1451 Forgotten Name

Sunny had yet to recover from the shocking revelation about the nature of his world, but time waited for no man. The revolution was going to end soon, so he had to gain as much as he could from his first meeting with Wind Flower.

But still...

'If my world is one of the six divine realms... then which god did it belong to?'

The most suitable candidate was War God, the Goddess of Life — as well as of progress, technology, craft, and intellect... the patron deity of humanity. Heart God was a possibility, as well. However, he could not quite imagine Earth having anything to do with the fallen gods of the Dream Realm. These two concepts were just too incompatible.

Plus, the waking world encompassed more than just Earth. There was the moon, the sun... all the planets of the Solar System, and countless stars beyond. A whole universe of them, billions of years old! How could all of it be simply one of the divine realms?

But then again... the gods had never been constrained by mundane logic. They were the ones who had created the universal laws of existence. Even time itself was merely one of their weapons — who was to say that a god could only will something into existence, not will something to have always existed?

'Ah... my brain hurts.'

Sunny's mortal mind seemed to be incapable of truly comprehending such matters.

Wind Flower must have been the same. She certainly knew more than Sunny, but there was no telling how accurate her understanding was. In any case, for now, it did not matter. He was elated to learn such profound mysteries, but his immediate goal was not enlightenment. It was getting the hell off Aletheia's Island.

And Wind Flower was conveniently offering her help in that regard. Sunny took a deep breath.

"Do you know... how we can escape this horrible place?"

He paused for a moment, then shook his head.

"No, I should describe our situation first. There are five of us here. Three, including me, start the loop in the hidden bay at the southern edge of the island — well, what I call the southern edge, anyway. The fourth member of the cohort is in the forest, not too far away from the bay. It's the fifth that is the problem... she is all the way on the northern edge of the island."

His expression darkened.

"There are all kinds of terrifying abominations hidden in the mist, so we can't travel freely. No matter how many times I tried, I failed to pick up the fifth member and return to our ship before the loop ends. This tower... and you, Lady Wind Flower... is more or less my last hope."

Wind Flower looked into the window, then let out a quiet sigh and put her cup on the table. Then, she stood up.

"Come with me."

Before Sunny knew it, they were somewhere else. The walls of the Aletheia's Tower disappeared, and he found himself standing at the edge of a tall cliff, looking at the flowing waters below.

The colossal whirlpool was gone, replaced by the beautiful vista of the Great River sparkling under the light of the seven suns. However, not too far away, the world was obscured by the familiar mist... it was the boundary of Wind Flower's dream, most likely.

The enchanting Saint looked into the distance.

"Before that... let me tell you how I ended up imprisoned here, Sunless." She glanced at him and smiled.

"As you might have guessed already, it was my father who had brought me here, and put me to sleep at the top of Aletheia's Tower. There is a seed of Corruption in my soul, and so... remaining inside this cycle of time is the only way for me to live on."

Her smile dimmed a little. Wind Flower lingered for a moment, then looked at the Great River once again.

"Back then, we laid siege to Verge, hoping to destroy the source of the Defilement and conquer this Nightmare. However... even after breaching the walls of the city and fighting our way to the Citadel of Truth, we failed to defeat the First Seeker."

Studying the exquisite line of her charming face, Sunny scowled.

"The First Seeker... must be tremendously powerful, then."

If even a Sovereign in command of a vast army of Awakened had failed to put an end to the Defilement, then how could their cohort ever hope to succeed?

His thoughts turned dark and bitter. However... Wind Flower lightly shook her head.

"The First Seeker has no power. That thing could not even be called a living being anymore... it's just a grotesque, sprawling mass of festering flesh contained within the Citadel, its tendrils slowly spreading across all of Verge. The problem, however, is that anyone who touches it becomes infected by Corruption. That... is how I became infected, as well. In the end, we had no choice but to leave our fallen behind and retreat. That is how our glorious assault ended, in death and misery."

She looked at Sunny somberly.

"So, Sunless, tell me... do you still think that you and your companions can conquer this Nightmare?"

He remained silent for a few moments, trying his hardest not to imagine the revolting image of the cursed city of Verge. The picture Wind Flower painted with just a few words was just too vivid...

Eventually, Sunny nodded.

"I do. One of my companions... she is immune to the Corruption, in fact. I have a Memory to borrow that Ability of hers, as well. There is probably no one in the world suited for the task better than the two of us."

He smiled faintly and lingered for a moment, then added in a strangely dark tone:

"...It must be fate."

Wind Flower did not seem too surprised by the fact that there was someone out there whose soul could not be corrupted. She watched the water flow for a while, then sighed.

"It's good, then. You might really stand a chance to succeed where we failed. In any case, after we retreated from Verge, my father brought me here, to Aletheia's Island. The only place that could delay my eventual fall into Corruption. Quite ironic, don't you think?"

Sunny hesitated.

"I'm not sure that I know what you mean, my lady." She looked at him with surprise.

"What, you don't know who Aletheia was?"

He frowned, then shook his head.

"I only know that she was called Aletheia of the Nine, and that she was one of the Seekers."

Wind Flower chuckled.

"Yes... you are not wrong. Indeed, she was one of the Seekers. A mysterious sorceress who built this island and created the whirlpool of twisted time surrounding it, for some unknown purpose. She lived here for a while, but eventually left in search of the Estuary... as most Seekers did. Aletheia never returned, and her name slowly disappeared from the memory of the River People."

The beautiful Saint gazed at the Great River with a dark expression.

"Of course, there is something different about Aletheia. Because, unlike all the other Seekers who had traveled downstream in search of the Estuary... she actually found it."

Sunny eyes widened slightly. "Wait. Do you mean..."

Wind Flower nodded.

"Yes. Although her original name is forgotten, everyone in the Tomb of Ariel now knows her by a different one. The core of this Nightmare, the source of the Defilement... the First Seeker... is Aletheia of the Nine. This island is the estate that she had abandoned before leaving on her fateful journey to the Estuary."

Sunny shivered and instinctively turned around, to look at the distant silhouette of Aletheia's Tower.

Wind Flower, meanwhile, smiled.

"So, you see, it is indeed quite ironic... the seed of Corruption was planted into my soul by the First Seeker, yet my father prevented my soul from being consumed by bringing me to the First Seeker's stronghold. If that is not ironic, then I don't know what is."

She turned away from the Great River and laughed.

"Ah... in any case, after putting me to sleep in Aletheia's Tower, my father meant to return to Twilight and search for a way to destroy the First Seeker. He also meant to find a way to save me... or, if not, then at least to visit me from time to time. However, he never came. Now I know that it is because Twilight was lost, and he succumbed to Corruption himself."

Wind Flower sighed.

"Well, anyway. That is the past... what is important now is that my father had not only come to Aletheia's Island, but also left it. And I can teach you how to leave it, as well."