1812 Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood

Sunny was enjoying the sight of Nephis consuming the food he had prepared delightedly. He did not speak much and just looked at her, feeling that the day was perfect. Everything went much better than he had anticipated. It was so blissful, in fact, that he unconsciously expected a Cursed Titan to fall on their heads out of nowhere.

Then, he had to remind himself that he wasn't Fated anymore.

'So... it will probably be fine.‘

Still, his mouth was suddenly dry at the thought.

Not thinking much about anything, Sunny reached for the tea kettle.

But, at the same time, Nephis reached for the bottle of wine.

Suddenly, their faces were terribly close. It was to the point that he could feel her breath on his cheek.

The two of them remained motionless for a few moments, looking into each other's eyes. Neph's gaze was calm, but also made him feel hot.

His own gaze... Sunny had no idea. He felt that it was rather intense.

Her tantalizing lips were so close.

She did not exactly move, but he sensed a subtle tension in her muscles, as if she was about to lean closer.

The leaves rustled softly all around them, and the setting sun painted by the sky in a million shades of golden radiance.

Sunny took a deep breath...

And said:

"I need to tell you something."

Just like that, the moment was gone.

He sighed.

"I said that there were secrets that I might never reveal. But... before anything else happens, there is one of them in particular I must share. So..."

Nephis remained motionless for a bit, then picked up the bottle of wine and leaned back. Pouring the greenish liquid into a glass, she exhaled slowly and took a sip.

Then, she smiled faintly.

"You don't really have to tell me. I already know."

Sunny froze.

His heart skipped a beat... no, a few beats.

Suddenly, he was a little panicked.

Hiding his frazzled state, he forced himself to breath and asked slowly:

"Lady Nephis... what, exactly, do you think you know?"

He had been gathering courage to admit that he was the Lord of Shadows for so long. But... she already knew? Know? Since when?

There were too many thoughts buzzing in his head.

Nephis drank more wine and smiled wistfully.

"Well, it wasn't that hard to figure out, was it?"

She paused for a few moments, then sighed.

"Plus, I feel like you've been giving me hints since we met today. I would be a fool not to realize."

Her tone wasn't particularly agitated... which was good.

However, at the same time, why wasn't it? How could she be so nonchalant?

Sunny had been agonizing about this issue for a long time, so he felt a little hurt by the fact that she could remain so calm about it.

He also didn't know how she could remain calm.

Nephis looked at him and continued:

"There are too few people with an affinity to shadows out there. But now, I am suddenly surrounded by them. Additionally... you could not have expected me to know, given how rare and arcane this knowledge is. But my experience in the Third Nightmare allowed me to draw a direct parallel between you and the Saint of Godgrave."

Sunny trembled.

"What knowledge?"

Her smile grew a little gentle.

"That mantle you wear looks just like the ritual attire of a priest of the Nightmare Spell. The mask the Lord of Shadows wears is part of that attire, as well. Now, it might be a coincidence for me to stumble on two people with high affinity to shadows, and it might be a coincidence for two Awakened to possess Memories inherited from the followers of Weaver. But both of these connections can't be a coincidence."

He slowly poured the tea into his cup.

'...Huh.'

lndeed. Why had he not thought about that? Probably because the Nebulous Mantle was quite inconspicuous, unlike the eye-catching Weaver's Mask. He had not expected anyone to attribute it to the cult of Weaver... but this was Ananke's mantle, after all. Nephis knew it too well.

Additionally, she had never been supposed to meet the humble shopkeeper, to begin with... their unexpected relationship was the result of a messy series of unanticipated events. So, Sunny had not been as meticulous in maintaining his disguise as he would normally be.

'She... she knew all along?’

The idea was startling.

Nephis, meanwhile, finished her wine and poured herself a little more.

"...But mainly, it was the fact that the Lord of Shadows was too well-informed about everything that is happening in both worlds for someone who is supposed to be a recluse. Knowledge like that can't be achieved without an information network. So, I figured that he has many agents scattered across the waking world and the Dream Realm."

Sunny blinked a couple of times.

'Huh?'

With a sigh, Nephis put her glass down and added in a soft tone:

"The lineage of Shadow God has never been discovered... at least everyone thinks so. But all these facts hint that it has. I don't know how the Shadow Clan managed to remain hidden for so long, and why you are starting to move now, but it doesn't matter. What matters..."

He tilted his head a little.

"Wait a moment..."

She looked him in the eyes and smiled.

"Is that I know that you are an agent of the Lord of Shadows, Master Sunless. But... that doesn't really change the way I think of you. So, you don't have to worry."

Sunny stared at her silently.

'...No, but why does she sound a little smug?‘

And also, she did not care if he was a spy working for the Lord of Shadows... that made him feel warm inside.

It was so adorable!

He inhaled, then said in a cautious tone:

"No, that's not it."

A hint of surprise appeared on Neph's face.

She lingered for a moment, then asked:

"It's not?"

Sunny scratched the back of his head awkwardly.

"What I mean to say is that I am not an agent of the Lord of Shadows."

His voice was a bit smooth.

"...I am the Lord of Shadows."

Nephis looked at him incredulously.

Her expression was deadpan.

"What?"

He nodded.

"Yes. The Lord of Shadows... that's me. We met in Godrgrave before we met in Bastion." Her face froze.

Nephis remained silent for a while, then asked in a flat tone:

"How would that even work? Godgrave is so far from Bastion, and your tether..."

Sunny sighed, then manifested the gloomy shadow into an avatar. A moment later, two of him were sitting on the blanket — one wearing nothing but the swimming trunks, the other wearing clothes made from manifested shadows.

"It's an Ability of mine. I have seven bodies. Two are here in Bastion, four are in Godgrave, and one is in the Song Domain."

Neph's eyes slowly widened.

She stared at the two of him without saying anything, her expression perfectly emotionless.

After a while, Sunny asked:

"Uh... Lady Nephis... are you fine?"

She nodded slowly.

"Yes. of course."

He hesitated.

"Are you sure?"

Nephis raised an eyebrow elegantly.

"Yes. Why are you asking?"

Sunny coughed.

"Because... the river is on fire…”