1469 Something to Remember

So much had happened since the last time Sunny had seen Wind Flower, but the spacious chamber at the top of Aletheia's Tower was still the same. Dozens of lanterns floated in the air, shining with a warm orange light. The world outside the window was dim and dark. The silken canopy of the wooden bed was half-transparent, revealing the delicate shape of the beautiful sleeping Saint.

Sunny ascended the stairs and remained motionless for a while, looking at the vague silhouette with a heavy expression. Then, he sighed and shifted his perception, peering into Wind Flower's soul.

There, the seed of the repulsive darkness had already grown larger. 'So fast.'

Corruption was spreading so fast. Its seed had been like a tiny speck before, but now, it was already like a pearl. If Sunny did not act soon, the darkness would spread and consume Wind Flower's soul entirely.

There was no time to waste.

And yet... he could not simply kill her. At least not without talking to the beautiful Saint one last time.

Dissolving into the shadows, he allowed Nightmare to bring him to her dream.

Soon, Sunny found himself standing on a tall cliff overlooking the vast expanse of the Great River. The seven suns were slowly rising from the flowing water. The tranquil expanse of Aletheia's Island was shrouded in the dim twilight of the early dawn.

Wind Flower was standing at the edge of the cliff with her back to him, gazing at the water. A cool breeze was playing with her wavy hair, and her azure robe looked like the midnight sky in the dimness of dawn. Sensing his approach, she shifted slightly and let out a quiet sigh.

"So, you have succeeded?"

Sunny froze for a moment, then nodded.

"Yes. The loop... is gone. We destroyed it."

She turned around and looked at him. Then, a soft smile illuminated her enchanting face.

"How marvelous. And on your first try, no less."

He walked over to stand beside her on the edge of the cliff. Looking at the dreamlike expanse of the Great River, Sunny said darkly:

"First try? It might have been, but I spent an eternity preparing for it. Months of torment... countless deaths... all for this single moment. I wouldn't call it marvelous."

Wind Flower studied his face silently, then looked away and sighed.

"Countless deaths, huh? Dying once does not sound so terrible, in comparison."

She paused before asking:

"You haven't forgotten what you swore to do, have you?"

Sunny gritted his teeth.

"I remember."

The beautiful Saint fell quiet. A few moments passed before she spoke again, her voice losing some of its usual lightness:

"After it's done... burn my body. I don't want anything to sprout from my corpse and walk around wearing my skin. Find a strong flame to burn it."

Sunny had no response, so he simply nodded. Wind Flower took a deep breath, then took a step back from the edge and laughed.

"Don't be so serious, Sunless. I lived a long life... far too long, really. Gods, I am older than my grandmother was when she passed away — by a few centuries, at least. Ah, these old bones of mine have had enough."

Shaking her head, she walked to the edge of the forest and put her hand on the trunk of an ancient pine.

"Are you going to visit Twilight before sailing for Verge?"

Following her into the forest, Sunny nodded again.

"We are planning to, yes. The last two members of my cohort are there. We hope to find something else to help us in Twilight, as well."

Wind Flower lingered for a few moments.

"Good. That crown you wear will be of help if the city still stands. It is another enchantment key, in a sense... the defensive array that was meant to protect the city will recognize you as its ruler. You'll have to reach my father's throne to take control, though."

Sunny looked at her back and asked grimly:

"The defensive array?"

She shrugged.

"It was a grand enchantment that my father and our best sorcerers created. They had to have improved it a lot after I was gone, so I'm not sure what the exact effect of the array is now. It should be similar to what Aletheia had done. You saw the black stone in the hidden chamber of the tower, yes?"

He frowned.

"...Yes."

Wind Flower smiled.

"That stone... is very special. There were only a few of them found by the River People. These fragments are said to have absorbed the essence of time, and so, the rumor is that they come from the Estuary. The defensive array of Twilight is built upon a fragment of the Estuary, too."

Sunny shivered, not knowing if it was wise to deal directly with anything that had come from the Estuary. Wasn't that where the Defilement had come from?

Then, he frowned, thinking about the Estuary Key that rested peacefully within his soul. It looked very similar to the black stone of Aletheia's Tower. Where had the Mad Prince procured a piece of the Estuary?

...Had the vile madman actually been to that harrowing place?

The two of them entered a small clearing. Green moss covered the ground there, with shallow puddles of water glowing softly in the gentle light of dawn. Wind Flower slowed her steps and hesitated for a few moments, then crouched and outstretched her hand.

In front of her, a beautiful azure flower was growing from a shallow pond. Its lotus-like petals glistened with drops of dew, and its subtle fragrance was pure and intoxicating. She touched its stalk gently, then broke the blossom off and stood up.

Turning around, the charming Saint smiled and presented the lotus flower to Sunny.

"Here. Take it."

He hesitated for a moment, then accepted the azure blossom and looked

at it in confusion. They were in a dream, so he could not take anything with him back to Aletheia's Tower.

"What is it for?"

Wind Flower laughed.

"Just something to remember me by. What, has no one ever given your flowers, Sunless?"

Sunny silently shook his head, prompting her to smile.

"Well, then. I'll be the first. That way, you definitely won't forget."

With that, Wind Flower looked at him with bright sparks dancing in her eyes.

Then, however, the smile slowly disappeared from her lips. The beautiful Saint sighed.

"...You should go now. I don't think I can hold on for much longer."

Sunny held the azure blossom, staring at her silently.

Wind Flower looked away and lingered for a while. Then, she said quietly:

"If, by chance, you ever meet the real me out there in the Dream Realm... tell her... tell her that I did my best. Tell her that we all did."

He lowered his head, and nodded slowly.

"I promise."

It... was a heavy promise to make. Of course, the real... the original Wind Flower had almost certainly been dead for countless years. And yet, by promising to pass along this message in case she was somehow still alive, Sunny was also promising to return to the Dream Realm.

Which meant that he was promising to conquer this Nightmare, as well.

Wind Flower smiled, then turned away and looked up, at the rays of sunshine falling through the crowns of the ancient pines.

"Farewell, Sunless. Go... you don't have much time left."

What else was there to say?

He remained motionless for a few moments, then gritted his teeth, closed his eyes, and breathed in the fragrance of the azure blossom.

Darkness embraced him softly.

When Sunny opened his eyes again, he was back in Aletheia's Tower.

His hands were empty. The beautiful blossom was gone, erased with the rest of Wind Flower's dream.