1641 First Impressions

Sunny studied Cassle's face, trying to guess what she was thinking about. Having left her alone for several weeks, he did not feel particularly... safe. Who knew what conclusions she had drawn in that time? What plans she had formulated? He was a stranger to her, now. Which meant that the blind seer would not afford him the same grace she afforded her friends.

Facing Cassie as someone she might perceive as a potential enemy... was a nerve-wracking experience. Sunny felt like he finally understood why Mordret was so wary of her.

...But then again, he was someone worthy of being feared, himself. He was powerful and lethal enough to be an existential threat to anyone who would dare stand in his way. Sunny did not have to be afraid of anyone, or any thing - instead, everyone had to be scared of him.

If they knew who he was, of course. But no one did, which only made him more terrifying.

"Well, no matter.”

It was not like he wanted to frighten Cassie. Sunny was pretty sure that she would treat him with sincerity - he had what she wanted, after all. Still, a relationship of a transactional nature was not the most stable, It was in his best interest to build a better connection with her... and maybe even reach a point where they shared mutual trust.

Sunny looked at Cassle, who was wearing a white tunic and a seawave cloak, her eyes hidden behind a strip of blue cloth. Then, he glanced at his own black bodysult. The two of them did not exactly look like a natural pair. Currently, they were accomplices at best, not allies.

So, how do I go about building trust?"

One small step at a time, most likely.

He looked at the shattered moon, then at the restless waters of the dark lake. Finally, he said:

"The ambiance here is truly lovely. However, the lake is rather dreadful. Wouldn't it be better if we left before something very terrible came out of the water to spoil the mood?"

Cassie remained silent for a moment, then smiled faintly.

"Didn't you come from the water yourself, Saint Sunless? Are you very terrible, as well?"

He coughed.

"Well... yes, I did. And yes, I guess I am."

She tilted her head slightly.

"I am surprised that you made it all the way here, actually. How did you traverse the lake without being torn apart? Or alerting anyone to your presence?"

That was an obviously probing question, but Sunny didn't mind. He shrugged and answered in a nonchalant tone:

"By being patient and very good at hiding”

She sighed lightly and turned around, walking slowly in the direction of the castle ruins.

"Let's go."

Sunny hesitated for a moment before following

As he did, he looked up, at the figures patrolling the remnants of the toppled walls.

This was the problem he had not been able to solve yet.

Finding an entrance into the hidden realm had not been too hard. Avoiding the Echoes patrolling the lake and finding a path through the graveyard of swords at its bottom had not been much of a problem, either. Even traversing the dark depths of the true lake, where great horrors dwelled, was well within his power.

But getting inside the ruined castle itself was troublesome. There were many powerful Knights of Valor inside... there was the King of Swords himself, as well. Worse than that, the members of his clan were versed in runic sorcery. Their stronghold was protected by an array of enchantments that Sunny could not hope to unravel, let alone bypass silently.

He knew a thing or two about Hope's sorcery, but not nearly enough to compete with real experts.

That was why Sunny needed Cassie. Without help from inside the castle, it would take him years to infiltrate its ruins. He wasn't worried about being betrayed by her, either...

At this moment, as if reading his mind, the blind seer asked him with a hint of curiosity in her voice:

"Can I ask you a question, Saint Sunless?"

He glanced at her back.

"Sure. And, please... call me Sunny. Here in Bastion, I am known as the master of Sunny's Brilliant Emporium. A humble shopkeeper, and definitely not a Saint."

She remained silent for a moment.

"Why are you so sure that I won't surrender you into the hands of my clan? After all... here in Bastion, I am known as a loyal, obedient servant of the King. A virtuous Saint, and definitely not someone who would help an outsider infiltrate the very heart of our stronghold."

Sunny answered calmly, his voice tinged with a hint of amusement:

"It's because I know that you are actually disloyal, disobedient, and wicked."

Cassie suddenly coughed.

"...Ah."

He chuckled and added in a light tone:

"Just my kind of person. I am a bit of a treacherous bastard myself, to be honest."

She cleared her throat.

"I… see"

Cassie remained silent for a while after that, jumping off the toppled tower to land softly on the ground below, Sunny followed, suppressing the desire to slap himself across the face.

"What... what kind of nonsense am I spouting?"

Right now, Cassle only knew that he was a Saint that was somehow connected to her and Nephis, and had undergone the Third Nightmare with them. Which would suggest that he had been their friend, or at least an ally... if not for the fact that Mordret had also been there, in the Tomb of Ariel.

Meaning that not everyone who had entered that Nightmare was an ally. Cassie knew that Sunny had played a big role in her life, but she did not know what kind of role he had played. She had to account for the fact that he very well could have been her enemy... at the very least, she wouldn't be sure that he had been a friend.

So, why the hell was he willingly admitting to being a wretched traitor?

Sunny closed his eyes for a moment and then said, trying very hard to keep the embarrassment out of his voice:

"What I'm trying to say... is that everyone has their own interest. It is not in your self-interest to surrender me to Clan Valor, and I am pretty sure that you would not sacrifice yourself for their benefit. Otherwise, I would have been visited by a cohort of Knights and a few Paladins the very next day after your visit."

Cassie inhaled slowly.

"I see, That makes sense."

She paused for a moment, and then suddenly asked:

"What is your interest, then?"

Sunny smiled and looked at the broken sky.

"That is the question, isn't it?”