1967 Lost Together

Nephis had only just returned to the camp, so she did not know about the memories of Master Orum yet. Sunny selfishly wanted to stay in her company for a while longer, but it was important for her to meet Cassie.

Not only because of the knowledge about the Sovereigns that Orum's memories contained, but also because they were a testament to the lives of her parents.

Broken Sword, Smile of Heaven...

The two of them, who had been the shining stars of humanity once, were long gone. And they had not left a lot behind for their daughter, who carried the weight of their legacy alone.

When Sunny spoke, Nephis nodded lightly and stood up. Placing a hand on his shoulder, she smiled.

"Alright. Wait a little, I'll be back shortly."

With that, she left. Cassie's living quarters were only one floor below her own, so she did not have to go far... however, Sunny knew that it was going to take her quite a long time to come back.

Left alone, he sighed quietly.

Suddenly, the fatigue that he had forgotten about returned, making his eyelids feel heavy.

Sunny remained at the table for a while, picking up a few grapes absentmindedly. Then, he stood up and walked over to the wide balcony, looking at the landscape of the army camp far below.

Neph's chambers were spacious and sparsely furnished. The white walls were unadorned, and there was nowhere to rest except for the bed hidden beneath a canopy, which fluttered gently in the breeze. Shadows and sunlight were interspersed with open space, creating a beautiful and complicated mosaic.

Sunny hesitated for a few moments, then sat down on the bed and closed his eyes, intending to let them rest for a moment.

Instead, he simply fell asleep.

His tired body desperately needed reprieve, and so did his overtaxed mind.

So, Sunny decided not to wake himself up. Master Sunless had nothing to do at the moment, anyway. His other two incarnations could pick up the slack.

The Lord of Shadows was preparing to attack the Song Army from the rear. Rain's mercurial teacher was busy hiding from the Queen of Worms while keeping his headstrong disciple safe.

So, he drifted into the soft embrace of sleep.

...After a while, feeling rested and refreshed, he became aware of his surroundings once again and slowly opened his eyes.

It seemed that he had been asleep for much longer than intended. The air smelled of coming rain, and the stone chamber was much darker than before. Considering that there were no nights in Godgrave, it could only mean that storm clouds were gathering in the sky, casting a deep shadow on the war camp of the Sword Army.

Sunny was still in the sweet grasp of sleep, a little. The bed was soft and welcoming, and both his body and mind felt revived. He was in a very good mood.

'The Hollows are going to be flooded again.

At least the Hollows of the eastern reach of the Collarbone Plain. He did not know how vast the approaching storm would be.

Turning his head, Sunny noticed that Nephis had come back at some point. She was sitting on a chair a few meters away, looking at the piece of the grey sky visible through the arches of the balcony. Her distant eyes were the same color as the stormy sky, harboring a hint of melancholy.

Watching her, Sunny belatedly realized that he was laying comfortably on her bed, his head resting on a soft pillow. However, he did not move, reluctant to disturb her thoughts.

Nevertheless, Nephis must have sensed his gaze —or maybe something deeper — and turned. Her face remained motionless for a few moments, and was then illuminated by a faint smile.

"You're awake."

Sunny nodded.

"Yes. Sorry... I just closed my eyes for a moment, and that seemed to have powered me down."

She shook her head lightly.

"That's alright. It was... sweet, actually. I got to see another of your faces. You look very different when you sleep."

He raised an eyebrow, hiding his embarrassment.

Sunny had only recently called himself delicious, but really, no one had ever described him as sweet — at least not that he could remember.

His expression wavered for a moment.

'Wait. Was she watching me sleep?'

He wasn't quite sure how to feel about it.

Not the least because it meant that he felt safe enough here to not even bother staying aware of his surroundings with the help of the gloomy shadow.

Glancing at it briefly, Sunny looked back to Nephis and hesitated for a moment.

"Have you met Cassie?"

She turned to the grey sky again and nodded after a short pause.

"Yes. We learned quite a bit about the Sovereigns. It's... good news."

In the silence that followed, Sunny sighed deeply.

"What about the rest of it?"

Nephis looked up and smiled.

There was a hint of bitterness in her smile. Eventually, she sighed.

"It is something special, isn't it? Cassie's power. I never thought I'd get to see my mother one day. I mean... how she was before becoming Hollow. I had only ever heard about how bright and wonderful she was from others."

Nephis lingered for a few moments and added, her voice growing a little distant:

"My dad, too. I still remember him, a little — it was not like we were particularly close, though. He was not indifferent or uncaring, just... always busy. And always bleak, even if he tried to brighten up when around me. Looking back, he was really obsessed with what he was trying to achieve. Conquering the Fourth Nightmare, most likely. The apple... doesn't fall far from the tree, does it?"

She sighed.

"It was really strange, to see them like that. Young, radiant, loving, and brimming with hope. I had thought... that it would be a solace, to finally know what they were like. To know that they have not always been just a pair of ghosts. Especially my mother."

She looked down at her hands and added, her voice sounding wistful:

"But to be honest..."

Nephis sighed.

"...In the end, witnessing them only made me feel lonelier."

Sunny remained silent for a while, not knowing what to say.

Everything he wanted to say to her would be forgotten in a few moments, never leaving a mark. So, there was no point.

Eventually, he looked at the ceiling.

"...There is this guy that I know. Who became an orphan early on. He was lonely for a long time, too. But then, he met a girl."

He paused for a few seconds.

"And then, he lost that girl. And then, he found her again, only to lose her again. Come to think of it, I guess it's wrong to say that he lost her — rather, it was him who became lost. In any case, what I am trying to say is... actually, I'm not sure what I'm trying to say."

Sunny smiled.

"I seem to have had some kind of idea when I started talking, but now, I don't know. You don't have to feel like that, I guess."

Nephis chuckled softly.

Standing up, she walked over to the bed and sat down, looking at Sunny from above. There was a strange emotion in her eyes... both bitter and sweet, both powerful and timid.

Perhaps it was longing.

Nephis smiled.

"Well... how does the story end? Was that guy found in the end?"

Sunny answered her smile with one of his own, then shrugged.

"I'm not sure yet. Time will tell..."

She gazed at him deeply, not saying anything.

Slowly, her smile dimmed, replaced by a calm and sober expression.

And the strange emotion in her eyes grew more intense.

Sunny wanted to speak, but before he could, Nephis leaned down and kissed him deeply. Her lips were like flame, setting his heart on fire.

His hands rose, hovered hesitantly near her waist for a moment, and then wrapped around her tightly.

As if intending to never let her go. Never let her go again.

Responding to her kiss, Sunny pushed himself toward her, and then gently pulled her onto the bed.

A flash of lightning illuminated the world, and somewhere in the distance, a deafening thunderclap shook the world.

However, neither Sunny nor Nephis were aware of the storm, fully and utterly lost in each other.