

Part-1

[ch-764 neph returns, instinctly feels safe enough around sunny to surrender herself]

Standing naked amidst the devastation caused by her, Changing Star stared at Sunny with a confused expression. Then, she suddenly swayed, and fell down. Sunny was barely quick enough to fall to his knees and catch her. Holding Neph in his arms.

{ch765 sunny reaction to her return }

Sunny had reasons to be shocked, and reasons to be tense. And he was. But most of all... he was happy. Incredibly happy.

A sense of profound relief, contentment, and joy threatened to drown his ability to think clearly. He felt as though... as though something precious, something vital that he had lost was suddenly returned to him. Something that he had been missing. And now that it was back, Sunny felt complete.

{Ch769 sunny wants her to smile more}

A beautiful smile illuminated Neph's face, making her look much softer and younger than she usually seemed. In all the time they knew each other, Sunny had only seen her smile a few times, and every time he did, a hint of regret brushed against his heart. It was a shame, for such a brilliant smile to appear so seldom...

Maybe in her dreams, Changing Star allowed herself to show it more often.

He remained silent for a while. Then, finally, he looked at her and said the only thing that came to his mind. The most truthful one.

"I missed you."

Neph smiled, and looked at him as well.

"...I missed you, too."

"If you really missed me... then why the hell had you left me, Who the hell do you think you are?! Who asked for your righteousness?! Do you even know what you took from me?! Who gave you the right to make that choice for me?!"

"I buried too many people, Sunny. I deserved the right to be selfish. Even if it did you harm..."

"Why do you even care whether I live or die?!"

Nephis looked at him and smiled. The wind moved her silver hair, making it dance.

Then, she shrugged and said in an even tone:

"Because I do."

"Argh! What an infuriating woman!". 😂

(ch-778 neph stares sunny in longing but sunny misunderstood the gaze)

Why not? I'll tell you... it can reverse one's Flaw."

A sudden silence settled in the dark chamber. Nephis looked at him, a hint of longing and pain reflecting in her striking eyes. Sunny grinned.

"Why? Do you want to take it from me? All you have to do is to say the word. It's not like I can refuse." She stared at him for a long time, then silently turned away and did not say anything

{Ch-780 friendly spar }

Drops of blood fell to the floor..Before he could say anything, Nephis suddenly reached forward and placed a cool palm on his torn cheek. In the next moment, a brilliant white radiance illuminated the underground dojo.Standing close to each other, the two of them froze for a moment. Neph's hand rested on Sunny's cheek, which was swiftly healing. The soft radiance emanating from her skin reflected in her calm, grey eyes.Beneath that calmness, there were pain and suffering in them.

{Ch786 Both were obsessed with each other } Putting the bowl away, Changing Star smiled slightly and looked at him. A hesitant expression appeared on her face.

A few moments later, she suddenly said:

"Be that as it may... while I was lost and wandering the Dream Realm, slowly forgetting what it felt like to be human... there was one thing I clung to that reminded me that all my prior life had not been just a dream. Do you know what it was?"

Sunny thought for a bit, then shrugged.

"I don't know. A Memory? Your sword, Dreamblade?"

She lingered for a few moments, then slowly shook her head.

"No. It was... you."

Sunny remained silent for a bit, and then forced himself to say:

"...Actually, I spent a lot of time staring at your runes, as well."

He looked at the floor.

"Granted, I was not exactly going crazy from isolation like you. Well... except for a short stretch of falling into a bottomless abyss all alone, I guess. But, the point is... to be honest, I was... I am... unsatisfied with the fact that you are so far ahead of me. Every time you gained a soul fragment, it urged me to try and get two. The stronger you grew, the more I wanted to become stronger, as well. A large part of those things I gained... was because of you. I guess you, too, kept me going. In a sense."

Ch788 sunny don't know what ball is

Sunny blinked a couple of times.

"...Is holding balls some weird Legacy ceremony? Wait, what kinds of ball are we talking about? Something like a football? Why do people hold it annually, and more importantly, why do we have to attend this... ball holding ritual?"

Nephis silently covered her face with a hand and said, a hint of exasperation finding its way into her voice:

"Sunny... a ball is a social gathering, usually accompanied by a dance. It is not a literal ball!"

{ch789 tsundere sunny }

He glanced at Nephis and Cassie and then said, his voice grumpy:

"Aren't you two forgetting something? This is still my home! We only agreed that Nephis would stay here for a week. Shouldn't you at least ask me before deciding to leave her here for a while longer?"

He was not going to let Changing Star pull off an Effie that easily!

Neph turned and looked at him with an unreadable expression. After a few moments of silence, she asked:

"Sunny, do you mind if I stay for a couple more weeks?"

He coughed, and then glanced away in embarrassment.

"Of course! Sure, no problem. Glad to have you, and all that. See, was that so hard

{Ch791 Both are idiots, one is introvert and the other is weirdly weird }

Staring at the mass of dancing humans in bewilderment, Sunny shook his head.

"What a... strange ritual.

Nephis turned her head slightly and raised an eyebrow.

"...I know, right?"

Changing Star peered at the dancing crowd and frowned.

"Their behavior doesn't make any sense."

Sunny nodded in solidarity.

"Indeed."

After a while, he added:

"They're not even dancing, they're just... rhythmically gyrating their bodies. It also appears that the proximity at which one is allowed to gyrate his or her body to other participants is representative of their... desirability? Anyway, they all look incredibly stupid."

Nephis tilted her head a little.

"It is not that simple, I think. This strange dynamic actually seems to be very nuanced. Just look at the women... they seem to be using their looks, physical coordination, and agility in order to attract the men. However, once men are attracted, the women act as if they are disinterested. Most of the time they truly are, other times it is just a signal for the men to try harder."

