1692 Return Customer

Back in the Brilliant Emporium, Sunny was standing motionlessly in the middle of the dining hall. His face was frozen.

The streets of Bastion had long turned dark, and he was enveloped by a peaceful silence.

Some time later, he looked down and stared at the gloomy shadow.

'I... did not imagine the whole thing, did I?'

The shadow stared at him back and shrugged. Nevertheless, it seemed strangely elated.

'Maybe?'

No... Nephis had definitely been here just now. Her plate was still on the table, and her glass was still mostly full of water.

Not only had she been here, but Sunny was now apparently making a soulbound sword for her.

Slowly, his face paled.

'...What did I do?!'

It all seemed perfectly reasonable and cunning in the moment. Not only would he be able to fulfill his ambition of replicating the [Bound] enchantment with Neph's help, but she would also reveal the secrets of her Transcendent battle art to him, completely of her own volition.

Not to mention the hefty sum he would earn for the commission. But now, Sunny was panicking!

Why did he insist on spending lots of time with her? That was the exact opposite of what the humble shopkeeper was supposed to do! His only task was to stay as far away from Nephis as possible and live a tranquil, peaceful life.

And now, in the span of just a few days, Sunny ended up being entangled with Nephis and Cassie both. Somehow.

'This wasn't a part of the plan!'

But it was also... not that bad?

Despite how contrary to his plans the current situation was, Sunny found himself smiling.

In fact, despite his panic, he was just as elated as the gloomy shadow.

Too much so, even, to the point that his second avatar was currently humming a happy melody in Ravenheart... which made Rain stare at him weirdly.

Sunny abruptly stopped humming.

'...Crap.'

He had done did it now!

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The next day, Sunny informed somewhat sleepy Aiko that Changing Star had visited the shop late in the evening to commission a Memory.

The petite girl just stared at him for a moment and then asked, her voice gruff:

"Oh, yeah? Who else came in? Was it Santa Claus?"

Hearing the unfamiliar name, Sunny frowned.

"Saint Claus? Who is that? Is there a new Transcendent in the Sword Domain?"

Aiko just shook her head and looked away.

"Never mind. So, you're telling me that both Cassie and Changing Star herself have visited the Brilliant Emporium, but both waited until I was gone to spend some time with you alone. Am I getting this correctly?"

Sunny blinked a couple of times.

"I mean, that is a strange way of putting it, but yes. That is basically it."

She nodded.

"Sure. Why not? I shouldn't be surprised, really."

By that point, Sunny was starting to get offended.

"What's the matter? I thought you would be happy! We'll get a pile of soul shards soon!"

Aiko yawned.

"Yeah... that's great. Don't forget to give me a fat bonus, then." Her tone told him to leave her alone, but Sunny was not willing to. "It's true! She even complimented my cake!"

The petite girl silently floated up to the ceiling. He stared at her in confusion.

"What are you doing?"

Aiko responded sarcastically:

"Checking the liquor. I just made an inventory yesterday, so don't think I'll fail to find out how much you guzzled after I left..."

Sunny threw his arms up.

"Is this how you talk to your boss?!"

She scoffed.

"I apologize. Don't think I'll fail to find out how much you guzzled after I left, boss."

Shaking his head, he mumbled a few curses and went about getting ready for the morning customers.

A few days passed in idle tranquility. There was not much happening in the Brilliant Emporium, so Sunny simply waited to be contacted by the Fire Keepers.

Funnily enough, the Lord of Shadows was in the same situation. The elders of clan Valor were taking their sweet time discussing how to negotiate with him, so he had nothing better to do than wait.

Only the avatar in Ravenheart was busy, since he and Rain were in the initial stages of planning a hunt for the Awakened abomination.

A few more days passed, and then, Sunny was distracted by the sound of plates rolling in the dining hall. Looking up from the stove, he wiped his hands and went to check what had happened.

When he left the kitchen, what met him was the sight of Aiko having planted face-first into the floor. There was a new customer standing at the entrance, sunlight pouring over her shoulders and illuminating her slender figure.

The customers were staring at her in silent awe.

Nephis, meanwhile, looked down with a hint of bewilderment in her eyes:

"Aiko... are you alright?"

She was wearing civilian clothes once again, this time having replaced

the criminal summer dress with fashionable white trousers and a fitted black blouse.

The petite girl mumbled a stifled curse and slowly picked herself off the floor.

"Ah, yes... I'm perfectly fine, Lady Nephis. Uh... what brings you here?"

Sunny had the same question. He had expected for Cassie to summon him telepathically, or maybe one of the Fire Keepers arrive to hand him an invitation. The fact that Nephis arrived personally was rather strange. Did she have a lot of free time?

As a matter of fact... she probably did, waiting for the elders of clan Valor to make a decision. The same way the Lord of Shadows was waiting. But that still did not explain why she had come to the Brilliant Emporium.

Secretly stumped, Sunny walked over and, made sure that Nephis could not see, and gave Aiko a smug look.

Then, he turned away with a pleasant expression.

"Welcome, welcome. I didn't expect you to visit our establishment again so soon, my lady."

Nephis remained silent for a few moments, then said neutrally:

"I'm here to continue the discussion we started last time. Oh, and..."

Her expression remained stoic.

"I'm a bit parched. Would you mind serving me some tea? And something to go along with it... cake will do fine..."

Sunny's smile wavered for a moment.

He sighed.

"I'm afraid we don't have cake at the moment. But!" His chin rose a little.

"I've been told that my waffles are to die for. Please have a seat... I'll be with you shortly."