1603 He's a Rumor

It was not every day that a famous Saint visited the Brilliant Emporium, so Sunny went all out with cooking up a feast.

And Effie was, without a doubt, very famous.

The world had changed a lot from the day he Awakened. Back then, there had been barely a few dozen Transcendents in existence, each representing the absolute pinnacle of human tenacity and achievement. They were distant and dazzling, like living legends.

Today, though, there were more than a hundred Saints out there. They were still revered and venerated, and each of them was still an absolute elite — an exalted warrior and champion, the best of the best humanity had to offer.

But, still. Not all Saints were made equal. All of them were remarkable, but some were more remarkable than the rest.

In general, the hundred Transcendents were often divided into three loose tiers. The lowest tier — if such a description could even be applied to these legendary figures — was the largest, and mostly consisted of those Saints who had reached Transcendence after the Southern Campaign.

They were younger and less experienced, and their path to Sainthood had been a little easier than that of their predecessors. So, these undoubtedly outstanding warriors were still considered a bit weaker than the rest of the Saints.

The middle tier consisted of the few most talented representatives of the new generation, as well as of the old guard — of those seasoned veterans that had reached Transcendence before the Chain of Nightmares. Saints like Sky Tide, Summer Knight, Silent Stalker, Bloodwave, and Wake of Ruin were among them.

These powerhouses wielded fierce powers and possessed a frightening amount of experience, each towering above the rest of humanity like mythical giants.

...However, there was still someone above them. Each of these unique individuals was a singular existence, a presence that broke all the rules. Their terrifying power could hardly be measured, and they stood apart from even the Saints, inferior only to the Sovereigns themselves. There was no word for what these people were, but everyone knew their names.

The government possessed three of these exceptional champions: Raised by Wolves, Nightingale, and Soul Reaper.

Clan Song possessed three, as well. They were Mordret, Seishan, and Beastmaster. And lastly, Clan Valor possessed two. They were Nephis and Morgan, the Sword Sisters.

...Of course, there were Saints of equally terrible power who were completely unknown. One of them was Cassie.

The other one was Sunny.

And that was pretty much it.

So, it wasn't an exaggeration to say that a very famous Saint was currently visiting the Brilliant Emporium. Saying that she finally understood what the female Fire Keepers had been talking about when they mentioned the "eye candy cafe".

Sunny frowned subtly.

"Eye Candy Cafe? Hmm. I haven't heard of it. Do I have a new competitor?"

New shops and restaurants were popping up in Bastion almost every day, so he was not very diligent about keeping up with the competition.

'Whatever. All the more reason to make sure that Effie is satisfied with her experience in the Brilliant Emporium. Then, she can tell the Fire Keepers to stay loyal to it. Her own soldiers, as well! Although the government Awakened have fewer coins to spend, there are a lot of them...'

Eventually, he used one of his bodies to start serving the dishes.

Various side dishes, a mountain of dumplings, tender barbequed meat, black bean noodles, steamed buns, spring rolls, red rice cakes, and perfectly cooked rice... he had really outdone himself this time.

Panting, Sunny wiped his hands on the apron and smiled pridefully. Back in the dining hall, Effie had already demolished half of what he had cooked and let out a satisfied sigh.

"Ah! This is great!"

Then, she gave his avatar thumbs up and added:

"Can I get another one of everything?"

Sunny's smile wavered.

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After Effie was done with her meal, she stayed for a while, catching up with Aiko. They had invited Sunny to join them, but he politely refused and returned to the reception desk, pretending to read the Monster Almanac.

Therefore, he accidentally heard Effie sharing some information about the meeting she had attended in the Castle.

"It's about the winter solstice, of course. Which is today. By tomorrow, many Sleepers from the waking world would be sent into the Dream Realm, scattered all across its territory. With how many humans are here now, most will find their way to the nearest settlement without much problem. The rest will be picked up by the patrols we've jointly established. Well... apart from those who are unlucky."

She grew quiet for a moment, and then added in a somber tone:

"Of course, there very well may be poor bastards like us two. Since not all regions of the Dream Realm have human presence, they can be lost. No one wants the Forgotten Shore to be repeated, so this time, there is an initiative to widen the search area. Valor is even sending a team into a Death Zone."

Aiko frowned.

"Let me guess who is going to draw the short straw. They're going to send Changing Star, aren't they?"

Effie sighed.

"Yeah. My poor Princess can't catch a break. Well, of course, it's all a ruse. The real reason they are sending her there..." She lowered her voice: "...is the Lord of Shadows."

Sunny turned the page of the Monster Almanac, his face remaining perfectly neutral.

Aiko, meanwhile, raised an eyebrow.

"Lord of Shadows? Who is that?"

Effie gently caressed Little Ling's head. The boy was resting his head on her lap, fast asleep. His dad, meanwhile, simply listened to their conversation while sipping coffee with a smile on his face.

The huntress shrugged.

"He's just a rumor... ah, but since Valor is taking action, I guess he's not, after all. In any case, there has been a lot of talk about a mysterious Saint appearing in the Death Zone between the Sword Domain and the Song Domain not too long ago. If he really exists, and has been able to survive there alone for so long... then he is immensely powerful. Of course, both Domains would want to obtain his allegiance."

She hesitated for a moment, then added darkly:

"Or, if that is not possible, to make sure that no one else gets him. I guess they are sending Nephis to test the waters."

Shaking his head, Effie remained silent for a few moments, and then laughed.

"Can you imagine? I mean, has Anvil lost it, or what? Don't get me wrong, I love Princess... but really, she is probably the worst person in the world to use as a negotiator..."

Sunny couldn't help but agree.

Of course, what Effie did not know was that the person Nephis was supposed to negotiate with was sitting just a few meters away, having just served her a delicious dinner.