2332 Payday  
Sunny chuckled.  
'Actually, I haven't felt this weak in a long while. It was a good reminder, though - I was beginning to grow arrogant.'  
Kai stared at him incredulously for a bit.  
',Beginning? Did you say 'beginning' to grow arrogant?'  
Sunny gave him a reproachful look and laughed.  
'Ah, right. Your first impression of me was meeting the Lord of Shadows. Don't let it deceive you, though - that haughty guy is merely one of the roles I played. The real me is not nearly as conceited.'  
He scoffed.  
'I mean, whу does someone as incredibly wealthy, unimaginably powerful, and unbearably handsome as I even have to be conceited?  
Kai blinked a couple of times.  
'In, deed. I think I understand. I had to play the role of myself for a long time, too, back when I was a singer. I guess you had your reasons.'  
He paused for a moment, then asked curiously:  
'But what is the real you like, then?'  
Sunny shrugged.  
'The real me? Oh… I am a modest man with modest goals. All I really want is to run a quaint cafe, make a little money on the side by selling Memories, become a god, and go on romantic dates with my girlfriend from time to time.'  
  
Kai stared at him silently for a moment.  
'Excuse me? What was that in the middle?'  
Sunny smiled brightly.  
'What, becoming a god? Isn't that a given? One can't even run a cafe in peace these days without becoming a god first… it is honestly annoying. Plus, my angelic girlfriend is a tad ambitious, so I have to keep up!'  
Kai coughed a few times.  
Sunny, meanwhile, glanced at the pile of soul shards the Obsidian Wasps had dutifully put in front of him. The shards shone gorgeously, dispelling the deep darkness of the Ash Castle…  
His eyes glinted.  
'Look at that, Kai. Dozens of Supreme soul shards! Can you even imagine how much this pile costs? That is… at least a crapton of credits right there!'  
Kai glanced at the radiant shards, remained silent for a moment, then smiled with a hint of wistfulness in his mesmerizing green eyes.  
'Oh. Indeed, You reminded me of someone just now, when you said that.'  
Sunny glanced at him briefly.  
'You mean Aiko? Right, she used to work for you at one point, didn't she?'  
Kai nodded.  
'Yeah. She was my manager after I Awakened. But we haven't seen each other in a while. How… is she doing?'  
Sunny let out a laugh.  
'Aiko? Oh, she is having a blast. It is a bit funny - she used to run a gambling den in the Bright Castle, but now she pretty much runs the entire Dark City. She also manages Shadow Clan's network all over both worlds… running a secret organizаtion of that scale is a complicated affair, so she spends a lot of time in Bastion.'  
Kai let out a quiet sigh.  
'That's good. I'm happy that she's happy. Although, to be honest… I am a little surprised. We went our separate ways because I wanted to follow the Path of Ascension and use my power for a noble cause, while she wanted nothing to do with causes after the Forgotten Shore. I thought she wanted to be a civilian. So, I didn't expect her to end up as a Sovereign's personal assistant.'  
Sunny scratched the back of his head.  
'Well, it just ended up like that. I didn't set out to exploit her that way - initially, I simply hired her to help me run a Memory shop. But one thing led to another, and before I knew it, she was in charge of my entire operation.'  
He blinked a couple of times.  
'Come to think of it… wait, have I been conned? Did she hoodwink me into bankrolling her shady underground empire with my fortune?'  
Kai laughed.  
'No, no. I am sure you are exploiting a mere Awakened like her, Supreme Sunless, and not the other way around. Definitely.'  
  
Sunny grinned.  
'Yeah… yeah, naturally! Obviously.'  
Finishing enjoying the view of the soul shards, he turned to several piles of crystal fragments instead. The Obsidian Wasps had chosen only the suitable ones, separating them into several large piles by form and size.  
He picked one up and traced his finger along its edge, His jade skin was instantly cut… which was impressive enough.  
No blood seeped out of the cut, and a few seconds later, it had alreаdy healed itself.  
'Wonderful.'  
The soul shards would become the anchors for weaves of the Memories he wanted to create, but the remains of the Crystal Wasps could serve as an excellent medium for the enchantments.  
After all, Memories had to be crafted from something, and materials harvested from Grеat Nightmare Creatures were superior to permanently manifested shadows. These crystalline shards were especially sharp and durable, making them perfect for crafting arrowheads.  
Actually… there was someone here who was quite amazing at crafting arrows from similar materials. Slayer had spent thousands of years making her own weapons from what she could find in the Shadow Real, and the most readily available resource there was obsidian.  
Sunny glanced at her and raised an eyebrow.  
'Hey. How about helping me with this?'  
She stared at him chillingly, which made him clear his throat.  
'Oh. Right…'  
It was time for another payment.  
Sunny used the same shard of crystal to slice open his forearm - this time, the cut quickly swelled with blood.  
Slayer finally moved, lowering herself to one knee beside him under Kai's startled gaze.  
She put her hands together and placed them under his arm, allowing his blood to flow into them. When the chalice of her hands was nearly full, Sunny stemmed the bleeding and watched as she raised them to her veiled lips.  
A few moments later, the blood was gone. Slayer did not really drink it - instead, it was simply absorbed into her ebony skin, disappearing forever behind the veil.  
Her dark eyes were distant, full of some vague, indescribable emotions for a heartbeat.  
Then, the hint of emotion was replaced by the familiar, cold malice.  
Kai stammered.  
'W - what was that?'  
Watching his cut heal, Sunny chuckled and glanced at him with a smile.  
'That?'  
He shrugged.  
'That was payday.'