1450 Seventh Realm

Sunny was reeling from the sudden deluge of impossible knowledge that Wind Flower had so casually shared with him. The relationship between the waking world and the Dream Realm... the vague theories about the Nightmare Spell he and Nephis had discussed... everything he knew was suddenly upturned.

He remained silent for a while, then weakly raised a hand, summoned the Shadow Chair, and sat down.

Watching him, the beautiful Saint tilted her slightly and laughed. "What an interesting Memory..."

Walking away from the window, she found a chair of her own, then picked up an elegant porcelain kettle and poured fragrant tea into two cups.

Sunny took a deep breath.

"I... I did think that my world — we call it the waking world — was the

only one infected by Nightmare Spell. Oh, I was never sure, of though."

Wind Flower pushed one of the cups toward him and shook his head.

"It seems that your people are less knowledgeable about the past than mine were. Ah, but we were rather ignorant, as well. Still, we knew that there were many realms before the End War. Some were connected to each other, some were far apart. Some were considered mortal realms, while some were considered divine. Each of the gods had a realm of their own."

She looked into the window and took a sip of tea.

"The mortal realms were where the war between the daemons and the gods took place. By the end of it, most of them had been turned into desolate graveyards. They have become the core of the Dream Realm, where Corruption reigns."

Sunny forced his hand to remain steady as he raised his cup and tasted Wind Flower's tea. It was pleasant and soothing, but left a tinge of bitterness on his tongue.

Of course... it made sense. The Dream Realm had always seemed like a patchwork world, with different regions of it inexplicably possessing

different skies, celestial bodies, and even laws. The Forgotten Shore, the Chained Isles, the Hollow Mountains, the Nightmare Desert — they did seem more like different worlds that had been roughly smashed together than natural parts of a single whole.

He took a deep breath.

"...What about the divine realms?" The beautiful Saint smiled.

"Those were left untouched by the war. Even after the gods died, their realms remained. They were isolated from the mortal ones and each other, as well, and so were left untouched by the spreading Corruption... at least for a while. Naturally, there were six of them."

Sunny did not say anything, prompting Wind Flower to continue:

"The world where I come from was one of those six realms. It is similar to the Great River, actually... a beautiful world covered entirely by water, with countless islands rising from it like gems. A world of storms, winds, and stars. Well... it was, before. By now, it must have been consumed by the Dream Realm already."

Sunny's hand finally trembled.

Bringing the cup to his lips, he lingered for a moment, then asked: "What... what do you mean, consumed?"

Wind Flower leaned back in her chair and sighed.

"From your reaction, it seems that your people have not experienced the worst of it yet. What is the Rank of the most terrible Gate that has opened in this Waking World of yours?"

He frowned.

"A Category Five... a Great Nightmare Gate, I suppose." The beautiful Saint looked at him with pity.

"I see. Then it will start soon. Once more of them start to appear, pieces of your world will begin to be assimilated by the Dream Realm. Piece by piece, your world will eventually be swallowed entirely, becoming a part of the Dream Realm... just like the other five divine realms have already become a part of it. That is why I said that your world will be the last one the Spell ever infects. Once it's gone, there won't be anywhere left for it to spread to."

'Become... a part... of the Dream Realm?' Sunny shivered.

How had Wind Flower described her world? A world of storms, winds, and stars. Didn't it sound like the Stormsea, the region of the Dream Realm controlled by the House of Night?

Had the Stormsea been a world like Earth once, where mundane people lived and struggled, and where the Spell had appeared one day, forcing them on the path of Ascension?

A world that had eventually lost to the tide of Nightmare Gates and was destroyed, becoming another one of the desolate hells of the Dream Realm... just like four more worlds before it?

Would Sunny's world share the same fate? He shook his head.

"But... why? Why is this happening? Why does the Spell infect different worlds, and why are they being consumed by the Dream Realm? Where do Nightmare Gates come from? How can we stop it?"

Wind Flower sipped her tea and smiled.

"Sunless... if I knew the answers to these questions, do you think I would be sitting here, imprisoned in a dream on a cursed island, with all my people gone, and my world destroyed?"

She chuckled.

"Whatever the path to victory is... my people have already lost. You still have a chance, at least. A better chance than we did, even — from what I saw, your world is much stronger than mine was. Otherwise, a mere Ascended like you would have never been able to slay my father, no matter how far he was gone because of the Corruption."

The beautiful Saint looked away and lingered for a while. Finally, a hint of sorrow crept into her sweet voice:

"...How did he die, in the end?"

Sunny did not speak until the pain of the Flaw forced him to answer.

How did one tell a person about killing their father? Sunny was not the most tactful of people, but even he knew better than to try and make his voice sound soft. Being nonchalant about the whole thing did not seem right, either.

He sighed.

"From what I know, he went mad after Twilight was lost. By the time we met, he was like a rabid beast... but even then, he was a king among them. I watched him battle many Nightmare Creatures much more powerful than him, and yet, none could defeat your father. After a while... he was severely wounded and weakened. I used that moment to attack, and won after a ferocious battle. Even then, I would have died as well, if not for my companion."

He paused, and then added respectfully:

"I am sorry for your loss, Lady Wind Flower."

She remained silent for a while, looking away.

The sight of her elegant profile was both sad and beautiful. ...Eventually, Wind Flower smiled.

"Don't be. What is the point of being sorry? He was merely a copy, just like me. I am sure that my real father met a much more glorious end in the true Tomb of Ariel. Who knows? He might have even escaped it."

Wind Flower shook her head and looked at him with a smile.

"But you and your companions are different from me, Sunless. You are here to challenge the Nightmare. So... did you say that you wanted to escape Aletheia's Island?"

Her azure eyes sparkled with dark amusement.

"I'll help you. Helping challengers conquer this Nightmare was my original goal, after all..."