



The Flower's Emissary

Chris Garvey

"You cannot sit in here all day, my brother," pleaded Yuta.

Eiso gave a half-hearted grunt as he sat at his desk, the flower from the swamps sitting like one of his prizes, though Yuta couldn't help but think Eiso seemed more like the prize. Yuta's gaze kept drifting over to the flower unbidden.

"Without you I've had to captain your ship. In the morning we will make landfall between the Phoenix and the Lion. We can't take too long. Our food stores are running low." Despite her words, Yuta felt calm while in her brother's cabin.

Eiso reached out a hand and caressed the delicate white petals of the lily of the valley.

"At least come out and see the Phoenix city. Somehow, they have a whole city already." Could the Phoenix have built it with their deep connection to the kami or had the city been there before they arrived? If it were the latter, what treasures could an ancient place like that hold? "The houses flicker lights as if they are speaking to one another. It is the most peculiar thing."

Eiso stared vacantly.

"Fine. We can find out from Aja what is going on there. I saw the Sea Spot offshore." Yuta spun around and left her twin brother. The moment she left the cabin, worry for her brother came into her mind like the tide. Could it just be ebbing and flowing like the tide? She had not felt this way just moments ago. Or was something playing on her mind. That possibility worried her even more, not just for herself but her brother and the rest of the crew of The Wave's Blade.

Worry and dread were a heavy rope tying her inescapably down. What was this place doing to them? Were the Kami punishing them for intruding into this space uninvited by the wife of the Son of Heaven? Was this place cursed? Eiso believed this place was their destiny and Yuta believed in her brother. This place would bring them riches, infamy, and honor, she just had to believe.

"Nāgusuku," Yuta called.

"My lady," moon light reflected off his bald pate.

"Prepare the sails for a gust, we are making landfall by morning."

Nāgusuku gave a grunt of affirmation.

Yuta climbed atop her dais and began to dance.

The Mantis's tsuchibune boats slid onto the sandy shore nestled between the Phoenix to the west and the Lion to the east. Yuta and Eiso were among the first to land. It had taken surprisingly little work for Yuta to get her brother to leave the cabin and the lily of the valley behind. Yet another thing that confused and worried the tenkinja. Beyond the beach little could be seen, a thick fog clung to the ground. Impenetrable by sight. Several adventurous sailors waded out into the blanket of mist, everything below their obi disappearing.

"What? Is this it?" Hazama, a young but capable deckhand, called out. "If I wanted to look at fog I could have just stared out to the open sea and that wall we are hiding within."

It had to be some cruel joke. For years Yuta and her brother tried to get to the island hidden by the mists and now that they were here they find more mist. "The mists out there hid this island, who knows what these mists may conceal. Tread carefully. Spread out but keep within ten shaku of each other so we do not miss anything."

Yuta and Eiso watched from shore as the crew they had taken along with them spread out. An archipelago of bodies in the sea of fog. Yuta barely had time to get bored of watching them grope around in the mist before a sickening snap could be heard and Hazama yelled out in pain. Immediately, everyone froze and all eyes were on the young sailor or they would have had he not disappeared down into the fog.

"Everyone stay where you are," Yuta announced.

"Lady Yuta," the shipwright Tuku yelled, "I want to help Hazama, he saved me from the akkorokamui at the Bay of Dark Waters."

"I have no intention of abandoning him or anyone. The only thing worse than one wounded sailor is two. Stay where you are." With that Yuta began to dance, entreating the kami of the air to clear the mists of this plain. It hadn't worked on the mists that concealed the island but the mists of the plain could be traveled through, so there was a chance that they could be blown away. A gentle breeze began to blow and the mists closest to the shore began to eddy and flow, ethereal tendrils whipping up. It wasn't enough. Yuta's dance grew in intensity and the breeze grew in kind, yet the mists resisted. Before long she was stomping her feet, sending plumes of sand into the wind. Hopefully this did not offend the earth kami. Sweat ran down Yuta's skin as the dance became a fervor. Wind ripped over the plain, knocking several Mantis over. Not even their sea hardened legs could take the storm. The fog writhed as if alive and some sort of tentacled beast fighting for its life, but in the end the wind was the victor.

The Mantis samurai looked around in astonishment. The ground was filled with holes. Somehow they had missed them until Hazama had inadvertently found one. Within those holes lay piles of jade, bronze, and gold among other treasures. A raucous cheer erupted.

"Brother, you were right," Yuta panted, "The Empress was hiding treasure from us."