She grew silent, and then added with slight confusion:

"The most startling part is that all this information, including the complicated evaluations based on obscure parameters and much more, is communicated absolutely non-verbally and in a way that both men and women somehow seem to understand while chaotically jerking their bodies. It is like they all developed telepathic abilities."

Sunny scowled.

"Anyway, these gyrations are clearly meant to illustrate one's high value as a romantic partner. And that is what this "dance" is, a venue for the "dancers" to seek out physically desirable partners. However, everyone acts as if it's not. In fact, most of these people are pretending that the exact opposite is true."

He rubbed his chin.

"As if showing interest is in itself an admission of inadequacy and undesirability. Those who do manage to find partners do it through a series of obscure hints and silent signals. This is so... inefficient. Why can't people just honestly state their goals and desires? They are all pursuing the same result, anyway."

Changing Star nodded thoughtfully.

...Effie, who was leaning on the railing near them, stared at the two of them with a perplexed expression. Then, the huntress slowly shook her head.

{Ch792 oh! Sweet neph}

Effie gave her a strange look.

"Huh? Have you been watching a lot of videos on the network, princess? You are quoting Mongrel now?"

Changing Star shrugged.

"I just find him admirable."

The huntress suddenly grinned and said in a conspiratorial tone:

"Neph... do you maybe have a crush on Lord Mongrel?"

Sunny almost spat out his champagne. He turned slightly and threw a murderous glance at Effie.

Nephis, however, remained nonchalant. She showed no reaction, and simply said:

"I just appreciate his skill and his integrity. At first, I was merely attracted by how beautiful his swordsmanship is. Flowing, unpredictable. Supremely adaptable. I watched a few of his duels, as well as his performances in the Dream Tournament. His dedication, versatility, and... domineering attitude... left a deep impression on me."

Changing Star shook her head.

"But those were just games. It was only when I stumbled on a clip of Mongrel single-handedly stalling several waves of Nightmare Creatures in front of a Gate that I truly grew to appreciate his character. In my opinion, he is what a true Awakened should strive to be. Someone who is not resigned to bowing down to the Spell, and is determined to resist it instead. His will, mastery of combat, and wisdom are commendable. It warms my heart to know that there are warriors like him out there."

Sunny gripped his glass and forced out an awkward smile:

"Hey... let's not go overboard about that Mongrel guy, shall we? He's not that great. I mean, he was not really alone at that Gate, there were other Awakened helping him. As for all that wisdom stuff, I am willing to bet that he did not mean any of the crap he said..."

Nephis looked at him with surprise.

"I disagree. I think that Mongrel deserves all the praise. He is truly remarkable!"

Effie, meanwhile, were looking at them with a grin.

Sunny suddenly got a bad feeling.

Before he could say something, however, the huntress leaned forward and whispered into Neph's ear:

"You do know that Sunny is Mongrel, right?"

Sunny choked on his champagne. The exquisite glass cracked slightly in his hand.

Nephis froze.

{ch 796 nephis regards sunnys achievements very high}

Her expression softened a little, and the corner of her mouth curved upward.

"You are doing very well already. Just continue practicing with the same determination."

A bright smile suddenly appeared on Rain's face.

"Really? You really think so? Sunny said so, too! He said that I am way better than he was!"

Nephis slowly shook her head.

"Sunny did not have a systematic education and the solid foundation that you enjoy. He never had a proper teacher, let alone a personal tutor. And yet, he has achieved so much, in such a short time. You are far from his level... for now. Even if you catch up to his corresponding accomplishments, it won't be enough. With your background and advantages, the only acceptable result is to surpass them."

{ch797-798 neph met sunnys mother, a major breakthrough in their relationship. An emotional conversation is ahead }

Neph: ...So what is the reason?

He lingered for a moment, then shrugged.

"I met your mother already. So I thought I would bring you to meet mine."

Nephis raised an eyebrow.

"I thought your mother was dead."

Sunny nodded.

"She is. Come..."

He headed toward the tree, knowing that Neph would follow. As they approached, Sunny sighed and said in a neutral tone:

"it is nice to have a special place to remember them by. This tree is such a place for me. A long time ago, I carved two lines into it — one for my mom, and one for my dad."

"There are three lines."

Sunny looked at her in confusion.

"What?"

Neph pointed to the bottom of the trunk.

"There is a third line."

He stared at her for a moment, then turned away.

"Oh. The third line is for me. I added it before going away to face the First Nightmare."

Changing Star glanced at him, then asked in her usual even tone:

"Were you not confident of conquering it?"

Sunny laughed.

"Gods, no! I was pretty sure that I would die. I was ready to, actually. Back then... I was sort of ambivalent about life, I guess. Very few people from the outskirts survive their Nightmares. We are physically weak and less educated than proper citizens. Local schools are not exactly known for training skilled fighters."

They stood silently under the tree for a while. Eventually, Nephis looked at him and said evenly:

"You did well."

Sunny glanced at her with a pale smile, then nodded.

"I guess I did, didn't I? My mom would have been very happy. If she was alive, that is. I am healthy, well-fed, and have a house in a good part of the city. I even found my... a student. These things might not sound like much to you, but to her, they would have been like a dream."

He turned to the tree and added after a short pause:

"I don't really remember my dad too well, because I was too little when he passed away. But my mom, I remember her perfectly. She was... like a ray of sunshine. The strangest thing, though, is that when I was a kid, she was the whole world to me. I thought that she knew everything, could do anything. But now, I realize that she was barely older than we are. She was more or less a kid herself."

Nephis looked at him and said:

"But we aren't kids."

Sunny tilted his head, then shrugged.

"That is true, I guess. We are adults, which is a strange thought. I don't really feel very different from how I was before, at least not in terms of being confident and knowing what the hell I am doing."

Changing Star sighed, then shook her head a little.

"That is because you have been an adult for a long time. People like us have to grow up early."

Sunny thought about it for a moment.

