1805 Sir Mongrel

Sunny was so stunned that he did not know what to say.

All he could think was...

‘What the hell?!'

No, really...

Him? A Knight of Valor?!

His mind short-circuited for a moment.

Of all the things Sunny had expected when a cohort of unfriendly soldiers invited him to the Castle, that one never crossed his mind.

Still standing on one knee, he raised his head and looked at Morgan with a dumbfounded expression. She studied his face for a few moments, then clicked her tongue and turned away.

"That will be all. You can go now."

Remembering that he had been allowed to rise, Sunny slowly stood up.

"Princess Morgan. Please excuse my impudence, but if I may ask..."

Before he could ask anything, though, the guards unceremoniously grabbed him and escorted him out of the hall. A moment later, the door was slammed shut, hiding her bewitching figure from sight,

Just like that, his very short and very baffling audience with Morgan of Valor ended.

Sunny was left standing in the corridor, not sure what to do.

He blinked a couple of times.

‘...Are they forcefully conscripting independent Masters?’

That was the only thing he could think of. But then, it didn't make any sense. If Clan Valor really wanted to conscript him into the army on the eve of war, they would have gone about it in a different manner. Forcing a Master with no loyalty to fight for them could do more harm than good.

Slowly, Sunny realized that a person who he had assumed was just passing by was actually standing still and staring at him. Composing himself a little, he looked up.

There was a dignified middle-aged man in a well-tailored livery standing in front of him. His grey hair was neatly combed, and his expression was perfectly stoic.

Noticing that Sunny was paying attention, the man nodded.

"Sir Sunless. I am Sebastian, the steward of the Great Clan Valor. Allow me to congratulate you on your knighthood."

Sunny took a deep breath.

'I'm not dreaming, am I?'

He exhaled slowly.

There was actually a steward named Sebastian in Bastion! That... that was just a little bit too much, wasn't it ?!

Worst of all, Sunny couldn't even sense the man's Rank. He could have been a mundane person or a Saint.

Sunny forced out a polite smile and said:

"Nice to meet you. Ah... please forgive my lack of manners. I have to admit, I am extremely vexed right now. Can... can you explain what is going on?"

The middle-aged steward nodded.

"Certainly, sir. You've just been granted the title of a Knight of Valor. Oh... additionally, you have also been appointed as the Knight Commander of the Ardent Wardens. What an honor."

Sunny closed his eyes for a moment.

"...Ardent Wardens? Who are these Ardent Wardens?"

The steward gave him a dignified smile.

"Ardent Wardens are a grassroots volunteer organization that holds various activities to enrich the daily lives of the elderly citizens of Bastion. Food drives, cultural events, interest clubs... and the like, Self-governed."

Sunny stared at him silently, struggling to maintain a calm expression.

"So, if these Ardent Wardens are self-governed... then why do they need a Knight Commander? No, wait. Why does a volunteer organization dealing with bored elderly people need one?"

The middle-aged man nodded seriously.

"Exactly!"

There was not a hint of sarcasm in his esteemed voice, but somehow, Sunny got the impression that he was being mocked.

He was very confused.

"...So what are my responsibilities as a Knight Commander, exactly?"

The steward lingered for a moment, then said in a solemn tone:

"There are none, Sir Sunless. Well... I should rather say that there is only one. It is to uphold the dignity of the Great Clan Valor. Don't do anything that would besmirch the prestige of the royal family, and you should be good."

He paused, and then added neutrally:

"Of course, you will receive a monthly stipend, as well as other benefits befitting a man of your station."

Sunny stared at him some more.

'Crazy! I'm going crazy!"

"So... let me get this straight. I was made a Knight, but I don't have to perform the duties of a knight. There is nothing I am responsible for, but I am going to be paid for doing nothing?"

Sebastian smiled.

"Your wisdom is unmatched, Sir Sunless. You put it all so eloquently."

With that, he walked away at a brisk pace and beckoned for Sunny to follow.

"Now, please come with me!"

Sunny suppressed a frustrated groan and hurried after the steward.

"Coming, coming... but, where are we going?"

The middle-aged man answered in a refined manner:

"As a Knight Commander, you are to receive a list of items. Two sets of full dress attire, two finely dyed tabards, a parade cloak with an embroidered crest, an unadorned winter cloak, an embroidered battle banner, a painted household banner, a leather waist belt with an engraved silver buckle..."

Sunny silently covered his face with a palm.

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Some time later, he was standing alone in one of the courtyards of the Castle, holding a sizable pack. His expression was absent.

The steward had basically chased him away from the keep after assembling the list of items that a Knight was eligible to receive. The man had refused to answer Sunny's tentative question until the very end, finding inventive ways to tactfully dodge them every time.

It was just that... how could Sunny put it?

Steward Sebastian did not seem to have kept the truth from him on purpose. Rather, it looked like the dignified man was too embarrassed to answer directly, as if saying it aloud would be a disgrace.

Sunny stared into the distance silently.

‘...I guess I am a Knight of Valor now.’

Weirder things had happened.

Granted... just a few.

In any case, at least the whole thing was such a formality that he had not even been forced to give an oath of allegiance. Neither had he been issued any Memories - with the war approaching, Clan Valor did not seem keen to waste resources on a fake Knight. That was a good thing for Sunny, because he did not want to receive a sword forged by Anvil.

Nor was he capable of receiving one there was no Spell to facilitate the transfer of Memories between him and its carriers, after all.

He would also be receiving a monthly stipend of soul shards.

Sunny sighed.

'Wow, Nepotism is truly the best.’

By now, he had figured out that his sudden knighthood had something to do with his connection to Nephis. It was just that the initiative must have come from some other entity in the Great Clan, which was why the signals had crossed.

So, there was nothing left to do except return home.

Sunny was ready to take a step forward, but then froze for a moment.

He was currently in a courtyard... a different one from where he had duelled young Master Tristan, but the mood was quite similar.

There were more than a few unfriendly gazes aimed his way. Looking around, he saw various Knights and Squires, all staring at him with cold expressions.

Sunny gulped.

They had already hated him before for having the audacity to accompany their princess. Now that Morgan had knighted him for no good reason...

It did not look good! Even Sunny was starting to hate himself a little.

Who wouldn't hate a handsome freeloader?

'Gods... I won't have to fight another duel, will I?’

As a matter of fact, he had the feeling that, this time, there would be no duel.

Instead, there would be a thorough beating.

Or an attempt of one, at least!

Sunny looked around once more, noticing that several Knights were already approaching him slowly with dark faces,

'Right. I just need to defuse the situation. Be polite and keep calm. Be polite…’

One of the Knights snarled through gritted teeth:

"I didn't believe it... hey, you! Mongrel! Have you no..."

Sunny's eye twitched, and he opened his mouth to retort.

Before he could, however, there was a rustle of wings, and suddenly, a breathtaking figure was standing between him and the incensed Knights.

Shielding him with her radiant wings, Nephis frowned and looked at them scornfully.

"...What is going on here?”