1598 Present Problems

Indeed, the gallant man was none other than Quentin, the healer and melee specialist of Sunny's old cohort of Irregulars.

Quentin's soul had been swallowed by the Call when he lost consciousness during the siege of Falcon Scott. As a result, he was pronounced missing in action by Army Command... but no one had any illusions. Everyone, including Sunny, had thought him dead.

However, the gallant healer proved everyone wrong. Somehow, he had not only managed to reach a suitable Seed of Nightmare in the hellish white desert without succumbing to its many perils, but also conquered that Nightmare alone.

There were a few people among the members of the Evacuation Army who had managed a similar feat, but still, Quentin's return could only be described with one word.

A miracle.

Sunny did not like that word too much, though. It detracted from Quentin's own effort, resolve, and incredible determination to survive. He was a man who had once clawed his way out of a cocoon made by an abominable spider, after all, while being digested alive. So, perhaps Sunny should have given him more credit.

In any case, Quentin had survived. His physical body had long been destroyed by the time he Ascended, so the Spell created a new one for him, sending it to the Citadel where he was anchored at that time.

Sunny had only learned about it a few years after becoming a Saint. Knowing that the gallant healer was alive brought him a bit of solace.

Before, he was under the impression that most of his soldiers had perished. Now, he knew that only a half of them had... which was better, somewhat.

Maintaining a facade of polite indifference, Sunny silently pushed Aiko into the kitchen and showed Quentin to the table where Beth, Kim, and Luster were waiting. They met the healer warmly.

"Master Quentin, good morning!"

"Hey, Quentin!"

"Well, if it isn't Mr. Big Shot Ascended..."

Quentin smiled in embarrassment and took a seat.

Sunny followed Aiko into the kitchen, ignored her glare, and retrieved the additional glasses.

'Strange...'

He had opened his shop in Bastion because that was where most of the people he knew were. There were not that many good restaurants here, yet, and certainly very few run by a Master. Not to mention the Memory side of the business. Therefore, it was inevitable that he would run into an old acquaintance or two sooner or later.

Since his services were top-notch, the Brilliant Emporium gained many customers through word of mouth. Those old acquaintances recommended the new place to people in their circle, so it wasn't that odd to meet someone Sunny had known, on occasion.

Plus, many of the people he had known were also people Aiko knew.

Still, it was strange for an impromptu meeting between the survivors of the Antarctic Center to happen in his cafe all of a sudden.

If it had happened before, Sunny would have thought that [Fated] was pulling the strings of fate behind the curtains.

But he was free of such concerns now. Coincidences were nothing more than coincidences, and they did happen.

'Free...'

Sunny smiled neutrally as he placed the glass in front of Quentin.

"Would you like something to eat?"

The healer made an order, and Sunny left. As he was walking away, he saw Kim pouring the whiskey into the glasses. The sound of laughter disappeared, and the smiles disappeared, as well.

The four of them remained silent for a few moments, their faces solemn. Then, they gulped the bitter liquor down.

The fifth glass of whiskey remained standing on the table, untouched. Sunny had an idea of what his customers were going to talk about, so he dove into the kitchen, not wanting to listen.

Aiko was there, waiting for him with a dismayed expression. She whispered angrily:

"Why did you push me away! Boss... listen... I can serve that dreamy... uh... serve Master Quentin and his friends myself. You just rest..."

Then, she noticed something on his face and grew silent.

A couple moments later, Aiko sighed.

"You are being strange again."

Sunny glanced at her impassively, then said with a shrug:

"Those guys are from the First Evacuation Army, and they are here for a reason. Leave them be."

She coughed awkwardly.

"Oh. I keep forgetting that you were in Antarctica, as well. Sorry..."

Sunny did not make a secret of the fact that he had gone through the Southern Campaign — without going into details, of course. That was because the situation there had been extremely chaotic, and many people ended up being forced to challenge Nightmares with no warning. Few managed to survive them alone, like Quentin, though.

Still, it was easy to explain where an absolutely unknown Master had popped out from by simply saying something like "Oh, I sort of stumbled into a Nightmare in Antarctica". That was also a perfect conversation killer, dissuading people from asking further questions.

In short, it was very convenient.

Sunny patted Aiko on the shoulder and went to cook Quentin's order.

"Get ready. The breakfast crowd will arrive soon."

He cooked another omelette, brewed some coffee, and delivered both to the gallant healer.

Retreating to the reception desk, Sunny picked up the Monster Almanac and continued to read.

He could not help but catch bits and pieces of the conversation his former soldiers were having.

After the initial solemn atmosphere, the mood at their table gradually turned lighter. They joked, laughed, and shared news about themselves. Listening to the sound of their laughter, Sunny remained silent.

At some point, though, his expression changed slightly.

Quentin was talking at the moment, his pleasant voice tinged with a complicated emotion:

"Oh... I heard something strange a few days ago, by the way."

Luster raised an eyebrow.

"Good strange or bad strange?"

The healer shrugged hesitantly.

"I'm not sure. You see... that thing. The Winter Beast. Apparently, itis gone."

Kim and Beth looked at him sharply, their eyes turning colder.

"Gone? What do you mean, gone?"

Quentin shook his head.

"It seemed like someone... or rather, something... killed it. You know how hard it is to catch glimpses of the Southern Quadrant, but apparently, the evidence suggests that it was killed years ago. We just didn't know."

A long silence settled over the table.

Then, Kim poured the remaining whiskey into their glasses and raised hers.

A pale smile appeared on her face.

"Good. That's good, then..."

Turning the page, Sunny sighed subtly.

Of course, he knew that the Winter Beast was gone.

He was the one who had killed it, after all, ripping the wretched thing apart with his own two hands.

Well, it was in the past now.

Right now, he was running low on coffee beans and a bunch of other ingredients. Worse than that, his Memory business was not doing that well.

This was the kind of problems Sunny was facing in the present.