"I don't know. I have a suspicion that when I look back on today in a decade or so, I will be dismayed by how big of an idiot I was."

Nephis smiled with the corner of her mouth.

"...That has nothing to do with adulthood."

He spared her a short glance and scoffed.

"That was the point where you were supposed to say that I am not an idiot, you know."

She stared at him with a deadpan expression, then said in her usual tone:

"I know."

Sunny couldn't help but laugh.

"Anyway. I don't really understand why I wanted to come here. I guess I expected to feel something... and I do. It's just not what I thought I would feel."

Nephis lingered for a few moments. Eventually, he said with a hint of hesitation in her voice:

"Do you maybe want to say something to your mother?"

Sunny lingered for a while, then shook his head.

"What is the point? She is dead, and the dead can't hear anything. They are simply gone. They only exist in the memories of the past. I would rather concentrate on the future."

He sighed, then walked over to the tree and touched it for a brief moment.

'Hey, mom. It's me. I am... doing well, I guess. Rain is well, too. She looks like you very much. You would have been really proud of her.'

Sunny felt rather stupid at that moment, but at the same time, strangely soothed. He hesitated for a few seconds, and then thought:

'Anyway, I don't think I will be able to visit again for a long time. Not that you're really here. Oh... that young woman right there is Nephis. She is my... well... it's complicated. In any case, I think you would have liked her. I have several other friends, too. So I am in good hands. You don't have to worry about me.'

The great hall where dozens of beautiful pairs danced suddenly did not look as splendid;

Ch806 The bloody break up 🙄

Turning around. Sunny looked at Nephis. lingered for a few moments. and then walked in her direction with steady steps

As he came close, he offered her a hand and asked;;;

"Shall we dance?"

Neph looked at him in confusion for a couple of seconds, then shrugged and placed her hand in his. Together they walked to the middle of the hall; Sunny put his second hand on her waist. while she put hers on his shoulder; Suddenly. they were extremely close to each other;

Sunny's heart skipped a beat.

...It was in moments like this one that he missed having two;

Trying to not let her closeness affect him too much and failing at it. he waited for a bit and gathered his thoughts. Finally. Sunny said. his voice drowned by the music and the hum of the great hall:

"I've been meaning to ask..."

The time to hide his head in the sand was over;

Nephis silently raised an eyebrow, prompting him to continue.

"...What, exactly, are you planning to do today? You know that Valor won't take no for an answer. They want to have all of us, but if that is not possible, they'll only settle for getting at least one. That way, they'll be assured that the rest of us won't join a rival faction. So... which one of us is going to become a retainer of the great clan Valor?"

" You don't really understand, do you?"

Sunny did not frown, but his eyes suddenly became darker.

"I don't? What is it that you think I don't understand?"

A somber expression slowly appeared on her face

"Valor and Song are not rival factions, Sunny. They're warcamps."

As they spun under the light of beautiful chandeliers, she leaned even closer and said:

"I've studied the facts for a long time after returning to the waking world. The ripples caused by the death of Saint Cormac, the subtle machinations that happen in the darkness, the growing imbalance of power between Bastion and Ravenheart... even the timing of Seishan challenging the Second Nightmare. It all paints a clear picture."

A slight scowl appeared on Sunny's face.

"What are you trying to say?"

Nephis sighed.

"I am trying to make you see that the conflict between the great clans has grown into something more than mere disagreement. They are at war... or rather, they will be soon."

Sunny felt her hand growing tense in his own.

"War? Wait... what does a war between great clans even look like?"

Changing Star shook her head.

"Something like that has never happened before. So... who knows? Three things are certain, however. It will be hidden. It will be bloody. It will claim the lives of many people."

He suddenly felt cold.

'Damned Legacies... Antarctica is about to fall, and they choose that exact moment to lunge at each other's throats! Bastards!'

Sunny remained silent for several steps, and then looked at Nephis intently:

"Alright. But what does it have to do with us?"

She suddenly gripped his shoulder tighter and met his gaze. Cold, dangerous white sparks were dancing in her eyes.

Don't you see? It has everything to do with us."

Sunny stopped himself from snarling.

"I don't! Nephis... whether the great clans are embroiled into a secret war or not does not change anything. You are still too small and weak to openly oppose them. Please, tell me that you understand

that. You were the one who said that the... that these people are too strong. That their power is too absolute."

Changing Star stared at him for a while, her face turning impassive. After a few moments of silence, she said:

"I remember. I understand."

She looked down, and then added:

"Which is why... which is why the answer to your question might not be what you want to hear, Sunny. You asked me which one of us will become a member of the great clan."

Nephis raised her head and looked him straight in the eyes. Then, she said evenly:

"It's me. I will join Valor."

"What?"

Her expression did not change.

"You heard me."

Sunny opened his mouth, lingered for a moment, then simply turned around and pulled her by the hand. Despite the fact that many people stared at this sudden turn of events, he cut through the dancing guests, forcing Neph to follow. They left the middle of the great hall, then disappeared from the central chamber entirely.

Sunny and Nephis were left alone

You? Join Valor? What... what the hell?!"

Changing Star sighed, then took a step back and leaned on the wall. Then, she spoke in her usual calm, steady voice

"Why are you so surprised?"

Sunny stared at her in stunned silence. Then, he shook his head.

"What about your great goals? After all the crazy stunts you pulled, after all that talk about wishing to bring the three ghouls to their knees and destroy them... you are just going to join them?"

Neph's eyes grew somber.

"My plans did not change, Sunny"

Sunny let out a heavy sigh.

"So, let me get this straight. You are going to join Clan Valor, fight for them until Clan Song is destroyed to earn Anvil's trust, then turn your blade against him?"

Nephis lingered for a few moments, then shrugged.

"More or less. Why?"

He rubbed his face.

