1747 The Infamous Lord Mongrel

In the days following Sunny's appointment as the Memory Purveyor of the Fire Keepers, the Brilliant Emporium had undergone a transformation. Once established as a cover for his ability to weave sorcery, the Memory Boutique was suddenly thriving due to the high number of acquisition deals flowing through it... almost as if he was a real merchant.

The Fire Keepers were quite generous. Nephis did not enjoy the favor of the Valor elders, so her private troops rarely received resources that a princess's personal guard deserved - they existed on a pitiful stipend that wouldn't cover the needs of fifty Awakened, let alone half a hundred Masters. Nevertheless, they were quite rich.

Their riches did not come from the Great Clan, but from their own exploits instead. Every time Valor sent Nephis and her Fire Keepers to deal with a terrible calamity of some sort - which happened on a regular basis - countless abominations would fall to their swords.

That meant that there would be many Memories and Echoes brought back from each expedition, as well as valuable materials harvested from the Nightmare Creatures. The Fire Keepers kept the best for themselves and sold the rest. That way, they were quite self-sufficient, and their coffers never ran empty.

Cassie managed the assets of the Fire Keepers, Investing in various enterprises throughout the Sword Domain. In fact, many establishments in Bastion and other young cities had been funded by her on behalf of Nephis, not only bringing in stable income, but also adding to Changing Star's reputation. There was a sizable charity fund established by the Fire Keepers, as well, helping people in need.

In short, Nephis was quite affluent despite being shunned by the elders of Clan Valor.

And now, Sunny was benefiting from her wealth, as well...

There were a lot of mocking rumors about him in Bastion these days, calling him names and detailing what it was exactly that he was doing for Nephis in exchange for her money and gifts. But Sunny didn't mind... in fact, he was of the firm belief that everyone talking nonsense about him were simply jealous.

Who wouldn't want to receive expensive gifts and attention from a stunningly beautiful young lady? What was there to feel shame about? If they did not know how to put themselves in such an envious position, it was their problem... plus, of all the things Sunny had learned over the years, shame wasn't one of them.

He had none, to begin with.

In any case, the Brilliant Emporium was now handling the flow of Memories in and from the Ivory Island, collecting a commission from each deal. Granted, the Fire Keepers weren't selling much these days... they were, however, on a spending spree. The war was just beyond the horizon, and everyone who knew anything about it was in a hurry to arm themselves as well as possible.

Aiko was so giddy that Sunny was seriously concerned that the petite girl would explode from the excitement. Her greed and love for money put even his own prodigious avarice to shame.

The deal with the Fire Keepers was not the only reason why the Brilliant Emporium was doing better than usual, though. The restaurant side of the business was booming, as well.

And the reason for that was not just Sunny's face. Well... it was, in a manner of speaking.

The real reason was that damned duel with Tristan of the Aegis Rose clan. Sunny had expected that playing the role of Changing Star's lover would attract a lot of attention, of course...

What he had not expected was how much the citizens of Bastion loved to gossip, and how much free time they had on their hands!

‘These people...'

There were no empty seats in the dining hall, and apart from a couple of regulars, the rest of the crowd was here for only one reason - to catch a glimpse of the despicable mongrel who had cunningly bewitched Changing Star!

The thrill seekers had even scared away his regular customers. Fewer and fewer of them were showing up in the Brilliant Emporium each day, to Sunny's chagrin.

He could hear the hum of their whispers from the kitchen:

"I saw him! Good gods... I was on the fence before, but now I really understand Lady Nephis..."

"No way! That bastard is deceiving her... he must be a Song spy!"

"What spy? Why would people from the Song Domain send spies here?"

"What, you haven't heard? Their creepy queen is just straight evil. She even sent assassins to kill Lady Nephis!"

"She wouldn't dare!"

"It's true! Everyone is talking about it... that's why I think that this mongrel is a spy..."

"Quiet, you idiot! What if the mongrel hears you? Don't you know how many people he massacred in the castle?"

"Still... he doesn't look like a spy... he's too dreamy to be a spy..."

Stuck in the kitchen, Sunny gritted his teeth and concentrated on cooking.

‘...That's Lord Mongrel to you, fools!’

He was tempted to spit into the pan.

Of course, he didn't, Fools or not, he had a reputation to uphold.

Sunny did not care if his name was being dragged through the mud.

But no one was allowed to besmirch his cooking!

In the end, he was almost relieved when it was time to close the shop. Sunny chased away the last customers, locked the door, and collapsed onto the Shadow Chair in utter exhaustion.

‘What a contradictory feeling.’

On one had, he was tired of hearing idiots talk trash about him.

On the other hand, the idiots paid a good amount of coins to spend time in the Brilliant Emporium. So...

It was a good thing, overall?

Sunny remained motionless for a while, then sighed and descended into the Memory Boutique. There, Aiko was busy checking the descriptions of the Memories she had recently purchased.

She was in charge of the whole operation - not only because she had better business sense than him, but also because Sunny was unable to receive and transfer Memories, like all carriers of the Nightmare Spell could.

The Memories he crafted had to be designed with the customer in mind. Sunny had stolen a trait from the Shard Memories of the Forgotten Shore, which had the ability to bind themselves to those who touched them. After modifying it a little, he was able to devise a way to bestow the Memories on the clients without transferring them directly from his own soul.

Which meant that for the deals concerning purchased Memorles, he needed an Awakened courier. Alko played the role splendidly, delivering the Memories to the Fire Keepers in person.

"How is it going?"

The petite girl looked up from the documents and grinned.

"All accounted for, boss. We even managed to find a weapon with the weird combination of enchantments that Master Shim requested. Damn, it's still strange to call that guy a Master... I remember how he used to nag the older Hunters for losing all their shards gambling with me, back in the Bright Castle..."

Sunny smiled.

"Good, then. Make a trip to the Castle tomorrow... come back early, though! I won't survive in the kitchen alone."

Aiko shuddered at the word "early", then sighed and gathered the documents.

"See you tomorrow, boss."

Soon, she was gone.

Sunny had followed her onto the porch and remained there for a while, watching the sun set. And the full moon rise.

Tonight was the night he had to meet Cassie again.