

“Lord have mercy. Out of every single day in a calendar year, out of a million stores, I have to deal with this?”

Shark stares at the packed grocery store, Skires fighting with each other in the already packed grocery aisles over various baking supplies stand in front of him and he looks at his long list of ingredients with a worried expression. It's an all out war in the small store as he decides to go for the first thing on his list...flour. He turns the corner to step in when 3 Crooks, armed with...GUNS? Oh wait. He looks again, one has a baguette, another one has a rolling pin, and the other has a large stick. They run into the flour and spices aisle, the one with a stick beating off Skires and anyone else unlucky enough to get whacked while the other two grab their supplies.

“CRAP!”

A familiar voice rings out above the crowd and jumps off the top of the aisle and in front of Shark.

“Jizo? What on earth are you doing here?”

Shark asks, and Jizo smiles and wipes away some sweat off of his forehead.

“Well...I was going to...”

Jizo sheepishly reveals his list of baking materials, the list looking almost identical to Shark's list.

“I thought I'd show you that I was thankful and grateful for everything you do...and I thought what better way to do that by baking you something sweet!”

Jizo and Shark laugh together and Shark jokingly punches Jizo on his arm.

“Well I guess you and me had the same idea then! I was getting supplies to make you a delicious cake, and even planned on hosting a little party...”

Jizo smiles and blushes a bit, flattered and a bit flustered from the thought of Shark wanting to thank him. Suddenly a loud boom shakes both of them out of their thoughts, and the three Crooks run out of the aisle, a cloud of flour radiating from it. Shark coughs and waves the air away, and looks at Jizo.

“Well. I guess flour will move to the bottom of the list. Eggs it is! Come on Jizo, maybe if we work together...or at least share our supplies, we can get out of this crazy place faster than we would if we were separated.”

Jizo nods and they walk together through the less crowded aisles to get to the dairy area.

“While we're here, Shark, let's grab some milk.”

Shark agrees with Jizo and grabs a gallon of milk and sets it in the hand cart. Shark, now looking around to see what could be grabbed from this area so they could minimize the time here, takes a peek over Jizo's shoulder to see if there's anything he can grab. Everything is normal on his list, eggs, milk, butter, flour, sugar...wait. Something on that list leaves a bad taste in Shark's mouth. Jizo looks at Shark and smiles happily...while Shark gives him a light smile back and goes back to walking behind Jizo while he looks at the lists and tries to figure out what the list meant.

‘Lemon...why would there be that on the list...Jizo knows I hate lemon. And even worse, what was that other note? ‘Go to secret shop’...what is Jizo hiding from me?’

Not really focusing on what was going on in front of him, Shark bumps into Jizo, who is looking at him with a very worried expression.

“Did you hear me calling you? Or even talking to you? I've been trying to ask you if you needed anything else that wasn't on this list.”

Shark shakes off the bad feelings, the feelings being held deep down, so Shark can ask about them later.

“Sorry, I was just thinking. Hmm...I think the only thing I didn't put on that list is icing.”

Jizo nods and smiles.

“Sounds good to me! Let's get going, the faster we get everything, the quicker we can get out of here...especially since this store will run out of stuff soon...and I don't wanna be here for it.”

Shark laughs and smiles, walking a bit faster to catch up to Jizo, who is now trying to scout out what aisles are the least crowded.

We slowly make our way to our next stop, the eggs...which are right next to...

“Shark. Are you seeing this?”

Shark stares at the large sign, with the word “EGGS” written on it. However, his eye trails down to the shelves. Barren and empty, if a tumbleweed was there, it'd be like the wild west.

“How on earth can I make a cake with no eggs? What am I supposed to do?”

Shark paces a bit, circling around and starting to bite his nails, thinking and thinking, his head filled to the brim with ideas that won't work...when just as he turns around to pace the other way, he sees it. A small carton of 6 organic eggs, tucked behind a package of bacon...as if it's taunting him...no. As if it's been there, waiting for him. The purple package almost seems as if it's glowing, like a legendary item. Shark is about to grab the eggs when a large group comes

walking by, whispering about what they need...and the one word that sticks out like a sore thumb and stabs Shark in the throat is...

“A carton of eggs....we need them...we would do anything for them....so sacred...so...delicious...eggs...”

It's as if they're zombies, in their own little world, tearing apart different areas while searching for the eggs.

“Jizo. Get over here...now.”

Shark speaks quietly through gritted teeth, so the horde isn't alarmed or suprised. Jizo, worried about what's going on, walks over quickly. Shark leans in and whispers something into his ear, Jizo nodding and agreeing silently.

“You can see the...obstacles in our way. But they haven't noticed the one carton left. Don't look at it, since they've been watching our moves since they turned the corner.”

The horde continues searching, a few stragglers staying somewhat close, as if they're trying to figure out what Shark and Jizo have been saying to each other in hushed tones.

“I want you to make a distraction. You're gonna run down that aisle as fast as you can, don't look back. I want it to seem as if you've found eggs. Don't let them catch you.”

Jizo has a worried look on his face, and his hand is on Shark's forearm.

“But...what if...I don't see you anymore? I don't want you to get hurt, and I don't want us to lose each other in this store.”

