1696 VIP Treatment

Eventually, they reached the pler.

There were six ferries carrying people and cargo across the lake to the Castle, operating in pairs. The one Sunny and Nephis approached was located on the eastern shore, and was meant for passengers.

There was another pair of ferries on the southern side of the lake, in the direction of the Dream Gate, mostly used for transporting cargo. The last pair was on the northern shore, usually used by the Awakened warriors departing on expeditions.

Every time Sunny returned to the waking world, he had to purchase a ticket, wait in line, and then spend some unpleasant time on the crowded passenger deck of the ferry. Most Masters had access to much more comfortable accommodations, but they also had a higher status than him.

Since Sunny did not serve any established power and preferred to remain low-key, the treatment he received was much less glamorous than what an Ascended deserved. He didn't mind it... too much.

Today, however, his experience was entirely different.

Not only did Nephis not bother to buy tickets which made sense, considering that the enchanted ferry technically belonged to her family - but they were even immediately guided to the luxurious VIP deck. There was no crowd here... in fact, there did not seem to be any other passengers on the smaller deck, at all, at least not yet.

Instead of the crowded standing arrangement, there were soft sofas and tastefully engraved tables. There were even refreshments and beverages provided, served on a separate table.

The deck was situated at the front of the ferry and raised, so nothing obstructed the beautiful view of the vast lake and the picturesque castle rising from the waters in the distance. A soft breeze blew across the lake, playing with Neph's radiant silver locks.

Sunny enjoyed the view for a few moments, then looked away and inhaled slowly.

They walked to the beautifully laced wooden railing and looked at the sunlit vista. There was some time left before the ferry would depart, so they had nothing to do but wait.

Both were silent, but strangely enough, Sunny did not feel awkward at that moment.

Instead, he felt at peace.

After a while, Nephis suddenly asked:

"Master Sunless... you possess a high affinity to shadows, don't you?"

He nodded slowly.

"I do."

She considered her next words carefully.

"What can you tell me about shadows? And people whose Aspects have to do with them?"

Now, it was his turn to choose words.

After thinking for a bit, Sunny shrugged.

"I can tell you a lot, actually... but also not that much. I am ashamed to say that I don't understand my element well, myself. Which is a bit fitting, if you think about it, considering that Shadow God was also the god of mysteries. Shadows... are a unique concept. Someone considers them to be the opposite of light, but actually, shadows and light are just two sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other. It is true darkness that is their enemy."

He paused for a moment, secretly studying her reaction, and then added:

"Shadows are also intimately tied to souls. In fact, I am not even sure where the soul ends and the shadow begins. There are very few beings out there who can deal damage directly to one's shadow, but if a shadow is hurt, the soul is hurt as well. Granted, things without souls also have shadows... it's all very mysterious."

She remained silent for a while, contemplating his words. Then, she asked neutrally:

"Do you know of any other Awakened with shadow Aspects?"

Sunny hesitated.

"Well... I only ever heard of one."

That seemed to pique her interest.

"Oh?"

Sunny nodded.

"Yes. There was a man who went by the name Shadow Blade Kurt. A really vicious fellow. I heard that he used to handle some truly distasteful tasks for a Legacy clan, back in NQSC... I'm not sure which clan, though."

Nephis raised an eyebrow.

"Used to?"

He smiled somberly.

"Yes. He... was one of those Awakened who couldn't handle their nightmares, overusing stimulants to stay away from the Dream Realm. He eventually lost control and was dealt with by the government. That... was the last anyone had ever heard about Shadow Blade Kurt."

She sighed with a hint disappointment.

"That... doesn't sound like the kind of person I would want to know about. Thank you, though."

Sunny smiled.

"No problem. I'll... go get us something cool to drink."

He walked back to the table with the refreshments and poured them two glasses of light wine.

As he was about to head back, however, Sunny froze for a moment.

'What... is this familiar feeling?'

Suddenly, he had a terrible premonition.

'Oh, nol'

He walked hurriedly toward Nephis, but before he could reach her, a new passenger arrived. She noticed Neph's slender figure, grinned, and walked past him with wide strides.

"Princess!"

Effie hugged Neph around the shoulder with a bright smile.

"When did you return to Bastion? No, wait... you're not leaving right away again, are you?"

Nephis opened her mouth to answer, but Effie gave her no choice:

"Great! Listen..."

She leaned closer and whispered loudly:

"You're still single, aren't you? Well, let me tell you... that won't do! A beauty like you should not just be worshiped by the masses, but also appreciated by a dashing man. The masses won't warm you on a cold and windy night, after all... well, unless you're into that kind of thing..."

Neph's eyes widened.

"Effie..."

The huntress laughed.

"I'm saying all this for a reason. How about... you let me set you up with someone? Princess, I found you a perfect match! He's a young Master here in Bastion, Homeowner, runs a successful business. None of that tiresome Legacy baggage, either. Oh, he's an amazing cook, as well! Gods, I am starting to salivate just from thinking... oh, and to be clear, 1 don't mean thinking about the food..."

Neph trembled.

"Effie, wait..."

But Effie just smiled mischievously.

"What? You were the one who told me that you were researching passion. How are you going to learn passion without, you know... getting a little taste of passion? In any case, I saved the best for last. That guy, he's so cute! Ah... if I wasn't a married woman of modest disposition, I would have gobbled him up myself. He's just... wow. Speak about tasty things! And you can tell that he hides a great body under that apron, as well..."

Nephis grabbed her hand forcefully.

"Effie! Stop talking!"

Effie's looked at her in confusion.

Then, her smile slowly froze.

She remained silent for a few moments, and then said in a stifled tone:

"Oh. He... he's standing right behind me, isn't he?”