1535 Seven Heroes

The members of the cohort were standing on the pier, surrounded by a crowd of people. Because of how strange the lives of the Riverborn were, all these people seemed to be very young... Sunny was not that old himself, and yet, he couldn't help but feel that he was a seasoned elder looking at countless children.

The glint of awe and admiration in their eyes did nothing to lessen the impression. He remained motionless for a few moments, feeling strangely burdened by their gazes.

The members of the cohort had different reactions to the warm welcome they received from the citizens of Falling Grace, ranging from nonchalance to embarrassment. It was at that moment that Cassie took a step forward and spoke, her voice rising above the crowd:

"People of Fallen Grace... after being apart for so long, we finally meet again."

She smiled, and the crowd of youths exploded with exhilarated cheers. The blind seer leaned on her white staff, waiting for them to calm down, then raised it slightly.

"I am Dusk of Fallen Grace. And today, I return home bearing the sacred relic of our city, the Guiding Light bestowed upon us by the gods themselves!"

Sunny felt a bit odd observing her speak to her people. The sight of Cassie right now was so different from how she had been before. He knew it better than anyone else, because his shadow had been following the blind girl for the past two months.

Cassie was usually quiet, reserved, and unassuming. Even when surrounded by people, her presence was subtle to the point of being unnoticeable, sometimes making it hard to remember that the blind girl was there.

That was only because Sunny was accustomed to her company, of course — most people would find it hard to ignore the presence of such an exquisitely beautiful Ascended. Still, Cassie was not someone who enjoyed attention. On the contrary, she seemed to be in the habit of avoiding it.

Which was why he felt strange watching her command the attention of a large crowd, and do it so seamlessly at that. Cassie played the role of a confident leader so effortlessly that it made him question what other parts of her personality were an act.

'Calm down. That is the Sin of Solace talking, not you.'

Unaware of his thoughts, the blind girl lowered the Guiding Light and continued, the crowd hanging on her every word.

"I return in the company of mighty Outsiders, as well. These brave warriors have come from all across the Great River to help us battle against the vile curse of the Defilement. Please, help me welcome them to Fallen Grace, the last stronghold of humanity under the seven suns!"

She turned slightly and gestured to the members of the cohort, calling out their names one after another:

"I bring Nightingale, the Dragonslayer, who felled the harrowing Dread Lord! I bring Jet, the Soul Reaper, who put an end to Undying Slaughter! I bring Lady Nephis, the Changing Star, whose holy flames vanquished Soul Stealer! I bring Mordret, the valiant prince of a distant land, and huntress Athena, whose spear always strikes true!"

She faced Sunny. Did he imagine it, or had her expression changed subtly, for a fleeting moment?

"...And Lord Sunless, the heir of the Serpent King, who broke the chains of time and brought down the dreadful citadel of the First Seeker!"

'What the hell...'

Sunny was a bit surprised by that introduction. Yes, he wore the crown of King Daeron, and yes, he had technically played a vital part in destroying Aletheia's Island — which used to be the stronghold of the woman who had become known as the First Seeker.

But wasn't that a little bit too much?

Cassie, meanwhile, turned back to the crowd.

"The Dread Lord is no more. Undying Slaughter is no more. Soul Stealer is no more. Devouring Beast is no more, and so is the Mad Prince! The heroes standing in front of you have already dealt a decisive blow to the harrowing forces of the Defilement, spilling the profane blood of its most dreadful champions!"

She paused for a moment, and then continued, her voice swelling with confidence and passion:

"And just like we broke and vanquished the Plagues, we will break the walls of Verge, and vanquish the First Seeker! We will destroy the source of the Defilement and bring peace to the Great River, allowing human cities to flourish once more! I, Dusk of Fallen Grace, promise this to you!"

If the crowd of youths was excited and elated before, Cassie's impassioned speech truly made their hearts ignite. A wave of voices slammed into the cohort like a tide, echoing above the waves.

Even Sunny couldn't help but feel the impact of the blind girl's words. He had already known everything she shared with the people of Fallen Grace, and yet, presented in such a light, the situation truly did seem worthy of being celebrated.

Had he allowed his pessimism to get the better of him?

No... no, he had not. Cassie might have wanted to reassure these poor people, who had been at the mercy of the Great River for so long, but he knew better.

Sure, five of the six Plagues were no more, and sure, the cohort had a perfect weapon against the horrid power of the First Seeker — Nephis. But the Nightmare was far from over, still. Torment remained, and so did the remnant forces of the Defilement under her command.

Verge still existed, somewhere far away. It was where the Defilement had started, and would therefore be the most harrowing of all the places they had visited on the Great River, without a doubt.

But still...

Perhaps, he could allow himself to relax and believe in a better future, at least for a day.

Looking at the sea of delighted youths, Sunny took a deep breath and smiled.

'There won't be opportunities to smile and celebrate later. So... I better take this chance to enjoy some peace.'

Leaning down a little, he whispered in Cassie's ear:

"Since when are you so good at addressing crowds?"

She remained silent for a moment.

"Since I found myself in charge of a crowded city, I guess?"

Smiling, Cassie shook her head and took a step forward. The mass of people parted before her like a sea.