1962 Darkest Shadow

Sunny massaged his tired shoulders and yawned. As a Saint — and quite a special one at that — he did not tire easily. Still, this latest marathon had been a little exhausting. From battling Revel to fusing with Shadows and Memories, to weaving without rest for a week straight... his mind was in dire need of respite.

Particularly because neither the Lord of Shadows nor Rain's teacher had any time to rest, either.

Shaking his head, Sunny picked up the [Bag of Withholding], opened its clasp, and stored the rest of the Memories inside. With that done, he finally left the basement of the Brilliant Emporium, expecting to crash onto his lavish bed on the second floor and go to sleep.

However, before that, he walked over to the entrance and returned the Silver Bell to its usual place above the door.

"There. All better."

Sunny stared at the bell for a few moments.

'It's a little funny.'

He had expressed regret about not having a home before, which prompted Noctis — another displaced Saint — to give his heartfelt and thoughtful advice. Noctis himself had built the Sanctuary and made it his home, while Sunny...

Sunny had the Brilliant Emporium.

It really showed how pathological he was, making a home that was literally capable of following him around wherever he went, so that he would never lose it again.

It worked pretty great, though. He was still living comfortably in his cottage despite leaving Bastion and coming to Godgrave, after all.

Sunny smiled.

'...I might be a genius.'

He briefly wondered how the Marvelous Mimic would look one day in the distant future. Would he and Nephis be living together by then? Hopefully, yes.

Imagining an idle life with Neph in this cozy cottage made Sunny's smile widen. Surely, he would have to make some alterations to the interior. She would definitely need a closet of her own... more than that, knowing Neph, she would need a training ground first. Several rooms would have to be added. Another bathroom, an office, a library...

A... a nursery?

Sunny coughed.

But then, his smile dimmed a little.

'Right.'

If the two of them were to even have a future, they would be Supreme. Which meant that Nephis would be a queen — the sole ruler of humanity, most likely, responsible for all the human territory in the Dream Realm and their slowly collapsing homeworld as well.

A queen could not live in a modest cottage.

Sunny sighed.

'It's not a problem, though.'

There was another great thing about the Marvelous Mimic — it could change shapes. The size and intricacy of its shape depended on the potency of Sunny's soul, so by the time he was a Sovereign, his cottage could very well be turned into a palace.

Sunny rubbed his face.

He was thinking about strange things.

'Time to get some sleep.'

Turning around, he headed for the stairs. But before he could reach them, the Silver Bell rang, and Aiko entered the dining hall with a happy smile on her face.

Noticing him, she froze.

"Boss! You're out of the basement?"

'She doesn't have to sound so surprised... it's not like I'm some kind of a basement dweller!'

Sunny studied her for a few moments, then nodded.

"Yeah. Why are you so happy?"

The petite girl grinned.

"Oh... Saint Tyris is finally back at the camp. Which means that there won't be any Cloudbreaks, at least for a while. Bah, they are so annoying... I was on my way to the bathroom the last time one happened, and it lasted for four damned hours!"

Sunny gave her an unamused look.

"Thanks for sharing. I could have done without knowing that last detail, though."

But then, the meaning of what she had said finally dawned on him.

'Saint Tyris is back...'

Sky Tide had been traveling with Neph's party.

Which meant that Nephis was back, too...

His eyes brightened.

'Finally!'

Smiling, Sunny forgot about Aiko, turned around, and headed for the door.

After thinking for a bit, though, he used Shadow Step to jump to the second floor of the Brilliant Emporium.

He had been stuck in the basement for two weeks, after all... and looked accordingly.

Meeting Nephis in such an unsavory state was simply unacceptable.

'First, a shower...'

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Sunny was understandably excited to see Nephis return... but so was the entire Sword Army.

Currently, it was split between two camps. Most of the soldiers remained in the main camp, while the former expedition force was settling in the secondary camp on the breastbone of the dead deity.

Now that Nephis and her party were back, the deployment of troops would probably change —after all, the very reason why it had taken her so long to return was because she was supposed to have secured a wider and safer path for the soldiers to move between the two camps on the way.

The secondary camp would serve as the spearhead of the war against the Song Army, while the main camp would become its bastion in the rear. Similarly, the troops currently stationed in the depths of the Breastbone Reach were the most experienced soldiers of the Sword Army, having endured the hellish expedition to subjugate the Vanishing Lake Citadel — which was the name people had settled on after Nephis burned most of the Citadel down during the fight against Moonveil.

The ones who had stayed in the main camp experienced plenty of battles, as well, slowly claiming the eastern expanse of the Collarbone Plain and battling the scarlet infestation. However, they only knew about the harrowing journey of the expedition force and the devastating battle for the Vanishing Lake from rumors.

Sunny did not know who had been responsible for the rumors — the elders of Clan Valor, who wished to bolster morale, or Cassie herself — but they painted quite a heroic picture of Summer Knight, the Lord of Shadows, and Changing Star... especially the latter two.

Although he had spent most of his time locked away in the basement, he still knew what was being said about the Lord of Shadows. If Sunny had not been the nebulous Saint himself, he would have come to believe that the Lord of Shadows was quite an awesome figure.

Mysterious, immensely powerful, and chillingly ruthless. A dauntless warrior who wielded darkness and death as weapons, leading a cohort of dreadful creatures to massacre and slaughter countless hordes of abominations... and, at the same time, a calculating and cunning commander who kept his soldiers alive in the face of most dire odds.

'Well... I am a little awesome, indeed.'

Sunny sometimes forgot how unbelievably powerful he was — which he couldn't be blamed for, really, considering how the caliber of the enemies he faced always seemed to evolve and reach comically unreasonable levels of power faster than he did.

But from the point of view of an ordinary Awakened, the Lord of Shadows would indeed appear as an absolutely monstrous existence, someone whose dark and dreadful power defied all reason and logic.

The soldiers of the Sword Army would naturally feel blessed to have him fighting for their side. The soldiers of the Song Army, meanwhile, would soon learn to be terrified of shadows.

...Luckily, none of them knew that the Lord of Shadows was merely half of Sunny, wielded no more than half of his true power.

If they did, they wouldn't have been able to sleep in peace.