1449 Left Behind

'Wind Flower...'

So Cassie was right. Wind Flower was the True Name of the mysterious Saint in front of him, and after the memories of the original master of the island — Aletheia — had disappeared from the memory of the River People, they started calling this place after its current resident.

In time, even that knowledge was erased by time and the collapse of the River People civilization. All that remained was a name that had lost all meaning.

Everyone who remembered Wind Flower were gone, and yet, the person to whom that name belonged remained. Trapped in a dream that lay in the heart of Aletheia's Island.

However...

Sunny was caught by surprise because of something else the beautiful Saint said. He suppressed the desire to take another step back, frowned, and said tensely:

"I am asking because I don't know, and I am here in hope of finding a way to escape this island. But... again? Why did you say that I am here again?"

Wind Flower studied his face for a few moments, still smiling. Her gaze lingered at the Crown of Twilight, then shifted away.

Letting out a melodious chuckle, she walked to a beautiful porcelain vase and put the bouquet of wild flowers she had been holding inside. Then, she let out a sigh.

"I see. This is our first meeting. How exciting!"

Sunny was not convinced. Why would Wind Flower act as though she had recognized him? It could only mean one of two things...

He hesitated for a moment.

"Are you not affected by the loop?" She shrugged.

"My body is, but my consciousness isn't. Here in this dream palace, I am free to live my days in peace."

Her smile dimmed a little, and a hint of darkness appeared in her beautiful azure eyes.

"I must admit, though... young man, you have rather poor manners. Not only have you intruded upon a lady's dream without an invitation, but you've also neglected to introduce yourself. I feel at a disadvantage."

Sunny coughed.

"Ah... please accept my sincere apology, Saint Wind Flower. I'm not exactly familiar with the etiquette of visiting people's dreams. My name is Sunless."

'If she is not beholden to the loop...'

Then she had indeed met Sunny before. Which, of course, was impossible — this was definitely his first time entering the... the Dream Palace where Wind Flower's soul resided.

Either Sunny had spent much longer on Aletheia's Island than he had suspected, somehow losing his memories of becoming aware of the loop the first time around... or she had mistaken him for the Mad Prince.

The latter was much more probable, and also meant that the odious madman had visited the island in the past.

But why? And what had he spoken with Wind Flower about? What was the bastard scheming?

Mysterious, mysterious... all of it was so mysterious! Sunny had so many questions!

But would Wind Flower answer his questions? Was she a friend, or was she a foe?

He hesitated.

The beautiful Saint, meanwhile, looked at him in confusion. "...Saint Wind Flower? Why do you call me a saint?"

Sunny blinked.

'Right...'

The people of the waking world used the word "Saint" to denote those Awakened who had conquered the Third Nightmare and Transcended. A native of the Dream Realm would not recognize the term.

He scratched his head.

"It's just what my people call Transcendents. A... a honorific, I guess." Wind Flower smiled.

"Ah. I see. Well, Sunless... it is very nice to meet you. You are the second person to visit me in all this time. Very few beings possess the ability to travel through dreams, you know."

Sunny nodded.

"To be fair, I don't possess such an Ability. It's my horse who does."

Wind Flower looked into the corner where Nightmare was hiding among the shadows. Her pleasant smile widened a little.

"I've noticed. It's certainly extravagant, to use a Terror as a steed. You must be quite powerful to have the loyalty of such a creature, Sunless. And to wear that crown."

Sunny hesitated for a moment, then briefly touched the Crown of Twilight. His expression was complicated.

Did she know what the Crown of Twilight was because she had seen the Mad Prince wear it?

He asked cautiously:

"You recognize it, my lady?"

The beautiful Saint studied him for a while, a small smile playing on her soft lips.

Then, she laughed.

"How could I not? Ah, let me introduce myself properly — I am Wind Flower of the Twilight Sea. King Daeron, the Serpent King, is my father. Or rather, he was... considering that you are wearing the Memory of his crown, Sunless, he must have died by your hand."

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Time seemed to slow down for Sunny. He stared at the beautiful Saint... the princess... silently, not knowing what to do.

'So... I am her father's killer...'

That was not ideal, to say the least. He had already been wary of Wind Flower, and knowing that there was blood between them only made that wariness grow. Who would want to stand in front of a mysterious, partially Corrupted Saint after slaying her father?

Of course, Daeron of the Twilight Sea had already succumbed to Corruption himself by the time Sunny killed him, so there was no rational reason for the enchanting princess to hate him.

But when had people even been rational? 'Wait a minute...'

There was another revelation in what she had said. Wind Flower easily identified the Crown of Dawn as a Memory... which meant that she knew about the Spell. Was its carrier, most likely.

Sunny's eyes narrowed. 'Well, of course she is.'

If she was Daeron's daughter, then she was not one of the River People. Instead, she was a challenger of this Nightmare, just like Sunny. No, not quite... only Masters could challenge the Third Nightmare. And since she was a Saint, she had either achieved Transcendence inside the Tomb of Ariel... or had come inside with her father, in order to guide the future challengers with him.

Noticing Sunny's unease, Wind Flower smiled.

"I see you are starting to get it. Indeed, I am not the real Princess Wind Flower. I am merely a copy of her, conjured by the Nightmare Spell. She... is long dead by now, I think. And yet, I remain."

Sunny's face paled.

This was the first time he had met an inhabitant of a Nightmare who was

aware of their nature. He didn't quite know how to behave in front of her.

Was this Wind Flower dead or alive? Was she real or not? Was she a mere echo of a real person, or a true living being created by the Spell for the duration of the Nightmare?

Wind Flower sighed, glanced at the Crown of Twilight one more time, and walked over to the window. Gazing at the beautiful vista of this dreamy version of Aletheia's Island, she spoke:

"Back then, my father and his most loyal warriors braved the White Desert and entered the Tomb of Ariel. I was one of them. Our goal was to imprint our souls into the Great River, so that when challengers entered this Nightmare, there was someone to help them conquer it."

She sighed lightly.

"It was a gamble, of course... a desperate one, considering that our world was dying. It was already being consumed by the Dream Realm, and despite all our struggles, we had failed to rise to the challenge of the Spell. My father was the only Supreme of our people, and there was not going to be another. At least not in time to turn the tide of destruction. So... he came up with a plan to raise an army of Transcendent warriors in this unique Nightmare."

Wind Flower's shoulders fell.

"...That plan failed, as well."

Sunny was staring at her with wide eyes, his thoughts in turmoil. 'What... wait...'

Taking a step forward, he raised his hands and asked, his voice hoarse:

"Wait... you world? Being consumed by the Dream Realm? What do you mean?"

The beautiful Saint turned and looked at him in surprise. Her enchanting azure eyes were full of confusion.

Then, she smiled.

Shaking her head, Wind Flower chuckled and said, her words sending Sunny's mind reeling:

"What... did you think that yours was the only world that the Nightmare Spell infected, Sunless? Of course not. There were others. Yours is not the first..."

She lingered for a moment, then added with a hint of amusement: "However, it will be the last."