"This is a terrible plan! There are more holes in this plan than in Swiss cheese... whoever Swi is. Who says that Valor will win this war? Who says that Anvil will ever treat you as anything but a latent threat? Do you think that he is a fool? Surely, he knows how much you have to hate his guts!"

Changing Star looked at him calmly.

"I do. I say who wins. I say whether he trusts me or not. It all depends on me, does it not? If I want the great Song clan to fall, I have to make sure that it falls. If I want to win Anvil's favor, I have to make sure that he favors me. I am not a passive observer in this, Sunny. I have agency to shape the future into what I want it to be... or at least try to. Sure, the chances of success are poor. But when were the odds ever on our side"

Sunny scoffed, then shook his head.

"I'll give you that. Our luck was always terrible. However, there is a difference between being thrown into overwhelming danger against your will and deciding to put yourself at risk of your own volition. Unlike before, we don't have to be underdogs. You are choosing this!"

Nephis shook her head, as well.

"That is where you are wrong, Sunny. Do you really think that I have any choice? Do you think that I can turn back now? That the Sovereigns will ever let me be? No... it is too late for that. It is as you said, Valor are determined to have their pound of flesh. All I can choose is where they sink their teeth."

He glared at her for a few moments, then spat:

"Aren't you forgetting something?"

Looking at him, Changing Star frowned.

"What?"

Sunny took a step forward.

"Me! You are forgetting me! I have a say in this too, goddammit!"

She remained silent for a while. Eventually, Nephis said:

"I am not forcing you to do anything. You don't have to follow me to Valor if you don't wish to."

A crooked smile appeared on his face.

"Oh, great! But is this really true? There is a certain bond between us, after all. I am only free to do as I wish until you decide otherwise. Who knows if your mood will change one day?"

Neph stared at him for a few long seconds. Then, she sighed and crossed her arms.

"Ah, so this is what it's all about."

Sunny gritted his teeth, then said slowly:

"Since we are talking about it, let's talk. This conversation was a long time coming. So, Nephis, tell me... what are you going to do with your power over me?"

Her face remained impassive. Neph looked at him coldly for a moment, and then said: *(imo nephis feels offended that sunny doubted her)*

"...Nothing. I will never order you to do something for me, ever again."

Sunny was already opening his mouth to retort before she finished speaking, but then froze. He stood still for a few moments, then let out a long breath.

"Well... good. Because if you ever tried, one of us would have died. That is not a threat, just a fact."

Suddenly, white sparks ignited in Changing Star's eyes. She leaned forward slightly and said, her voice full of barely suppressed emotion:

"And do you know why?"

Suddenly feeling a sense of unease, Sunny frowned.

"No, I can't say that I do. Why?"

She took a step forward and stopped in front of him, almost as close as they had been during their dance. Her face was still, but her eyes were full of searing flame.

"...Because I don't need anyone to follow me against their will. I don't need a magical collar to make people serve me. I don't need slaves. That is not enough for me, Sunny. Why should I settle for submission when I can have loyalty? People who will follow me, serve me, and obey me will do so because that is their most ardent desire. They will do so with a smile. If I ever want to make you mine, Sunny, you will become mine — not because you were forced to, but because you would want to. That... is also a fact." *(she's not wrong there)*

He stared at her for a few moments, startled by the sudden intensity of her words. Then, a stubborn expression appeared on his face:

"Aren't you too full of yourself? Who do you think you are, to decide what I want?"

Nephis looked at him, then turned away and sighed.

"I am... I am the person who knows you best in the world, Sunny. Two worlds, even."

She lingered for a few moments, and then added quietly:

"As I said, I will never force you to do anything. But whether you like it or not, our fates are intertwined. And that bond has nothing to do with your Innate Ability. In truth, they were entangled the moment we met, in front of the Academy gates. We just did not know it yet. You can't escape it."

'Can't... escape... fate?'

Sunny looked at Nephis for a long time, and then smiled darkly.

"Watch me."

1. *{note: His obsession with nephis goes very deep, most of his action or decisions throughout series are fueled by nephis, for example from venturing into ruins in dark city to becoming stronger to vacations in Antarctica to finding conviction and now rewriting history to save her}*

{Ch835- captured heart}

Sunny sighed, then stood up. No matter how much his heart desired to meet the beautiful singers, there was no way he was going to follow the call of their soothing song.

There was already someone who was aggravatingly adept at tugging on his heartstrings. His heart was all but overcrowded.

{Ch842 patch up after break-up}

dude couldn't stay away from nephis for long. what kind of break up is this 🤔

Nephis sat with her legs crossed, staring at the sparkling water with a distant look. When Sunny's shadow fell on her, she lingered for a moment and then looked up.

"Sunny."

"How's life treating you? Being adopted into a great clan has to be a weird experience."

Nephis frowned.

"It's... fine. Feels a bit strange to be addressed as sister by Morgan of Valor, I guess. She seems to enjoy my discomfort."

Changing Star let out a heavy sigh and turned slightly to face him.

"You should have told me, Sunny."

He smiled.

"What, about Antarctica? Oh, that was classified information. I thought that Cassie would have informed you, anyway. She had to have known, right?"

She studied him for a few moments, then shook her head.

"If she did, she kept the knowledge to herself. Cassie... has changed a lot since the Forgotten Shore. She carries a lot of secrets."

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

'Huh. I guess there's trouble in paradise.'

"I was under the impression that she's utterly loyal to you... like a lost puppy, you know. It's surprising to hear."

Changing Star did not respond immediately. After a while, she said:

"Cassie has her own thoughts and her own desires. She is powerful, too... no less than the rest of us. Brushing her agency aside would be a mistake."

Sunny laughed.

"Of all the people in the world, I would be the last one to underestimate Cassie, don't you think?"

Nephis simply looked at the lake.

"...**Are you safe?**"

He lingered for a bit, then shrugged.

