1685 Booming Business

"Boss... are you okay?"

Alko's voice sounded a bit confused as she glanced at Sunny with a dubious expression. The petite girl was floating near the ceiling, taking inventory of their liquor shelf. He, meanwhile, was busy cooking and cursing under his breath.

There were a lot of customers today, but Sunny could not even manifest an avatar to keep up with the flood of orders.

‘That third guy! Selfish bastard!'

He gritted his teeth.

‘Where did all my essence go?!'

The gloomy shadow, left to its devices for once, was staring at him mockingly. Sunny glared at it back.

'What? I know we're the same person! It's a figure of speech, okay?!’

The phrase "you have no one to blame but himself had never been so poignant.

The last few days had not been easy on Sunny, and it was all because of his third avatar. First, there was the problem with Weaver's Mask... he had intended for the Lord of Shadow to wear it at all times, but in practice, it made having any kind of sensible conversation impossible.

Well,,, not impossible, maybe, But definitely way too frustrating.

So, Sunny had been busy crafting a special Memory for the third avatar ever since returning from the mirror maze beneath Bastion.

He could not really reproduce the [Mantle of Lies] - Weaver's Mask was a Divine Memory, after all, so making a copy of even a single enchantment was utterly beyond his ability.

He could create a knock-off Weaver's Mask, though, by using an alteration of the Nebulous Mantle's enchantments. He had even added a bit of the [Autumn Leaf] - one of the Memories he had lost-into the mix.

As a result, the Lord of Shadows could still remain a mystery. His voice, height, hair color, and mystical traits were either hidden or distorted. Of course, he was not immune to all forms of divination unless the real Weaver's Mask was summoned... but since Cassie already knew the truth and had agreed to hide it, there was no need for such a level of secrecy. For now, at least.

Until the forces of the Great Clans arrived at Godgrave.

In any case, creating this Memory, which Sunny lazily named [Definitely Not Me], had kept him awake for a few nights. It was imperative that he created it, though...

Awakened with affinity to shadows were already very rare, and if the humble shopkeeper in Bastion was discovered to not only share this rare trait with the mysterious Lord of Shadows, but also have similar height and build as the mysterious Saint... his peaceful life would be over.

Pulling a few all-nighters was a bit of a chore, but he could manage it.

But then, he had to go and waste an ocean of essence in Godgrave, as well!

Traversing the Hollows and fighting Great Beasts was already bad enough. But then, Sunny decided to transport the two Sleepers back all by himself... the ruins of the forgotten city were situated in the vicinity of the Nameless Temple, but only relative to the overall size of the region. In truth, there was close to two hundred kilometers between them.

It was well within his power to make three or four consecutive jumps while carrying two Dormant humans, and then come back the same way. The essence cost of such travel was very high, though, draining his reserves to a dangerous degree.

So, now...

Sunny felt rather helpless. He couldn't even allow himself to manifest an additional avatar, let alone do something more strenuous. Whatever essence he had left had to be preserved in case there was an emergency.

It was a good thing that Nephis had left Godgrave with the Fire Keepers, Gods knew, he wouldn't want her to see him in such a pathetic state.

So, Sunny had no choice but to suffer and curse silently,

"Ready, Send it to the seventh table!”

Aiko used her telekinesis to send a beautifully plated dish into the dining hall, and he finally had a minute to rest. Sunny sighed, took a sip of water from the Endless Spring, and frowned slightly.

[Sunny.]

Cassie's voice suddenly resounded in his head, creeping him out.

He was still not used to that.

...But at the same time, it strangely felt too familiar.

[Yes, Saint Cassia?]

A moment later, her soft voice resounded again:

[About the Memory commission. I'll send someone to your shop today to explain the details.]

He raised an eyebrow.

She was already whispering into his ear... figuratively speaking. Was there really a need to send someone? Couldn't she just explain what she wanted straight away?

...Maybe Cassie was conserving essence, too.

He shrugged.

[Alright. Is there anything else? Sorry, I'm a bit busy... lots of customers today.]

She remained silent for a moment.

[There is nothing else, Well... actually, I do have something to say.]

Sunny's expression darkened. What was going on? Had she received a vision and wanted to hint at something? That couldn't be right... hadn't Cassle told him that the future could not be seen clearly anymore?

He looked down.

[I'm all ears.]

Strangely enough, she lingered for a while this time. Eventually, though, her voice rustled in his mind once more:

[It's nothing important, really. Just a little piece of advice... in the future, you might want to avoid using words like "heavy" and "burden" when speaking to women. You know, just thought I would share...]

His eye twitched.

Cassie's tone was polite and serious, but he couldn't help but feel that she was suppressing... laughter?

Sunny cleared his throat.

[...Oh. That's funny. Almost as funny as the fact that I've lived peacefully on my own, but just a couple of days after the woman in question showed up on my doorstep, there was suddenly a Cursed Tyrant trying to gobble me up. A person with less decorum than me could call that a bit burdensome, don't you think?]

There was no answer.

He waited for a while, then took a deep breath.

"Damnation."

Sunny was slowly starting to realize what the most terrible thing about Cassie's Ability was not that she could spy on almost anyone undetected.

It was that she was the one in control of who had the last word!

Muttering under his breath, he returned to cooking.

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The day passed in a blur. Sunny was so busy that he had not sat down once until the evening... which, in theory, was a good thing.

Why would he complain about how popular his restaurant was becoming? Cassie's commission was bound to be very profitable for the Brilliant Emporium, as well.

It was just that working hard and working hard while also working hard in two other places were two entirely different things!

As the sun rolled behind the horizon and the crescent moon appeared in the velvet sky, the dining hall of the Brilliant Emporium became deserted. Aiko had left, leaving Sunny to close down on his own.

He was carrying a tray of dirty dishes to the kitchen when someone approached the door,

"Must be the person Cassie sent...'

He turned to the door, waiting for the person to enter.

When the Silver Bell rang, though...

Sunny suddenly tripped and fell on his face. The dishes rolled on the floor.

"What... what is she doing here?!

Laying on the floor, he cautiously looked up.

Long legs... slender waist... a light summer dress... alabaster skin...

The silky hair was black, but it was hardly enough to disguise her.

Sunny's eyes widened.

"The "person" Cassie promised to send... is Nephis?!'

Indeed, there was no mistake.

Nephis, who had just left the Nameless Temple yesterday, was now somehow here, in the Brilliant Emporium.

Looking down at him in confusion.

She hesitated for a moment, and then asked in a polite tone:

"...Master Sunless? I've been told that you can create powerful Memories.”