Eiso stared vacantly on the pock marked plain.

Tuku hurried over to Hazama to bandage his leg while the rest of the Mantis scooped up armfuls of treasure, lugging them over to the tsuchibune. Yuta kept a close eye on the amounts that the samurai loaded onto their boats. It would serve them no good to find this treasure only to have it sink into the sea because they let greed overcome ambition.

A flicker of light in the plain caught her attention. This was no mere trinket from the holes that covered the land. It was something far more precious. It was the gold hair pin in Eiso's hair, a match to her own. He was bent over on the ground, his back to his sister. How long had he been away from her?

"Brother? What are you doing?" Yuta asked, concern tainting her voice. "Eiso?"

There was no response. Eiso was fixated on his task at hand.

"Nāgasuku, keep an eye on the crew. Don't let them overfill the boats."

The first mate gave a nod.

Yuta walked to the side of her brother. His hands were covered in dirt and the ground was disturbed before him. "Brother, we are loading the treasure and you are playing in the dirt. This is not like you. This is not the brother I have grown up with, that I serve with, that I love. You have been aloof ever since we left the swamps and I am concerned that you are lost to me."

Eiso looked up towards his sister. "I have sowed contentment to the land. It shall spread and all will thank me."

"What have you-? Are you-?" Yuta let out a deep breath, "Half of that sounds like the old you. I don't even want to know what you did here, I just want you back."

"Let us go back to the ship. I have been away for too long." Eiso stood and walked listlessly towards the boats.

Yuta followed Eiso into his cabin. There it sat, that horrid white flower. A floral monolith dominating the room despite its small stature. Eiso enveloped by the delicate petals' embrace.

"We have the treasure you long knew was here, you should give the order to return to the Isles of Silk and Spice," Yuta said, her words desperately trying to reach her brother.

"Yes, I do have the treasure," Eiso hummed, caressing the flower. "We must share the treasure. Spread contentment across the land."

"The gold, the bronze, the jade. It is sitting in our hold ready to bring you power, to bring the Mantis power. We just need to leave this place."

"Sister, are you content?" The question came out of nowhere. It gave Yuta pause.

"No, I am not content. We have riches like you wanted but I feel I have lost you." Her words came out unbidden. Forced from her mouth of their own volition.

"What would make you content?" The words didn't only come from Eiso's mouth but it pounded in Yuta's head at the same time.

"You know what I need. I need you, my brother, back with me. I've lost you to this place, to that flower." Panic filled Yuta like a ship taking on water.

"The flower can bring you peace, contentment. Smell, let the fragrance fill you. Let the daughter of Webisu speak to you, and-"

"Jigoku be damned with that flower," Yuta yelled. Her right hand made a flourish much like one of her dance moves. The kami instinctively moved with her, forming an invisible blade of air slicing the flower in two. The cleaved stem fell to the wooden deck. The small white flowers turned brown and withered. Yuta's hands flew to her mouth to stifle a gasp.

Eiso sat there, unmoving, silent. Was he in shock? Worse? Gingerly, Yuta extended one arm over the withered flower, across Eiso's desk, to the shoulder of her brother. With a startling snap the Captain of The Wave's Blade's head lifted up and he stared at his sister, hate in his eyes. But soon and almost imperceptibly smooth his eyes softened. They were once again the eyes Yuta had remembered.

"You said the treasure is aboard?" Eiso's voice cracked as if it had not been used in a while.

Yuta stared blankly, unsure of what to say.

"The jade, dear sister. The gold and bronze too. You said it is aboard?" Eiso asked, defeat in his voice.

"Y-yes," she stammered.

"It was all in vain," Eiso sighed, "we are not getting off this island."

"What?" Yuta asked.

"We are not getting off this island. We are trapped within the mists just as we were once trapped outside the mists. The Flower of Contentment told me this: the mists seal people here. To protect them, us, from the Dark Brother."

The sound of waves lapping against the ship could be heard as Yuta processed this new information. "Who is this Dark Brother?"

"I don't know, the flower didn't say."

"You mentioned the 'daughter of Webisu.' Who is that?"

"She is, she is...I don't remember. It is like sea water evaporating on the deck. Only the salt remains."

A look of horror and realization shot across Yuta's face. "We are almost out of supplies. What shall we do?"

Eiso took a big breath and sighed, "Reach out to the Great Clans. See if they will barter with us."

"And if they don't?"

A pregnant pause hung in the air. "We will address that should the need arise. All that is left for us now is to wait. Wait and hope."