"Is anyone safe? I am surrounded by thousands of soldiers, Awakened, Masters, and even a few Saints. Plus, I'm me. Antarctica is no worse than the Forgotten Shore or the Kingdom of Hope. In fact... **if anyone is in danger, it's you. Are you safe?**"

Her face grew dark. Nephis gritted her teeth for a moment, and then said with unusual intensity:

"You don't understand, do you? This is not the first expedition of that kind. Humanity has tried to resist the Spell before. The last attempt... the last one took the lives of both my grandfather and my mother. They were powerful, too. They were exceptional and ahead of their time, too. What makes you think that you'll do better than them?"

Sunny shook his head.

"Many things have changed in the past two decades. Back then, humanity had much less Awakened. There were barely any Masters around. No Saint had even emerged yet... at least officially. Our tech, spelltech, and strategies were much more primitive. We had no experience dealing with something like that. Yes, North America was a disaster, but we learned our lesson there. This campaign, it will be different. It will be better. I will survive it, and grow stronger as a result."

Nephis looked at him with a challenge.

"Says who?"

He smiled.

"I do. I say if I die or not. It all depends on me, does it not?" *(bro even started copying speech from nephis who's is a certified introvert.)*

{Ch1070 meeting after fall of falcon Scott}

Tall, slender, with beautiful silver hair, and wearing white apron.... wait, an apron?

Sunny blinked a couple of times.

Hearing their steps, Nephis looked over her shoulder and called out

"It's almost ready..."

Then, she suddenly tensed and slowly turned around.

Neph's face remained as calm as ever, but there was a hint of agitation in her striking grey eyes.

"Sunny?"

He remained silent for a moment, then looked past her.

"Sure. You better turn around, though. Don't burn our dinner!"

Nephis stared at Sunny for a couple moments, then briefly glanced at her apron and quietly cleared her throat. *{ someone is embarrassed }*

"Right."

She turned around and got back to stirring the rice. A couple seconds later, site added without looking back:

"You'll have to wait for a couple more minutes. And... welcome back, Sunny. Did you make it out of the Antarctic Center alright?"

"I wouldn't call it 'alright'. But yes, I made it out. I'm already inside a siege capital in East Antarctica."

Neph's shoulder moved slightly.

"...That's good."

(Later when they were alone - -)

Nephis :Help me do the dishes?"

Sunny blinked, amused by the mundane banality of her request. He lingered for a moment, then shook his head and went about giving Changing Star a hand. (*As always, he can't refuse neph*)

Then they discussed about sovereign and domains and all that, then later neph invited sunny to her chamber.

Come. uh, if you want."

Sunny gave her a dark look. then followed. As they ascended the stairs

Ch1099 - queen arrives in Antarctica

The first of the three immediately attracted Sunny's gaze. His heart moved slightly... Nephis looked different in the colors of house Valor. The black armor created a striking contrast against her ivory skin, silver hair, and cool grey eyes. She looked like a beautiful dark spirit that took the form of a deadly knight to sow the seeds of discord and ruin in the mortal world.

Later after seeing morgan echo army -

Was Morgan in possession of a Supreme Echo?

Did she have an Echo of a Titan slumbering in her Soul Sea?

He lingered for a moment, then glanced at Nephis, who stood in front of the army of monsters with an impassive expression on her calm, *beautiful face*.

'You want to destroy... this?'

He closed his eyes for a moment.

'...Damn that lunatic. She must have infected me with her madness! Because... I really want to make these bastards pay, too...'

At this point, it was hard to say whose madness was more virulent.

{Ch1105- people sometime takes neph tanacity for granted, they criticize her for being arrogant and all that but forget that she heavily burdened.}

Eventually, his eyes settled on Nephis. asked her through the mental link:

[What are you planning to do?]

[...Survive.]

Sunny tilted his head a little.

[Quite a sober answer, coming from you. Where is the real Nephis and what have you done to her?]

The corner of her mouth twitched upward. That small change was so subtle that he doubted anyone except for him noticed it.

Neph lingered for a while. Eventually, she spoke - or rather, thought - in her usual even tone:

[Sunny... don't you think that life is pretty strange?]

Sunny blinked.

'What has gotten into her?'

He wasn't used to hearing such questions from Nephis.

[Yeah, sure. Why?]

She maintained her poised appearance, pretending to pay attention to the conversation about the disposition of clan forces, as she answered:

[You've been through a lot in these past six months. The time before that must seem like a lifetime ago, for you. But for me... when I wake up, I still think that I am in the Nightmare, sometimes. For me, it feels like I was lost in the Dream Realm just yesterday.]

Changing Star paused, then continued after a few short moments:

[But I am not. I am a member of clan Valor now, I have a Citadel of my own, and dozens of Awakened are ready to follow my orders. That... was yesterday. Today, I am in the Southern Quadrant, preparing to wage war both on countless Nightmare Creatures and on the best of clan Song. Beastmaster is here, smiling at me politely. Whispering Blade is also here, watching my every move. All of it... it's a bit overwhelming.]

She turned her head and looked at him, her clear grey eyes looking a little... burdened. *{here i think neph showed sunny her vulnerability}*

[So, my plan is to take it one step at a time. One little step after another, until all my enemies are dead. And that is why... my first step is to survive.]

A few moments later, her voice resounded in his head once again, this time tinged with a hint of amusement.

[...Why, do you think that surviving this mayhem will be easy? It won't.]

{Ch1116- sunny and neph having conversation during fight}

[Hey, Neph... how's it going?]

[...It's a bit distracting, you know, to have someone speak in your head all of a sudden.]

Sunny grinned

[You didn't answer my question.]

[As expected, I guess. But, Sunny... what has gotten into you? You don't... don't seem like yourself today.]

'Ah, so she noticed...'

[Don't seem like myself? Well... I did have many new and exciting experiences in the Antarctic Center, so I was bound to change a little. Don't mind it, though. I'm just performing in front of your sister. And speaking of your sister..Is she trying to get rid of you, or what?]

