2032 : These Three Words

Sunny had hoped that his initial guess was wrong.

Perhaps there was a limit to Rain's Flaw… something like only being unable to kill those who were defenseless, weaker than her, or maybe those who did not represent a fatal threat.

Perhaps it was even dependent on whether she believed that the enemy deserved to die… although that one had been disproven almost immediately, since there was no sane reason to show mercy to a Nightmare Creature.

However, after capturing a few more abominations and forcing Rain to confront them, he had to admit the shocking truth.

[You cannot kill.]

Sunny was not the Nightmare Spell, but if he were, he would have described her Flaw with these three words.

As the truth dawned upon the three people gathered on the clearing, they remained silent for a while, each trying to cope with the stunning revelation.

Sunny felt as if he had been smacked in the head with something heavy.

He was dismayed.

'What kind of Flaw is that?!'

He had seen many cruel Flaws, but none that were as restrictive and ridiculous as this one.

It was one thing to be unable to kill people…

It was a completely different thing to be unable to kill anything in this perilous, dying world, where every day was a desperate struggle for survival.

Where Nightmare Gates were opening in the middle of peaceful cities, unspeakable horrors stirred at the borders of human enclaves, and the cradle of humanity was being slowly consumed by the Dream Realm piece by piece.

Not to mention that they were in the middle of a damn Realm War!

Suppressing a desire to groan, he brushed his hair back and forced out a mildly reassuring smile.

"...Don't fret about it. So, you can't kill anything. Who cares? Most people in the world don't go around killing things, anyway. Not only mundane people, but many Awakened too. Take Aiko, for example… she had not summoned a combat Memory in years."

Granted, Aiko was only able to stay away from bloodshed because she had already spilled enough blood on the Forgotten Shore. If she had been sent there while unable to defend herself, she would not have survived long.

And she also had him around, which was no small part of it.

Rain, who was sitting on the ground with a lost expression, raised her head and stared at him.

"Aren't you forgetting something?"

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

"What?"

She lingered for a moment, and then gritted her teeth.

"I'm a damn soldier! I am an Awakened member of the Song Army! We're at war!"

Rain covered her face for a moment.

"What am I supposed to do now that I can't even shoot my bow?"

Sunny hesitated, not knowing what to answer.

Eventually, he said:

"I can… steal you away. You don't need to remain a soldier, you know. Others can't desert, because there's nowhere to run in Godgrave, but you can."

Rain pierced him with a heated gaze, making it seem as if he had said something wrong.

'Damnation…'

Luckily, Cassie came to his help.

She had remained silent before, but now spoke in a soft tone:

"Rain, you are really asking the wrong person."

Rain glanced at her and raised an eyebrow.

"Oh? How so?"

Cassie smiled.

"Did you not see? He is a monster on the battlefield. His power is beyond all reason… so, naturally, he would have had few opportunities to experience being unable to kill something that he really wanted to kill."

She pointed to herself.

"But I have. After all, my Aspect is quite unsuitable for combat, and my Flaw made me blind. I had to learn how to face adversity despite my Flaw, and so, I am in a better position to give you advice."

Rain lingered for a few moments, looking at her heavily.

Then, she shifted her gaze to Sunny.

"Is it true? Does your Flaw not… restrict you in combat?"

He smiled wryly.

"Not usually, no… but you don't have to be polite. You can just ask me what it is."

Rain hesitated a little, then couldn't help herself and asked:

"So, what is it?"

Sunny stared at her silently for a while.

Eventually, he scoffed.

"It's simple, really. I can't lie."

Rain laughed.

She even slapped her knee a few times.

But under his calm gaze, her laughter slowly died out.

"No, wait… really? That is impossible. I mean, all the stuff you told me… no, wait. Really?!"

Sunny smiled.

"It's true. I can't speak a single lie aloud."

He pointed to her.

"However, I managed to fool you into thinking that I was spouting lies, didn't I? And keep the truth from you for many years."

Rain stared at him with wide eyes, then nodded.

Sunny nodded, too.

"That is how Flaws work. They are an insurmountable challenge… however, climbing over a mountain is not the only way to get to where you want to go. You can also go around the mountain — and you can work around the Flaw, too."

Cassie lowered her hand to the hilt of the Quiet Dancer and added in soft, but confident tone:

"It just takes time and effort. You will learn how to go where you want to go despite the Flaw, as well — there are many ways, as long as you have the will. For example, although you can't kill a Nightmare Creature, you can wound it. You can immobilize and debilitate it. With enough foresight, you can win a fight before it even starts, or even avoid it entirely."

She lingered for a moment, and then added:

"In that regard, your talent for the Sorcery of Names will be a boon. Shapers wield quite a versatile array of powers, including many that can restrain and restrict — that are not only meant for destruction, but also creation."

Cassie sighed.

"Remember that you are not alone. We will help you as much as we can. But you must also remember that, at the end of the day, only you can learn how to live with your Flaw."

Rain looked at her with gratitude, seemingly reassured.

Then, her gaze shifted to the corpses of the Nightmare Creatures sprawled across the clearing — Sunny had killed them after she failed to do so, thus ensuring her safety.

Her gaze became bleak again.

Feeling her dejection, he shook his head.

"Don't look just at the negative side. Look at the bright side, as well."

Rain raised an eyebrow, unconvinced.

"...There's a bright side?"

Sunny nodded.

"Of course. The Flaw is an important part of you… of your strength, even. So important that without it, no one can become a Transcendent. There is a reason why the Nightmare Spell helps every Awakened attain their Flaw."

He paused for a moment, then added:

"It is not only because diamonds are made under pressure, or some such nonsense. It is also because one's Aspect and one's Flaw are innately tied. In fact, I am not entirely sure that it is even possible to unseal one's Aspect without first finding one's Flaw… so, you are now much closer to unsealing yours. Knowing your True Name is another step in the right direction."

Sunny smiled.

"In short, it might seem like you were cast down into a bottomless abyss, and all your struggles to attain strength have been for naught. But in truth, it's the opposite… you have climbed to a much greater height compared to where you were yesterday. So, give yourself some credit."

Rain remained silent for a while, looking at him with a hint of tentative hope.

However, it did not look as if she was entirely convinced.

In the end, she seemed to retreat into herself and looked down.

"...Tamar must have finished talking to her dad a long time ago. The army will be marching north soon. So... bring me back, please."

Sunny glanced at Cassie, then sighed.

"As you wish. Just remember… our Shadow Clan has a very magnificent Citadel here in Godgrave. Say a word, and I'll bring you there instead."

He almost hoped that she would, but Rain remained silent.

Taking her hand, Sunny pulled her into the shadows.

Cassie remained alone on the clearing.

A few moments later, the Lord of Shadows emerged from the darkness and looked at her somberly.

"Well?"

The blind seer sighed.

"Let's return, as well. There is a lot to do."