1694 Facing the Consequences

Cassie did not answer. Perhaps she wasn't in the mood to waste essence to hijack his senses, or perhaps she simply did not want to...

In any case, after that bombshell of a revelation, Sunny sat quietly and stared into the distance for a while.

He was trying to understand how he had ended up in this situation.

It was all his fault, of course... really, Sunny had no one but himself to blame. Had he not suggested creating a soulbound Memory for Nephis on the spur of the moment, there would have been no need for them to interact, let alone do so while hiding the real reason from Clan Valor.

The Lord of Shadows would have continued to play his role as her battle partner, while the humble shopkeeper would have continued living his mostly peaceful life in solitude.

But now...

'I'm going to be a kept man... gods, why am I so handsome?!'

That pretty face of his... was a curse!

If Sunny had a more rugged appearance, Cassie would have had to come up with a different explanation for his presence near Nephis. The Lord of Shadows, who always wore a ferocious mask, received nothing but respect... but when Sunny showed his face, the most people could believe was that he had caught the princess's fancy due to his pleasing looks.

Surely, being a Saint and ruling a Citadel in a Death Zone had nothing to do with the difference in treatment...

'I can't believe it.'

Jet had once told Sunny that he could become a flower boy one day. Who knew that her words would not only come true, but also come back to bite him one day?

He glanced at Nephis furtively.

She was finishing her waffles with a calm expression, seemingly not affected by the sensitive nature of their conversation at all. There was no hint of agitation or embarrassment on her beautiful face, and her posture remained graceful and poised, like always.

Well, it made sense. It was nothing but a strategy of deception for her, after all. She did not know Sunny, and only saw him as a valuable resource. A talented enchanter who could create a powerful Memory for her to use.

But it was different for Sunny.

Because, to him, she meant so much more.

Throwing another glance at her, he sighed and leaned back in his chair.

'What happened happened. There's no point in worrying about it now.’

In fact... he should just accept the situation and allow himself to enjoy it. Sunny would have lied if he said that he didn't feel a little bit excited about the whole situation.

After all, if Nephis was calm, then why couldn't he be calm, as well?

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'He's looking at me... what do I do... should I... he's looking at me again!’

Pretending to be nonchalant, Nephis tried to concentrate on the stunningly delicious waffles that Master Sunless had made for her and not show any sign of her distress.

She didn't quite understand how she had allowed Cassie to convince her to go with this plan.

When they discussed how to go about allowing the charming enchanter to stay close to her without alerting Clan Valor to the true purpose of the arrangement, the idea seemed quite reasonable. Strategically, it was sound.

There was even the added benefit of shielding Nephis from the pursuits of the prospective bachelors from other Legacy clans... somewhat.

It was only this morning that she had gotten cold feet. Knowing herself, Nephis had rehearsed the conversation in her room... extensively... and finally realized how deeply embarrassing it would be to say something like that to the charming young man's face.

Nevertheless, she had gone through with it. She was not someone to back down from a challenge, after all.

But now, she had to face the consequences.

'Ah... he looked so put-upon...'

Well, why wouldn't he? Despite his alluring looks, Master Sunless was an incredibly talented craftsman, first and foremost. He must have taken a lot of pride in his skill. To be reduced to such a role... had to be extremely humiliating, from his point of view.

Yet, he graciously accepted their scheme without voicing any complaints.

Being involved in all the lies and deceit surrounding the royal family of the Sword Domain could not have been easy for a decent and honest person like him, either. Nephs was starting to understand better why such a talented sorcerer had chosen to stay away from the Great Clans.

She felt... a little guilty.

When her plate became empty, she sighed with regret and looked at Master Sunless.

'I should protect him well.

There was no choice now but to proceed with the plan, now.

"If you are ready, we should go to the Castle."

The charming young man seemed a little startled.

"Go to the Castle? Right now?"

Having calmed down somewhat, Nephis nodded.

"Yes. We need to sign the contract officially. Apart from that, the more people see us together, the better. Don't worry, though there is no need for you to do anything extra or force yourself to act in any kind of way. As long as we are simply seen together, those who need to get the wrong impression will convince themselves of the falsehood. So, you won't need to compromise your dignity."

She lingered for a moment, and then added in a serious tone:

"You have my promise, Master Sunless."

She meant it.

He looked at her silently for a while, his expression unreadable.

Eventually, the young man nodded:

"Alright. Give me a minute to give instructions to Aiko, and we can go.”

He stood up and retreated into the kitchen of the small café, leaving Nephis alone.

She was using a Memory to make it impossible for anyone to eavesdrop on their conversation, but people could still stare. So, she couldn't allow herself to show any sign of losing composure.

Even thought all Nephis wanted to do was slump in her chair and bury her face in her hands.

And maybe order another serving of those delicious waffles.

[Cassie...]

Her friend's voice resounded in her head a moment later, composed and calming:

[Yes?]

Nephis lingered for a few moments.

[...Prepare the contract.]

There was a little pause, and then Cassie replied neutrally:

[Already done.]

Nephis was a little surprised. She hesitated for a bit, then asked mentally:

[You already did it? But what if he refused?]

Her friend chuckled.

[Why would he refuse? There's an army of men out there who would kill for the opportunity to act as your romantic partner... don't sell yourself short!]

Nephis frowned.

That was true. She was beautiful in her own right... young, wealthy, renowned, and had the backing of a prestigious family.

So, then...

Her frown deepened a little.

'Now, wait a second. So why did he look so put- upon? Who... who does he think...'

Her thoughts, however, were interrupted by Cassie's pleasant voice:

[Oh, I wanted to say something. The way you found out if he has a girlfriend... well done! Very slick.]

Nephis blinked.

'What?’

Then, her eyes widened a little.

A moment later, Master Sunless appeared near her table.

He seemed to have regained his composure. Sparing Nephis a bright smile, the charming young man bowed slightly.

"We can leave... Lady Nephis? Are you alright?" She took a deep breath.

"Yes... I am fine. Let's just go....”