[No... I don't know what she is doing. There must be a reason, but it is hard to say.]

[You're awfully calm, considering the situation.]

Sunny could not see her face, but he knew how much pain fighting like this, for that long, was causing her.

Nephis was most likely approaching her limits, too.

[Do I... seem calm?]

[Don't you know? You always seem calm.]

Later there was titan falling over them--

Sunny froze

'Not good.'

Neph was the first to react. Her voice rolled across the battlefield,

"Pull back! Fighting Retreat! Move if you want to live!"

At the same time, she sent Sunny a mental message:

[Sunny... I am going to stall the horde to cover the retreat. You... you do as you wish.]

The meaning of her words was clear. What Neph meant to say was...

Help me.

But due to the nature of their bond, she couldn't. Because that would be an order.*(neph is very sensitive about the bond)*

Ch1120- Bro want's to come clean,don't want neph to misunderstand anything at all.

Effie: "Oh... and try making that shadow fiend bigger, next time. Looking at it made me really want to ride you again..."

As a strange expression appeared on Jet's face, the huntress started giggling and stuffed a spoonful of stew into her mouth.

Sunny shook his head in resignation.

"Don't mind her. The fiend was actually my body in the Nightmare. While that... overgrown delinquent... was sent into the body of a small child. So I let her ride on my shoulders, to save time. In retrospect, that was a huge mistake."

Jet smiled at him lazily from her cot.

"You don't really have to explain, you know?"

Sunny briefly glanced at Neph and rolled his eyes.

"I know. I still want to, though!" (😏 Simp)

Later when jet,Kai, Effie were in awe with his new shadow form and were praising him for his skills.Sunny sought recognition from neph.

Then, he looked at Nephis and raised an eyebrow:

"And what about you? No comment?"

She turned her head and studied him for a few moments.

Eventually, Nephis looked away and said simply:

"...Your swordsmanship has improved."

And that was it.

Sunny opened his mouth to respond, but then grew silent. A slight frown appeared on his face.

Ch1128- astorian plan

After gaining insight about assassination attempts on ☞ baby neph through eavesdropping, sunny went to meet neph who was standing in watch tower looking over the battlefield where Summer night was fighting in all his Glory.

Sunny: "That guy, Summer Knight, is both deadly on the battlefield and nice in person. Makes me wonder if he really is a Saint... every other Transcendent I know is either the stern stoic type, vaguely sinister, or completely insane. He really doesn't fit."

Neph glanced in his direction and smiled with the corner of her mouth.

"Maybe you just attract these kinds of people."

Sunny coughed.

Then they talk about fire keepers ascension and then sunny brought the topic of astorian.

[I happened to eavesdrop on a conversation.]

Neph glanced at him.

[Oh. By pure accident, I'm sure.] *(It is funny when neph roast sunny sometimes)*

He smiled.

[Turns out, it was your Uncle Vale who sent Caster to kill you... you know, Anvil of Valor, the King of Swords. That Uncle Vale.]

She didn't show any hint of a strong reaction.

[...I figured as much.]..... conversation went on..

Neph figured out astorian motive to some extent,

Neph paused for a few moments, and then added in a grave voice:

[If my suspicion is correct... then should you meet him in the future, you would be wise to be careful too, Sunny. You do not possess Shadow God's lineage, but Asterion might not know that.]

She suddenly turned and looked him in the eyes, then said in her own voice, discarding the safety of the Blessing Dusk:

"Sunny... you have guarded your secrets well. It is very important that you continue to do so. Be careful... if you wish. Please." *(It is almost like she's pleading him to be safe in her own way)*

{Point to be noted: nephis still uses starlight legion armour of awakened rank which was gifted by sunny to her, she has not discarded it.she usually give memories to firekeeper to empower them.}

Ch1153- Trip to dream realm

Sunny become emotional while visiting Red Colosseum -

Sunny himself was in a bleak mood. He studied the ruins, remembering the countless bloody battles that had been fought here

"Glory..."

Nephis turned at the sound of his whisper.

Her striking grey eyes were somber.

"Is this the arena where you were imprisoned?"

Sunny nodded.

"Yes... the cage they kept me in was right there Back then, I barely knew how to move the body that the Spell had given me. My, oh my. Coming to my senses inside that thing was quite a shock.""

He looked at her, wondering what body Neph had received in her own Nightmare.

"I can imagine."

She didn't say anything else, still keeping the details of her Nightmare to herself.*{sunny is desperate to know about her nightmare since she came back}*

Sunny sighed.

Then they talked about the nature of those perverted war zealots.

Nephis looked around silently.

"It must have been hard. To survive alone." He shrugged.

"It would have been. But I wasn't alone

He looked at Nephis and smiled.

"I must have slaughtered a thousand enemies in this arena, both abominations and humans. But, knowing you, I bet even more died by your sword in the Nightmare."

She glanced north, in the direction of the Hollow Mountains, and shook her head.

"No... actually, I did not kill that many." Sunny raised an eyebrow.

"Wait... what, really? With your personality?"

Nephis smiled.

"I was only Dormant, in my Nightmare. I was the weakest creature there, by far. Solving problems with a sword is... is a privilege for the strong."

He looked at her with a strange expression.

"Well. You must have learned a lot, then. Weakness is a great teacher."

As soon as the words left his mouth, Sunny regretted saying them. Nephis had always been a symbol of strength, in his mind. She knew about weakness just as much as he did.

Neph's smile slowly faded away.

She remained silent for a while, and then nodded.

"Yes. I did learn a lot."

'Great. Maybe think twice before opening your mouth the next time, fool.'

Ch1156- neph is cute, well atleast sunny think so

They were playing game and cheating was allowed .

Nephis lost pretty much every game after that. Observing her try to hide her frustration was rather entertaining... at least for Sunny, who won the most.

