1814 Confession

"...Sunless. Is that even your real name?"

Sunny blinked a couple of times.

‘Why is she...'

But then, it made sense.

He knew that his feelings for Nephis were real, and him being the Lord of Shadows did not change them. But, for her... she must have been questioning everything she knew about him. Every word he had uttered was under suspicion of being a lie, and every action he had taken was under suspicion of being premeditated and purposeful.

That was because, while Master Sunless was merely a person, the Lord of Shadows was something else.

He was one of the players in the grand game between the powers of this world.

Sunny lingered for a moment, then offered her a fragile smile.

"Sure. That is my real name. Well, actually, although it is my real name, most people call me Sunny, So... I was going to suggest that you call me that too, soon... today."

He faltered, then sighed.

"Listen, I want... first, I want to explain something My Intention was never to deceive you. I did not approach you with an ulterior motive, insinuating myself into your good graces for a nefarious purpose. In fact, I never expected to meet you at all. I mean... meet you here, in Bastion"

He wasn't being very eloquent, but there was no helping it. Sunny's mind was in turmoil, and therefore, so were his words.

He sought a momentary refuge in the act of gulping down tea.

"It was... sort of like... like this. The Lord of Shadows was supposed to be a part of me that deals with the big picture. While Master Sunless, he wasn't supposed to have any purpose at all. He was just meant to live the life that I have always wanted to live, but was never able to. A quiet and peaceful life away from bloodshed and strife, one that had nothing to do with the Sovereigns, the war, the Nightmare Spell, the gods and the daemons. The future."

Sunny sighed.

"I just wanted to manage a small shop and live quietly. Or rather... I wanted to let a part of me experience that bliss, at least. So that was what I did, and I never expected that a few days after the Lord of Shadows met you, you would walk into my shop. Actually... I was so startled that I fell... like a fool..."

Neph blinked,

"That was why you were on the floor?" Sunny coughed and scratched his head in embarrassment.

"Yeah."

She stared at him intently.

"Walt. What about the duel with Tristan of Aegis Rose?"

He looked down.

"Oh, that... I tried really hard not to hurt him. Too much."

Nephis opened her mouth to say something, then closed it again. Then, she opened it once more and covered it with a hand, as if mortified.

"Wait! So, when Effie... when she..."

Sunny smiled sheepishly.

"Ah, right. That happened, too. It was a bit funny, actually."

Effie was in a habit of belittling the Lord of Shadows in an earnest attempt to help out Master Sunless win Nephis over. Her clumsy attempts to help missed the mark completely, of course, but were strangely endearing.

Although... Nephis had indeed ended up seeing the humble shopkeeper in a favorable light. So maybe Effie actually knew what she was doing?

Sunny wasn't sure, at that point.

Noticing that Nephis seemed to have lost the ability to speak, he hesitated for a moment, and then said softly:

"When you walked into my shop, it was like twe worlds colliding. Well, and after that... one thing led to the other... and before I knew it, we were in a contractual relationship, i was being knighted, and you were spending more time with me than with the Lord of Shadows. Who was supposed to be the only Incarnation of mine to face you"

He hesitated for a moment.

"I knew that the best course of action would be to sever that connection and make sure that Master Sunless, the humble shopkeeper, never comes in contact with Changing Star of the Immortal Flame again. But... I was selfish, and I was greedy. And I went along with the flow, allowing it to pull me closer to you."

Nephis looked at him strangely, something flashing in her eyes.

Then, a slight frown creased her elegant brow. She mumbled:

"Wait. But Initially, I only trusted you... this version of you... because Cassie had vouched that you could be trusted. And she would not have done something like that without a thorough Investigation. How did she miss all these clues?"

Sunny almost choked on his tea.

Wiping his lips, he put the cup down and glanced at Nephis carefully.

'Ah.’

He said tentatively:

"Actually… Cassie was the first to find out. She made sure that I had no malice toward you, and tacitly agreed to keep my secret. For a bit. So that I could tell you myself, eventually"

The wine bottle... was slowly melting in Neph's hand.

Her voice trembled a little:

"Cassle knew?"

Sunny smiled awkwardly.

'Sorry, Cassie!'

"Ah... yes. We sort of... struck a deal. For reasons. But, you should know that she only has your best Interests in mind. So, if you want to blame someone, blame me. She has really done the best she could. It is me who's at fault."

Nephis stared at him silently for a while.

Then... she stared at him some more.

Sunny had a feeling that she was yelling at a certain blind seer currently, in her head.

He tried to imagine what Nephis was feeling.

His imagination failed.

Surely, she was shocked. Embarrassed, a little. Reeling.

But… maybe… was there no possibility that she was a little happy, as well?

The Lord of Shadow wasn't her enemy, after all. In fact, they had built some trust and rapport in the recent months, They had fought side by side, And he was someone anyone would wish to have by their side on the battlefield.

Someone who could support her on her treacherous path, not just treat her to a plenie between the calamitous battles.

Wouldn't it feel nice, to know that someone like that was also kind and caring... to her, at least... and that he was willing - longed for, really - to be more than just an ally?

Both the Lord of Shadows and Master Sunless were parts of Sunny. And together, they made someone who could stand side by side with Nephis wherever she went, and support her in whatever way she needed.

In short...

'I'm not that bad, am I?'

Nephis inhaled slowly, then said in a subdued tone:

"Which one of you is... the real you?"

Sunny hesitated for a few moments, then said the truth:

"All of me is the real me."

He looked away.

"...It would be easy to say that one of my Incarnations is a mask, and the other one is the true me. But that would be a lie. They are all me, and the only difference between them is the role they have to play. The Lord of Shadows is meant for war, and so, he is aloof and unyielding. Master Sunless is meant for peace, and so, he is soft and accommodating."

Sunny lingered for a moment, and then added quietly:

"I guess you can say that one of them is what 1 want to be, while the other is what i have to be. But that... is not really important. What's important is that..."

He looked at her with a pale smile.

"Both of them are me, and I am sincere in my feelings for you. You know it. You should have felt my longing."

Nephis studied his face for a long time.

Then, she nodded slowly.

And... blushed?

"I see. I... need to digest it. Sorry!"

'Wha...'

Before Sunny could react, beautiful white wings appeared behind Nephis, and she soared into the air, sending sand flying in all directions.

"Wait!"

He called after her, but she swiftly rose into the sky, and then disappeared in the direction of Bastion,

Sunny was left alone on the beach, frozen.

"You... you..."

He looked down, remained silent for a while, and grimaced.

“...You forgot to take your dress."

Indeed.

Nephis was in such a hurry to leave that she had forgotten to pick up her white summer dress. Of course, she could summon a Memory armor to cover her body at any moment... but still...

Sunny sighed deeply.

He didn't regret confessing his identity to her. He would have felt uncomfortable going further without doing that.

But he did regret it, a little.

Their perfect date was ruined.

And yet...

He looked at the sky silently.

There, at the end...

‘Her reaction wasn't that bad, was it?’

It wasn't.

In fact... it was a little promising.