1804 Unexpected Invitation

Today was a strangely slow day for the Brilliant Emporium.

Actually... it wasn't that strange.

Sunny had been complaining about how swamped he was in the kitchen when the business was good, but now that it was dull, he missed the money he could have made dearly.

The lack of clients was not strange, but the mood in Bastion was which, in turn, was the cause why so few people were visiting.

It was an odd mixture of agitation and somber anticipation. People were incensed and indignant about the attempt on Neph's life, which was attributed to Clan Song more and more. But, at the same time, some of them were disturbed by the swiftly changing tone of public opinion.

After all, people weren't fools. Many could recognize the malignant roots of the spreading rumors. They might not know who was behind the propaganda, but they could at least sense that they were being lied to. Others had enough foresight to see where the volatile situation was headed, even if they did not know why.

All in all, there were as many dissenting voices as those wishing to hold the Queen of Worms responsible.

It was all happening a little too quickly.

Sunny was still reeling from the recent conversation with Cassle. Now that he knew how fast the war was approaching, his own mood had turned strange, as well.

Luckily, he did not have a lot of time to worry about such things.

He was terribly busy despite the lack of customers. Most of his time was dedicated to designing the weave of the soul sword. But he was also preoccupied with something else.

Because his date with Nephis was approaching much faster than the war!

'Damn it... what to do, what to do?'

The pressure of designing a perfect date was more daunting than his attempts to weave a soulbound weapon. He had acted confidently when asking her out, but now that he actually had to come up with something, Sunny felt like his mind was paralyzed.

'Why did I prepare a picnic for a fake date? I should have saved that idea for the real one!'

There were not a lot of romantic places in Bastion. Even worse, Sunny was not that knowledgeable about romance.

And worse still, Nephis was not exactly a typical young lady! Who knew what her idea of a romantic encounter was?

In short, Sunny was stumped.

...And Aiko wasn't helping.

"What's the problem, boss? Just take her to an inn. I mean, you are both adults. There are inns that charge by the hour, you know..."

He glared at her silently.

"You. You are the problem! Do you want to get me killed?!"

Aiko laughed.

"Alright, alright, I'm Joking. Honestly, though, 1 say you are overthinking it. Anything and anywhere will be fine. After all, the only necessary ingredients are you and her. Since both of you will be present, that's most of the work done."

She glanced at him and asked:

"Just be yourself. Draw from your experience. What's the most romantic memory you have?"

Sunny scratched the tip of his nose.

"Uh... well... I spent a month being stuck on the corpse of a giant Nightmare Creature with a girl once..."

Aiko stared at him silently for a few moments.

"...On second thought, don't be yourself. Forget everything about your experience. Just take her on a boat ride, or something!"

Sunny eyes brightened.

"A boat ride? Huh. That's actually not a bad idea..."

He would have said more, but at that moment, his expression changed subtly.

Sunny looked at the door.

He could sense a group of people approaching the Brilliant Emporium. And they did not feel like his usual customers at all.

Heavy armor. Sharp weapons. Disciplined movements. Clear Intent.

'Soldiers.'

Why would a cohort of Awakened warriors of Clan Valor be approaching his humble shop?

For a moment, Sunny thought about how he would kill them. Dealing with these Awakened would only take him a few moments. Then, he could dismiss the Mimic, grab Aiko, and step through the shadows to outside the city. After that, Valor would not be able to catch him unless Anvil took action personally.

If his cover was blown... that was the only way.

However, he quickly dismissed that idea.

First of all, even if his cover was somehow blown, they would most likely only learn that he was the Lord of Shadows. The Lord of Shadows was an ally of Clan Valor, so there was nothing to be afraid of.

Secondly, in the much worse scenario where the elders of Clan Valor had learned that he was plotting to murder the king with Nephis, there would not have been a mere cohort of Awakened approaching his shop.

So...

'Why the hell are they here, then?’

Sunny was very confused.

"What's the matter, boss?"

Aiko looked at him apprehensively.

He hesitated for a moment.

"I, uh... have no Idea, really."

At that moment, the soldiers reached the Brilliant Emporium. Then, there was a loud knock on the door.

'Don't eat them.'

Giving Mimic a mental warning, Sunny sighed, put on a pleasant smile, and went to open the door.

"Welcome to the Brilliant Emporium! How may I help you?"

He was meat with an unfriendly stare.

Six Awakened warriors were standing a few steps back, while one was looking at him with disdain. The man was tall and sharp, clad in an enchanted armor, with a vermilion cloak hanging from his broad shoulders.

He was also an Ascended.

"Master Sunless?"

Hearing the deep voice, Sunny smiled a little wider.

"That's what they call me, yes,"

The Knight nodded.

"Please, come with me."

‘Uh…’

Sunny blinked a couple of times.

"...Why?"

The man glanced at him with badly hidden irritation, and then said coldly:

"I was ordered to escort you to the Castle. Please follow."

‘What the hell?'

Sunny hesitated for a bit, wondering if it wasn't too late to kill them and escape.

But he had to reluctantly abandon that idea.

"Why, by all means."

Exchanging a glance with Aiko, he shrugged helplessly and followed the Knight out of the Brilliant Emporium.

He tried to strike up a conversation a few times on the way to the Castle, but his escorts seemed to be in a foul mood. They were definitely not fans of Sunny, that was for sure.

With his sharp hearing, he could catch a few of the muttering under their breaths:

"Damned mongrel..."

No, really. What was going on? Was he going to get splashed in the face with water and be given a tidy sum of soul shards to never see Nephis again? That was what usually happened in dramas...

Sunny had thought of a thousand possible reasons for this unexpected visit, each more ominous than the previous one. However, he failed to learn the truth until the very end.

The escorts brought him across the lake, and then to the very heart of the Castle.

When Sunny was led to the main keep, where the direct line of Clan Valor resided, he was on the verge of collapsing from fright.

Half an hour later, he somehow found himself in a grand hall, facing none other than... Morgan, the Princess of War.

Morgan was leaning on a stone throne, holding a sharp sword in her hand.

Her gaze was piercing.

Suddenly, Sunny felt a chill run down his spine.

'She doesn't know. Does she?'

The last time they met was during the assassination attempt. Of course, back then, Sunny was wearing the persona of the Lord of Shadows.

Morgan's cold gaze traveled across his figure, making him shiver.

Then, her scarlet lips parted:

"Oh."

Morgan's voice sounded calm.

"I understand now."

Sunny struggled to keep a deep scowl off his face.

'What... what does she understand?’

Smiling faintly, Morgan descended from the dais and approached him. The sharp blade of her sword glistened in the rays of sunlight.

"Master Sunless, I presume."

Sunny nodded and forced himself to speak:

"Princess Morgan. It's an honor"

She stared at him with a strange expression, then cleared her throat.

"Indeed. Please kneel."

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

"Pardon?"

Her gaze turned a little dark.

"I told you to kneel."

He hesitated for a few moments, glanced at his escorts, and then elegantly lowered himself to one knee.

'Morgan has grown immensely strong after Transcending. Still... if she attacks, I should be able to dodge.’

She raised her sword slowly, and at the same time, he prepared to call upon the shadows.

However, to his shock...

The sword did not fall down to cut his neck. Instead, Morgan touched the blade to his left shoulder lightly, then repeated the same process with his right shoulder and the crown of his head Sunny was dumbstruck.

‘What... is going... on?’

Having finished the strange action, Morgan dismissed her sword and smiled in satisfaction.

"Master Sunless... I hereby proclaim you a Knight of Valor. Rise, Sir Sunless. May your edge never dull."

Sunny's eyes widened.

"P-pardon?!”