1688 Cherry on Top

‘I think... I might kill Cassie…’

Sunny kept a smile on his face to hide how startled and rattled he was. It may have looked a bit sheepish... and he may have looked like a bit of a clown... but there was nothing he could do about that.

It already took a titanic effort for Sunny not to glance at the dirty dishes scattered on the floor, or summon a swarm of shadows to quickly clean them away.

'Keep calm!'

Nephis was here, in the Brilliant Emporium.

Looking at him with a strange expression.

Well, of course her expression was strange! He had just made a fool out of himself right in front of her. And that was technically their first meeting, no less, which started with him planting on his face.

Sunny wanted to fall through the floor.

'Actually, that might be possible.

It would not take a lot for the Marvelous Mimic to swallow him into the basement.

Struggling to throw these thoughts out of his head, Sunny asked in as polite of tone as he could manage, given the circumstances:

"Indeed, I am called Master Sunless. Please forgive me, Lady Nephis, Saint Cassia did not warn me…”

Not only was Nephis here... but she was also wearing a dress.

A dress!

That should have been categorized as a crime,

Her light dress was simple and white, with not much decoration. It covered her shoulders and had a modest neckline, the hem resting somewhat high above her knees. Nevertheless, the modesty of the dress only served to accentuate the graceful line of her slender body, and the stark contrast between her alabaster skin and black hair only made her grey eyes look more striking.

Suddenly, Sunny was thankful that it was already dark outside. Otherwise, Neph's appearance might have caused the Brilliant Emporium to be besieged by a mob of admirers.

And then, he would have had to hold himself back from minting a fresh batch of soul coins.

Suddenly, he realized that Nephis had said something. He had no idea what.

Sunny blinked.

"Sorry?"

She cleared her throat, then looked away... perhaps in displeasure at his lack of manners and mental faculties,

"No, nothing. I am here to talk about a Memory"

Sunny forced out another smile, then gestured to one of the tables.

"Please, take a seat, I will be with you shortly.”

He pulled out a chair for her, then swiftly picked up the scattered plates and escaped into the kitchen. Before going in, though, Sunny hesitated for a moment.

"Would you like something to drink? We just received a fresh batch of coffee beans and tea..."

She shook her head.

"Water is fine."

He nodded and entered the kitchen.

A moment later, Sunny leaned against the wall and breathed heavily.

‘What the hell?!'

He had been anticipating meeting Nephis for a long, long time. So, he was mentally prepared to face her... but the one meant to face her was the Lord of Shadows! Not him, the humble and unassuming shopkeeper!

There was no reason whatsoever for someone as exalted as Changing Star of the Immortal Flame clan to visit the Brilliant Emporium, so Sunny had never once imagined that she would.

'Calm down!'

Sunny took a deep breath, then quietly checked to see if the Nebulous Mantle was working.

Everything was fine. His presence was hidden, and his facade of a harmless artisan was sufficiently maintained. In fact, this year of living peacefully in Bastion had smoothed out his edges, so this incarnation of his looked somewhat gentle.

There was no way someone would associate the Innocuous owner of the Brilliant Emporium with the antisocial, menacing Lord of Shadows.

‘...Good.’

Still, what the hell was Cassie thinking about?

[Saint Cassia... what the hell?]

As he poured water from the Endless Spring into a glass, she answered pleasantly:

[What do you mean?]

The glass almost exploded in Sunny's hand.

[Why is Changing Star here?]

He could just imagine the blind seer laughing somewhere across the lake, in the Castle.

[Why wouldn't she be there? The Memory I wanted to commission is for her. She is the best person to explain what she needs.]

He opened his mouth, then closed it again, not knowing how to answer.

[...What have you told her about me?]

Cassie's voice resounded in his head, calm and steady:

[That you can forge powerful Memories, can be trusted to keep a secret, and have an affinity to shadows.]

The last part was a bit problematic, but after thinking about it for a moment, Sunny had to admit that it was for the best that Nephis had been warned in advance, She would have noticed the nature of his Aspect sooner or later, anyway-it was better to Inform her first to prevent her from getting the wrong Idea.

Or rather, the right Idea.

In any case...

Carrying the glass of water back... Sunny somehow found himself also carrying a small plate with a piece of cherry cake on it, as well. He had made the cake this morning to prevent the batch of Beast Farm cherries from going bad, but as to how it ended up on a plate in his hand right now...

Sunny's recollection was foggy.

He was suddenly full of suspicion.

[...You didn't erase my memories, did you?]

For the first time in a while, Cassie's voice sounded confused:

[Huh?]

He gritted his teeth. Of course, she didn't. She wouldn't have been able to in such a short amount of time, not to mention without looking him into the eyes.

[Never mind.]

It was already too late to turn back. Returning to the dining hall, he placed the glass of water and the piece of cake in front of Nephis.

She stared at the cake silently, then looked up at glanced at him.

...Her serious eyes were way too tantalizing.

‘Crap.’

This whole situation was wrong. Why wasn't she wearing her armor? Had she destroyed her armor again?! Is that why she was wearing a dress today?

Was the Memory she wanted to commission an armor? Then he had to finish the commission as fast as possible!

On the other hand...

Really...

It wouldn't hurt to take his time with it. Would it?

He wouldn't want to make anything less than flawless, if it was for Nephis.

Keeping his expression neutral, Sunny sat down across from her and said with a polite smile:

"You probably haven't heard that our cafe is famous for its desserts..."

Of course, she hadn't. Because it wasn't.

But then again, Nephis had made him dessert once.

So it was only fair for him to return the favor, right?