1697 Actionable Strategy

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

Nephis slowly released Effie's hand, suddenly feeling weak.

It was too late.

'Oh, gods...'

She briefly considered lighting the ferry on fire.

That would resolve the situation, wouldn't it? Yes... she would not have to face Master Sunless, at least. That was an actionable strategy.

But, no... no, she couldn't. The ferry had cast off moments after Effie showed up, which meant that the passengers would have nowhere to escape and drown in case of a fire. It also meant that Nephis, Effie, and Master Sunless were stuck on the VIP deck-just the three of them, with nowhere else to go.

There was no escape.

Nephis barely suppressed a shudder.

'I can summon my wings and flee...'

But that would mean leaving the charming young man alone with Effie. She... was unwilling. No, actually, she was vehemently against it! For some reason,

So, Nephis just stared at the boisterous huntress Impassively and said in an even tone:

"Yes, He is.”

Effie trembled.

Nephis wanted nothing more than to sigh and hide somewhere.

She had just managed to regain her composure after the... the incident in the park. And now...

‘Oh, no! Why did I think about what happened in the park?!'

To her distress, the image of the beautiful enchanter making timid excuses for his clumsiness resurfaced in her mind, and all her composure evaporated.

...The memory of embracing him tightly surfaced next.

At that moment, Nephis did something that she never thought she would do.

Maintaining a nonchalant expression, she took a casual step left and hid behind Effie.

With Effie's robust body hiding Nephis from Master Sunless, she suddenly felt much better.

[Wow. Did you just... heartlessly abandon a friend?]

Cassie's voice made her flinch.

Nephis greeted her teeth.

[I did not! I just... retreated. To support her from the rear.]

Cassie answered with a dubious hum.

Effie, meanwhile, remained motionless for a few moments, and then slowly turned around.

"Oh! Master Sunless. You were here.”

Her light-hearted tone sounded a little forced.

Nephis could not see the charming young man from behind the tall huntress, but she could hear his pleasant voice. He answered after a short delay, maintaining perfect decorum:

"Yes. It is a pleasure to see you, Saint Athena."

With that, he took a step forward and appeared in view, carrying two glasses of wine. Luckily, Nephis had settled down a little, by that point, and was able to meet his gaze calmly.

Master Sunless smiled lightly, then handed her one of the glasses.

"Your wine, my lady."

He hesitated for a moment, then offered the second glass to Effie. The huntress silently took the wine and gulped it down in one go.

"Ah... I see! Has the Brilliant Emporium been contracted to provide catering for the ferry, now? Good job, good job! Valor has deep pockets..."

The charming young man remained silent for a bit, then shook his head subtly.

"No, we are not providing catering for the ferry."

Effie seemed confused.

"Oh? Then how come you are here on the VIP deck? Not that I'm complaining! In fact, it's nice to see a pretty face.., a friendly face! I meant to say a friendly face,"

Nephis observed their conversation without saying anything, secretly stunned. This... was probably the first time she had seen Effie tongue-tied.

‘Amazing.’

Master Sunless was far more formidable than she had thought!

Of course, his advantage was not going to last long Knowing the vivacious huntress, she was going to double down on her suggestive remarks soon. And if that did not work... well, quadruple down, then!

It was all but impossible to fluster Effie. Anyone she aimed her sights on was doomed to be flustered, instead.

Granted... Nephis wouldn't mind seeing the charming enchanter flustered...

'What am I even thinking about?'

Feeling a little guilty for hanging Effie out to dry... even though the huntress had no one but herself to blame... Nephis decided to clear the air and explain the situation. She would share the news about the Memory Purveyor position first, and then let Cassie explain the more scandalous layer of deception to Effie in private.

After all, if the huntress heard it right now, she would not be able to help herself and tease the poor young man relentlessly. Yes... Nephis had to protect him from her vulgar friend,

Him. Definitely not herself.

She opened her mouth, intending to say something…

But Master Sunless beat her to it.

Walking over, he leaned on the railing beside her...

And gently took her hand.

Nephis froze.

"Well, how do I say this? I am on the VIP deck... because Lady Nephis invited me to be with her on the VIP deck."

Her eyes widened slightly.

Neph's hand was suddenly burning from his soft touch.

'Do not. Spit your wine. Nephis.’

She gulped the wine down and smiled weakly.

"...Right."

'No, but how is his hand so soft?'

Nephis used to have rough, calloused hands... the hands of a swordsman. Later, as her body was fortified and tempered by the Awakening, Ascension, and Transcendence, it rid itself of imperfections. Those calluses were long gone, and her skin was flawless.

And yet, it was nowhere near the smooth silkiness of the beautiful enchanter's hand.

Nephis was unyielding and lived a life that was harsh and full of hardships. So... she wasn't used to soft things,

'...I'm spacing out.’

Luckily, so was Effie.

She stared at the charming young man with her mouth agape, then slowly turned to Nephis. Then, she looked back at Master Sunless

And then back at Nephis.

Nephis suddenly had a terrible premonition

‘Oh, no.’

Gradually, a wolfish grin appeared on Effie's face.

‘Oh, no.’

She giggled.

"Oh! Oh, damn! I see! Wow! Cassie sure works fast..."

The boisterous huntress leaned closer and whispered in an intimate tone:

"Alright. I've already given this one the talk about the birds and the bees..."

Master Sunless, who was looking at Nephis with a prideful expression, as if asking her to praise his act, suddenly tensed.

Effie, meanwhile, patted him on the shoulder.

"So, kids, let Auntie Effie explain safety to you now..."

Maintaining a calm expression, Nephis turned and looked across the lake,

The castle,,, was so terribly far away.