It's as if it's a romantic moment in a daytime soap opera.

“It's ok. We'll find each other. We are connected...forever. Jizo? I'll be DAMNED if we don't ever get to see each other again. Meet me where the sun doesn't shine, where the depths of the darkness are the strongest...the flour aisle.”

I kiss him on the cheek and cup his face in my hands.

“I'll love you until the earth as we know it ends, and until the sun is just a fleeting dream to the future masses. Until you and I cease to exist. Now, we have to part our separate ways...temporarily. If we complete this...if we get what we need and escape here alive? We'll be able to live out our dreams of the outside world with a sweet treat that is oh so deserved for both me and you. Now go. Run...run fast and run smart. Remember what I said.”

Jizo sighs and nods, rubbing the side of his head a bit further into Shark's hand, looking for that last bit of warmth. He finally steps back, and walks towards the aisle. Jizo looks back at Shark for one last time, a look of longing, fear, and trust, in his eyes. That's when Jizo's voice rings out, loud enough to hear it outside of the store.

“EGGS! I'VE FOUND THEM, I SEE THEM!”

The horde is on high alert, and they all turn towards Jizo. It's as if a dinner bell was rung...Jizo runs as fast as he can down the aisle, the horde close behind him, some of the Skires so out of it and so wild that they're feral, running on all fours and nipping at Jizo's tail. Shark gets one last glimpse of Jizo's glimmering emerald eyes before he turns the corner.

Shark quickly grabs the egg carton he had his eye set on and ducks in and out of the aisles, trying to hide from anyone who could be a stragglers from the group.

It doesn't take Shark long to gather the rest of the required ingredients...a stick of butter, the additional icing, sugar, and some chocolate. The items weren't too hard to get.

The butter was guarded by a large cccat, muscles on muscles. There's hundreds of sticks of the golden packaging, and it takes a whole group to take down the large cccat. The other Skires band together with Shark, taking down the cccat...or well. Bargaining with the cccat and one of the Gravents offering a full set of untouched glazed donuts to get the cccat to finally let people access the butter.

The icing was easy. A dance off was all that was required...but who in their right mind...the dance off, held in front of the icing, as if they're showing off the prize, isn't a regular dance off. The Dance Dance Revolution machine beeps and boops, and through his best efforts...and sick as heck dance moves, Shark beats the reigning champion...choosing the icing as his prize and getting out of there before he has to start doing another dance.

Sugar was...complex. It was as if there was a teleportation device, and the world he was in...was...weird to say the least. Maze after maze, a labyrinth of aisles and Groves, flowers leading the way to...the exit! He looks at the bags of sugar, and grabs one...before looking back. Crap. Time to go back into the maze to escape. Shark looks up, trying to figure out where he is, when a Gravent wearing the stores uniform explains to him.

“Man...you're in the garden department. Turn left at the hedge maze, right at the statue of the deer, and the stone slab that all those skires have been writing and drawing on and you'll be back in the store. Thinking they're cavemen...this store is insane.”

Shark thanks the worker and runs off, leaving the grumbling Gravent behind, complaining that they should have just called in sick when they saw the mass of cars outside in the parking lot.

The chocolate was...easy. Wait what? You read that right, it was easy. After the long walk around the maze, after dealing with the horde, the dance competition, the battle with the large monster cccat...it was calm. Shark stepped into the candy aisle, a few different Skires just hanging out. Drawing, playing, dancing, even making music. A Gravent, dressed in a white robe passes by Shark.

“Need a Save Point, oh great Glowing One? We have elixir potions, health regeneration potions, and even some experience potions. We don't allow fighting here, as it's a checkpoint.”

Shark stares at the odd Gravent, and smiles. Honestly...it can't get any weirder. Shark happily takes the...”health regeneration” potion and drinks a bit, leaving the rest for Jizo. Honestly...it's just a blue Gatorade...but it is refreshing honestly.

Shark waves goodbye to the group and heads to the final destination. The flour aisle. It's been a long journey, it's put lots of...stress...pain...and so much more on Shark. And yet...despite being so excited to see Jizo, Shark can't stop thinking about the paper and what was written on it. Maybe that question will be answered...

Shark turns into the aisle and looks. It's barren, the shelves completely empty. Skires of all sizes and shapes are hidden under the piles of flour, passed out. While the flour in the air acts like fog. Shark walks further and further into the aisle, looking for my sign of Jizo...when he sees it. Jizo appears from the smoke, stepping down from a large mound of flour, a bag in hand. It's as if an angel is coming down from heaven. Jizo runs to Shark and embraces him, them both hugging for what seemed like eons...before.

“\*Ding, ding, ding, ding!\*”

“The store will be closing in 10 minutes, please come to the front with your purchases so you may check out. Thank you for shopping today!”

“\*Ding, ding, ding, ding!\*”

The different skires start to get up, some coughing and groaning, some complaining that they needed more time, some just happy to get out.

“Jizo?”

Jizo looks at Shark with a sparkle in his eye.

“Let's get out of here. We have things to do.’

Smiling, hand in hand, they walk to the checkout area. The question Shark needed to ask still lingers in the air...but...maybe this isn't the time.