moon.'

Princess Moonveil, or whatever her name was... had almost killed Nephis today. While Sunny was having fun learning new things and testing his limits against Revel, Neph had been bleeding somewhere far above, alone and robbed of her powers.

He couldn't quite make sense of it all.

Nephis was... Nephis. Her public image was that of a larger-than-life heroine, and although Sunny knew that it had been meticulously crafted by the government and Cassie, he still couldn't help but forget that she was a mere mortal, sometimes.

She had accomplished the impossible too many times — just like he had — and had overcome impossible odds on too many occasions. In addition to that, her Aspect made her nearly immortal.

So, Sunny did not often contemplate the possibility that Nephis would be killed. Even when imagining how he himself would fight someone with powers similar to hers, he never thought about slaying them — that would be just a senseless waste of time and energy.

Instead, he carefully considered how he would restrain the opponent and render them helpless, which was the optimal way of defeating such a foe.

But today, that subconscious bias of his had been shattered. Each Aspect was unique, and there were all kinds of them out there... even such an insidious power as the ability to nullify all other powers existed, wielded by one of the princesses of the Song Domain.

And Moonveil had used that power of hers against Nephis.

Sunny did not even know how close he had come to losing her, and he... was not alright with that fact.

His hands turned into fists without him noticing.

For a moment, Sunny contemplated using his incarnation in the camp of the Song Army to go on a slaughter. He was currently not too far from Seishan and Death Singer — maybe killing them would be enough punishment for Clan Song, who had dared to lay a hand on Nephis.

If not, it could at least make him feel better.

However, he quickly discarded that idea. Not only would it put Rain in danger, but he couldn't really kill Saints for personal reasons. Perhaps playing a Valor soldier had gotten into his head, a little — for a moment, Sunny forgot that the Great Clan Song was not his enemy.

Its Queen was, as well as the King of Swords. Everyone else was a precious resource that could not be wasted — with every Saint that perished in the senseless war between the two Domains, the future of humanity was being compromised.

Every powerful Awakened that died in Godgrave would not be able to save countless lives in the dire, inevitable future.

Sunny let out a frustrated sigh.

Most of all, that impulse of his was childish.

He was letting his emotions get the best of him. He was being foolish.

Of course, Nephis could die. No matter how impossible it seemed, she could be killed just like the rest of them. He had always understood that logically, but understanding and acceptance were two different things.

Sunny could be killed despite his miraculous tenacity, as well. Or worse, captured alive —remembering the dark mirror cell where Mordret had been kept for many years made him shudder. That was not something he wished for himself...

Or for Nephis.

Just as he thought about her, the weak flames around him were suddenly extinguished, and she emerged from the smoke, shielding her face with a hand.

"There you are."

Sunny studied her for a while, as if making sure that she was really alive, and then smiled faintly behind the mask.

"Yes. Here I am."