2044 : Faithful Companion

Eventually, they found themselves on the shore of the lake. The grey sky of Godgrave was shining far above, so the lake itself seemed grey, as well. However, at the same time, its waters shone resplendently, almost to the point that it was painful to look at it.

The water was still cool and refreshing, though — a fact that both Sunny and Nephis had already enjoyed.

Sunny in particular, who felt a bit drained after long hours of forging.

It had taken him many attempts to figure out how to work the silver alloy, in the end. Still, he managed to succeed.

Currently, Sunny was laying on a blanket, spinning a simple silver knife between his fingers. The knife did not possess any enchantments except for those that made it a Memory, but it had been forged in the flames of Neph's soul, and enchanted with her essence.

"May I?"

He looked at Nephis, appreciated the lavish view of her tantalizing body for a few moments too long, and offered her the knife with a smile.

'That swimsuit… is a crime.'

She took the knife and studied it with a curious expression.

Eventually, Nephis shook her head.

"It feels good in my hand. But I don't sense any special bond to it."

Sunny nodded.

"That is because soul flame and essence strings are only one of the necessary ingredients if one wishes to create a Soulbound Relic."

She studied him for a few moments.

"What are the rest of the ingredients?"

Sunny lingered with an answer, not wanting to admit that he wasn't completely sure.

He was confident enough that his theories were correct, but… they would only know after attempting the forging.

Eventually, he gave in to the pain of his Flaw and spoke:

"Well, first of all… I've decided to cheat a little. Instead of creating a new Memory, I want to reforge one that you already possess."

Nephis propped herself up on one elbow and looked at him from above, her beautiful silver hair falling down like a waterfall.

"Oh?"

Sunny nodded.

"In fact, it is the first Memory you have ever received. The Dream Blade."

The silver longsword that Nephis had received in her First Nightmare, and wielded while wandering the Forgotten Shore, the Nightmare Desert, the outskirts of the Underworld, and the depths of the Second Nightmare.

She seemed surprised.

"The Dream Blade? But… it is merely a Dormant weapon of the First Tier. Is it suitable to become the base for such a powerful relic?"

Sunny slowly shook his head.

"It doesn't matter what Rank or Tier it is. What matters the most is the bond between it has with you. Correct me if I am wrong, but that sword was your companion throughout some of the most dreadful chapters of your life. And it served you well."

Nephis hesitated for a bit, then nodded.

"Indeed. No other sword has ever been able to compare."

Sunny hesitated for a bit, then added cautiously:

"There is another reason why I chose the Dream Blade, actually. That sword… it was a bit strange from the very beginning, wasn't it?"

She raised an eyebrow.

"How so?"

Sunny considered his words for a few moments.

"You should know. You only killed one Nightmare Creature in your First Nightmare, after all — the Awakened Terror that had trapped you in a dream. And yet, you brought back two Memories. An Awakened armor of the Sixth Tier, which you gave to Cassie on the Forgotten Shore, and the Dream Blade. A Dormant weapon of the First Tier. Where did the second Memory come from?"

Nephis hesitated.

"You… seem to know a whole lot about my First Nightmare. Curious. There are very few people I have ever told about it."

Sunny shrugged.

"Two people can only keep a secret if one of them is dead."

She studied him with an amused expression, then chuckled.

"I guess. In any case, I received the Dream Blade after escaping the dream. It was what I used to slay the Terror while it was wriggling in pain. I might not have survived otherwise… so, I simply assumed that the dream itself was like a living being, which I destroyed."

Sunny nodded.

"That is most likely the case. However, I can't help but think about a different possibility. A more symbolic one, perhaps. After all, you have destroyed that dream by burning yourself alive. So, one might think that you received that Memory for slaying… yourself. A Dormant Memory of the First Tier for the life of a Sleeper. Sounds strange, but it would not be the strangest thing the Spell has done by far."

As Nephis considered his words with a perplexed expression, Sunny sighed.

"No matter if there is any truth to that theory, though, the Dream Blade is still our best choice. Of course… if I fail, it will be destroyed. Therefore, we will only have one attempt to get it right."

She laid back down, remained silent for a few moments, and asked:

"When will we make this attempt, then?"

Sunny contemplated the answer.

He had already considered and tried almost everything he could think of.

For example, there was the bizarre idea of attempting to forge the sword within Neph's Soul Sea. Sadly, she seemed to be too powerful to be imprinted by the [Mark of Shadows], and Sunny had no way to enter someone else's Soul Sea otherwise.

He had also considered replacing the soul shards necessary for creating the Memory… with one of Neph's own soul cores. But while she could sacrifice her cores to receive astonishing power, there was no real way for them to simply carve out one of them — without destroying it, at least. Besides, the Mantle of the Underworld had not required its master to use their own soul as fuel.

Sunny had even examined each of the thousands of silent shadows resting in his soul, hoping that one would possess an ability that Serpent could use to help the forging. Alas, powerful Nightmare Creatures capable of manipulating souls were very rare, and Sunny had been fortunate enough to not cross paths with many of them.

So, there was no point in postponing the inevitable anymore.

He sighed.

"The day after tomorrow. There won't be a better opportunity later."

Sunny turned his head, looked at Nephis, and smiled.

"In the meantime, though, I am going to need you to pull some strings on my behalf, princess. There is this one thing I still want to try…"

She turned her head, too.

For a few moments, they were laying side by side, their faces almost too close to each other. Sunny stared into her calm, grey eyes silently, feeling content and at peace.

Then, her eyes grew a little livelier.

She smiled with a hint of mirth.

"Oh? There is a thing you still want to try?"

Sunny closed his eyes and let out a tortured sigh.

'All this teasing!'

When he opened his eyes again, his gaze was quite heated.

But what could he do?

His Flaw compelled him to answer truthfully, so that was what he did…