2150 A Place to Call Hоme  
  
He hesitated for a few moments.  
  
The sword was not exactly a mirror, and its blade wasn't truly flat either. So, the reflection was somewhat distorted — and yet, he could discern the shapes of things.  
  
There was the parapet of the rampart, the beautiful edifice of the main keep, its roof and towers, tattered flags hanging limp in the absence of wind. There was also the lilac sky behind the keеp, and the clouds drifting in its vast expanse like pieces of a torn shroud.  
  
However, there was one thing missing.  
  
The great mass of the sleeping dragon was not reflected in the sword.  
  
Jest rubbed his eyes, then carefully leaned through the doorway to look at the roof of the main keep with his own two eyes.  
  
The damn dragon was there, sleeping soundly. It was hard not to notice its vivid vermilion silhouette contoured against white stone.  
  
'What the hell?'  
  
He retreated back into the tower.  
  
"Where's the damn dragon?"  
  
The young knight nodded.  
  
"Indeed. I noticed it yesterday… the dragon did not reflect in the lake while flying over it. Strange, isn't it?"  
  
Jest rubbed the back of his head, the shrugged.  
  
"Well, yeah. It is strange. But what does it mean?"  
  
The knight smiled.  
  
"Who knows? I do have a theory, though."  
  
His smile dimmed slowly, replaced by a serious expression.  
  
"You see, Jest… I don't think that this dragon is even real."  
  
He paused for a moment, then added in a wondering tone:  
  
"Maybe it's an illusion… or a phantom. Maybe it's merely a lingering reflection, and the real dragon is long gone…"  
  
Cassie was quite curious to see how Warden of Vаlor and his first group of followers had conquered Bastion, and what they found inside. After all, it was not just a Citadel left behind by one of the daemons… somewhere along the way, the young knight had also discovered a Lineage Memory and inherited the bloodline of War God.  
  
Perhaps he had received that Memory for slaying the reflection of the vermilion dragon, even, or discovered it in the throne room of Bastion…  
  
But no matter how curious she was, she could not allow herself to get distracted — she had already spent too much time exploring the dawn of the Nightmare Spell era. Jest was resisting her Aspect fiercely, and her essence was draining at appalling speed.  
  
In fact…  
  
Even though the old man was supposed to be completely mesmerized by her gaze, she suddenly sensed one of his fingers twitching, almost as if the abomination was struggling to regain control over its hands.  
  
So, Cassie had to abandon the vivid memory and reach for the next one, hoping that it would bring her closer to the secrеts of the Sovereigns.  
  
She saw…  
  
Jest was an Awakened now. His gaunt figure had turned lean and stгong, and his gaze was more confident. That said… he had only been an Awakened for a few weeks.  
  
He was standing on the wall, armed with an actual steel spear — something he had picked up from one of the abominations they had slain on the way to the main keep.  
  
Hardship had not ended after the dying dragon fell into the lake. They had found the Gateway and were able to wake up, true, growing vastly more powerful in the process… but the castle was still teeming with monsters, and so was the lake. Their damned leader was not satisfied with simply hiding in the keep, either, and insisted on organizing rescue parties to search for more Sleepers in the forest.  
  
That was just how that guy was, and people tended to follow his example.  
  
So, Jest was forced to fight for survival when he was awake, and then fight even more when he slept. Life was miserable.  
  
At least his Awakened Ability was not as useless as his Dormant one — as long as he had a partner to make use of it. Being professional bait… what a fate!  
  
Jest scoffed.  
  
Just as he did, there was the sound of footsteps, and a familiar figure appeared on the wall beside him. The polished armor was the same, but now, the knightly young man was wearing a vermilion cloak — a Memory he had received after slaying the illusion of the dragon.   
  
He was smiling.  
  
Jest sighed and shook his head.  
  
"Hey there… what are we supposed to call you again? Warden?"  
  
The young knight chuckled.  
  
"Don't be jealous, Jest… I'm sure you'll earn a cool True Name too, one day soon."  
  
'Oh, don't doubt it!'  
  
Warden of Valor was really too cheesy of a name, anyway. Jest would surely receive one that was ten times more impressive.  
  
He hesitated for a while, then asked:  
  
"So, how is your wife? Everything is fine, I hope?"  
  
Warden nodded happily.  
  
"It's a healthy baby boy. We named him Madoc. Oh…"  
  
He looked at Jest with interest.  
  
"But don't I need to congratulate you, too? Honestly, it's unbelievable. A guy like you… with a girl like that… everyone is stunned!"  
  
Jest suddenly coughed.  
  
"Well, that… it's not like I'm holding her hostage, okay? She was just impressed when I pulled her out of the flames, back when we were fighting that damn lizard. And, well, you know what they say. The best way to get a girl is to make her laugh!"  
  
Warden nodded thoughtfully.  
  
"Exactly, so how did you get her?"  
  
Jest frowned.  
  
"Go to hell, bastard."  
  
The young knight smiled.  
  
"When are you planning to make it official? My son will need playmates, you know…"  
  
Jest coughed again.  
  
"Listen, it's not like I don't want to. But we are in different cities in the real world. You and I ended up in NQSC, but she's from up north."  
  
It was already lucky that the two of them were in the same Quadrant.  
  
After explaining the logistical problems Awakened couples faced, Jest sighed.  
  
"I'm thinking of going to get her soon."  
  
Warden's expression was somber, though.  
  
Jest frowned.  
  
"What?"  
  
His friend and benefactor shook his head.  
  
"No, it's just that… I heard bad things about that city."  
  
Jest raised an eyebrow.  
  
"Oh?"  
  
Warden hesitated for a while, then leaned on the parapet of the rampart. His expression changed subtly, losing its usual veneer of confidence. Instead, what Jest saw was… weariness. And fear.   
  
"People… people can be as terrible as monsters, you know."  
  
Jest laughed.  
  
Did he know it?  
  
There were very few people in the world who knew it better than him.  
  
"That is where you are wrong, Warden. People are not as terrible as monsters… people are monsters. Some of them, at least."  
  
He remained silent for a few moments, and then added in a cold tone:  
  
"But haven't we gotten pretty good at killing monsters, though?"