'Ah, I have forgotten how awkward she really is. She's hiding it well these days... it's cute. Huh? Crude, I meant it's crude!'

Ch1157- Having Caring boyfriend is lady's dream, neph should feel privileged.

Cassie: "In any case, it's vast and ancient, but weak to fire. We can burn the Root to ash without destroying the island."

After she said those words, everyone involuntarily turned to Nephis. Changing Star's expression did not change at all.

A moment later, she said:

"...I'll do it."

Sunny shook his head.

"No need."

she had to burn alive every time she called upon her powers. So... what kind of vacation would it be, if she was forced to go through that suffering in the middle of it?

Ch1159- failures are medicine

"I've tasted a lot of failure there. It's a bitter thing, failure, but after everything is said and done... I think it is more of a medicine than poison. You should try it too, sometime, before it's too late."

He did not know why he was being combative with Neph, but her confidence was really frustrating to observe recently. Perhaps... perhaps it was because he felt protective of her - Changing Star had put herself in terrible danger by joining Clan Valor, after all. She was facing death and destruction, but acted as if everything was under her control.

She was wrong. The Great Clans, the Sovereigns - these people were not someone who could be controlled.

Hearing his remark, Nephis calmly turned the meat and looked in Sunny's direction.

Her voice was even:

"I think I know more about failure than anyone here."

He frowned.

"You? When have you ever failed?"

Nephis sighed and continued tending to the meat.

"I failed to keep you by my side in the Dark City, didn't I? I failed to take control of the Bright Castle, too"...and many other failures.

She smiled, then handed Sunny his plate.

"But that's alright. You said it yourself, failure might be bitter, but it is a medicine. Now, let's eat... hopefully, this meat will taste better."

Ch1163- hope is admired by both

On the last night before they reached the Tower, Sunny found himself standing on the deck of the ancient vessel, looking at the myriad of stars above them through the branches of the sacred tree.

There was the sound of steps, and Nephis approached to keep him company in silence.

Together, they watched the night sky and thought about the future.

What it would bring, what it would take...What it would cost them

After a long time spent in comfortable silence, Sunny glanced at Nephis, thought for a few moments, and asked:

"So, what do you make of this place?"

Neph lingered for a while, then said quietly:

"It is as everywhere else. Broken."

Sunny smiled.

"I guess. The Chained Isles are more honest in that regard, aren't they? They don't hide their broken nature."

Still, I thought you would have more of an opinion. Don't you feel a connection to this land?"

Nephis glanced at him with a bit of confusion.

"Why would I?"

Sunny shrugged.

"Well, the Kingdom of Hope was destroyed by Sun GodSun God's blood is flowing through your veins. So, in a sense, you are the last descendant of the being who brought ruin to this land."

Nephis remained silent for a while, then smiled.

"I see. Yes, it would make sense for me to feel a connection to Sun God. But, actually... in this case, I feel more connected to Hope."

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

"Hope? The wicked demon who spent a thousand years twisting the minds of everyone living in the ruins, driving them insane, and causing all kinds of unspeakable, abhorrent evil? The vile queen of madness, that Hope?"

Neph tilted her head a little. She lingered for a few moments, and then said:

"Hope who had everything that belonged to her destroyed by an impossible foe. Who remained chained for a thousand years, but never stopped trying to set herself free. Who escaped her prison and waged war against the eternal gods. And killed them. That Hope."

Sunny hid his smile.

"Huh. Well, if you put it like that... actually, I'm rather fond of Hope, too. I met her once, you know?"

For the first time in a long time, he saw Neph's usually calm expression crack a little. She looked at him with a startled expression.

"You... you met Hope? The Demon of Desire?"

Sunny nodded.

"Yes. Well... a version of her, at least. At the very end of the Nightmare, I entered the Tower and saw her, for a few fleeting moments. She even spoke to me."

He hesitated for a few moments.

"She told me that the daemons were the Flaw of the gods. I'm not sure what she meant, though. I always assumed that the gods were flawless."

Nephis frowned, then turned away and looked at the stars.

"...I heard that the gods were perfect beings once, but then they were no more. It doesn't make a lot of sense, does it? I also don't know what she meant."

She remained silent for a while, then said evenly:

"It makes me wonder, though. Did Sun God also have to pay a price to use his power? Did he have to burn? Did he have to suffer? Did it hurt him to destroy Hope's kingdom?"

Nephis looked at the distant stars with a cold expression.

"The gods could die, so they must have suffered, too."

She stared at the black sky. Then, slowly, a pale smile appeared on her lips.

"...I hope he suffered a lot."

Ch1179- noona neph

The smell of freshly cooked food made both of them relax. Noticing the distant expression on Sunny's face, Nephis tilted her head a little and asked:

"What are you thinking about so seriously?"

He flinched, then shook his head and continued setting the table.

"Ah, nothing serious. I was just thinking... that I'm too old for this crap."

She frowned, then pierced him with a cold gaze.

"...I'm older than you, though?"

Her meaning was clear... Are you calling me old?!

Sunny grinned.

"Yes, yes. Forget I said anything. Come, noona, let's eat... who knows when we'll get a chance to enjoy a proper meal again..."

Trust

Neph was standing between sunny and dire fang like a last fortress.

Looking up at the towering monstrosity, Nephis calmly brought her radiant longsword into a high guard.

"Sunny... are you alright?"

He sighed.

'Damn... it is indeed a stupid question to ask...'

Sunny let out a terse breath.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Just got my throat ripped out... no big deal..."

A corner of Neph's mouth curled upward.

"I see."

the three of them were left facing each other — the towering monstrosity on one side, Sunny and Nephis standing shoulder to shoulder on the other.

'Ah... it brings back memories.'

The situation was entirely different, and the enemy was entirely different... the two of them were entirely different, as well. So much had changed, and yet, he couldn't help but feel as if they were back under the branches of the Soul Devourer, looking up at the Carapace Demon and preparing to bring the enormous abomination down.

"Nephis now"

There was no real need for words. Sunny and Nephis might have grown distant as of late due to the choices they had made, but the core of their relationship was the same. They were battle partners first, and everything else second - that bond had been forged in fire, tears, and blood on the Forgotten Shore long before a shadow was cast on it by other matters.

By now, their ability to act with seamless coordination was even higher than the unnatural unity granted to the warriors of Valor by the forged swords.

From the moment that the two of them had killed that first Carapace Scavenger together, Sunny and Nephis went through countless battles together. She had taught him how to wield the sword, while he taught her how to control her soul essence as a Master.

Despite everything, that bond would never change.

...Which was not to say that there was no other bond between them.

The battle continued.....

Later, to decipher dire fang battle art he share his mind with neph

he sent Nephis a mental message through the [Blessing of Dusk].

The message contained no words - there was no time for that. Instead, it was a much more crude, but also faster form of communication containing a mix of images, half-formed thoughts, and emotions.

For anyone else, it would have appeared as pure chaos, but Nephis knew him too well. They were so familiar with each other that even such an unadulterated stream of concepts was enough to form an understanding.

It was a bit like finishing each other's sentences or guessing each other's feelings from body language, but elevated to a completely different level.

And yet, it worked.

together, they missed nothing. They saw everything.

It was as though they were omniscient.

And with that omniscience...

Everything clicked in place, and the essence of Saint Dire Fang was revealed to Sunny.

He hesitated for a moment, and then sent actual words to Nephis for the first time.

He said... or rather, thought

[...Do you trust me?]

'What a loaded question.'

Sunny had his reasons, but it was true that he had gone against Nephis's wishes in pretty much every instance where it mattered. He had abandoned her in the Dark City, refused to leave her in the Crimson Spire, and then fled from her again at the grand ball of Clan Valor.

Just to end up by her side anyway

It was a bit funny, and a bit sad, but most of all... Sunny wasn't sure if she did actually trust him. He wasn't even sure if he himself would have trusted him.

[I do.]

...What?

The calm answer came almost instantly.

It startled him.

'Huh...'

Well. That makes things easier.'

He called upon a certain Memory, and sent Nephis a

short thought:

[Then, in about five seconds... give it all to me...]

He had to finish this fight in one exchange.

'So... I don't just need to kill a Saint, I also need to kill him with one strike... well, isn't it wonderful...'

There was no more time to think.

Only to kill.

Sunny cleared his mind of all unnecessary thoughts, except for one — a axiom he knew too well.

'The essence... of combat... is murder.'

He was going to murder Saint Dire Fang, the vassal of the great clan Song, right here and now.

There was no doubt or hesitation, no room for failure. Only certainty.... The battle continued and dire fang cut down by sunny 🤩

He was in shock

He had killed a Saint with his own two hands in combat.

...Of course, he didn't do it alone.

'Nephis!'

Suddenly startled, Sunny jumped to his feet and dashed to the spot where he had seen her last.

She was still there, struggling to stand up. d falling from her ears, her nose, and even her eyes. HeHer helmet was gone, and he could see drops of bloor face was pale, with damp hair sticking to it in thin strands.

"Neph!"

He slid on the mud and fell to his knees near her, placing his hands on her shoulders. She let out a raspy breath, and then shakily rose to her feet with his help.

A pained groan escaped from her lips, and Nephis swayed. He supported her.

She remained silent for a bit, trying to contain the pain, and then asked:

"...We won?"

Sunny let out a relieved sigh.

"Yeah. He's dead."

She winced.

"...Good."

He wanted to laugh.

"Good? Good?! That's all you have to say?"

Nephis looked at him for a few moments. Her face was too close, but Sunny didn't mind.

Then, a corner of her mouth slightly curled up.

"...Why make a fuss? It was... just a Saint..."

He stared at her, feeling a sense of triumph flood his heart.

But then...

The smile slowly disappeared from Sunny's face.

Nephis frowned.

"Sunny? What's wrong?"

He looked frightened.

Without answering, Sunny slowly turned away from her and looked up with an expression of utter terror.

"I... I don't... I don't know... something is wrong..."

And then all hell breaks loose..

Nephis suddenly shuddered, and then grabbed him by the shoulder. Her lips parted:

"...Realm! Escaping into the Dream Realm! That is the only way!"

Sunny and Nephis stood side by side as they watched utter devastation being unleashed by creature crawling out of the colossal Nightmare Gates.

Sunny and Nephis stood motionless amidst the harrowing destruction. They did not try to run or search for shelter.

Turning away from the black tentacles that were getting closer and closer, they looked at each other.

He didn't even look to see what was appearing from the other two Gates.

Instead, he just looked at Nephis. {Even in front of promised doom sunny only thinks about neph}

She was pale and weakened, but seemed calm.

She always seemed calm, even when she wasn't.

After a few moments, Sunny opened his mouth, which was suddenly excruciatingly dry, and said:

"...I'll see you on the other side."

Nephis looked back at him, something grotesque and lumbering reflecting in her striking grey eyes.

She nodded.

"Yes."

Then, she hesitated for a second, and took a deep breath.

"Sunny... I need to tell you something."

He gritted his teeth, suddenly frightened that what she was going to say would sound like a farewell.

Nevertheless, he forced himself to ask:

"What?"

Neph lingered for a bit.

Then, as the ground under them trembled violently, she suddenly looked away.

What she said next was entirely unexpected.

"The projector... back in your house... it... it didn't really explode by itself. I lied. Actually, I broke it. So... I'm really sorry."

Sunny stared at her in disbelief. His mind short-circuited for a moment.

'How is her tone so... what...'

He blinked, and then scoffed.

"Why the hell..."

However, he did not finish the sentence.

