2155 Human Connections  
  
Whistling a happy tune, Jest made his way to a different part of the complex.  
  
The important people were preparing to make the historic announcement, and would be busy discussing various matters after that — it was not every day that they gathered in one place, so there was a lot to talk about.   
  
It was also important to simply spend time together and get to know each other. Some of the famed champions of humanity had already met, and even fought side by side on many occasions, but some were barely acquainted. If the coalition was to last, its pillars had to share a sense of unity.  
  
Despite how much the world had changed, there was still nothing quite as effective in building trust as looking the other person in the eye and shaking their hand.  
  
Grand matters and shared strategic interests notwithstanding, personal connections were still the most important and fundamental element of human relationships, trampling all else. So, the exalted champions of humanity… were going to hang out.  
  
And while they were doing that, their families would spend time together as well. The wives, the husbands, the children — they had to build connections too, so that the framework of the tentative new coalition was cemented.   
  
Warden might have had to give a solemn speech, announcing the formation of the United Human Government to the world, but the actual new world order was going to be built behind closed doors, in heavily guarded backrooms, where the families of Warden and other champions were mingling and forming a different kind of union.  
  
One that would become their true legacy.  
  
Well… and also, all these powerhouses were paranoid — for a good reason, too. They weren't going to leave their loved ones unguarded while every warrior who was worth anything was away, so they simply took their families with them.  
  
Jest was no different. His son and his wife, who was pregnant with their second child, were somewhere here, as well. After the bloody morning, he couldn't wait to see them.   
  
There was a large room in the depths of the complex that was furnished splendidly, with comfortable sofas, various refreshments set on wooden tables, and plenty of toys scattered on the floor of the playing area that was arranged in the center. The lighting imitated daylight, and a beautiful view that seemed to reproduce the beautiful vistas around Bastion was projected on the walls.  
  
The room was filled with a relaxed atmosphere… or rather, it would have if not for the energetic kind of chaos that spawned anytime a group of children congregated.  
  
The first person Jest noticed was, of course, his wife. Her pregnancy was barely showing, so a person who did not know her well would probably not even notice the difference — but he, of course, could see it clearly.   
  
In fact, Jest had started joking about how pregnant she looked as soon as they received the good news. His wife was usually one of the few people whose sense of humor was sophisticated enough to appreciate his genius, but this time, she kept missing the point for whatever reason.  
  
She never missed when she punched Jest in response, though, so while he had not earned any laughs recently, he did earn more than a few bruises — his wife was an Awakened too, after all. Her punches carriеd both weight and purpose.  
  
Come to think of it…  
  
Hadn't she unexplainably lost her sense of humor the last time she was pregnant, too?  
  
'Probably hormones…'  
  
She was talking to a beautiful, elegant mundane woman of about their age, who seemed to be Immortal Flame's wife. Jest spared a moment or two to study her exquisite features and striking grey eyes.  
  
Immortal Flame himself was a fiery guy, so it was a bit strange to see that his wife was like a calm, placid lake. That said… despite being mundane, she had a strong presence, as if there was a core of solid steel hidden beneath the deep waters of that lake.  
  
That woman had character.  
  
Well… of course, she had. Not just anyone could be the life partner of an exceptional man like Immortal Flame, and out of those who had survived the descent of the Nightmare Spell, there were only two types of people — those who broke, and those who became so tough that nothing could break them.   
  
It was a good thing that Immortal Flame and his family were now their allies. If things had turned out diffеrently… Jest could not help but shiver. An enemy like that would have to be uprooted and exterminated completely, because leaving adversaries of this caliber alive was no different from signing your own death certificate.   
  
Luckily, Immortal Flame was a reasonable man despite his fiery temperament.  
  
Approaching the two women with a pleasant smile, Jest greeted them happily and then looked around the room.   
  
"Where are the kids?"   
  
The kids, of course, were up to no good.  
  
He found them in a corner, discussing something in hushed voices.  
  
Well, an adorable little girl was discussing something, while the three boys around her were just listening with obedient expressions.  
  
The oldest of them was about five years old аnd wore a hesitant expression, as if unsure of why he was listening to the tiny, but bossy little girl. Jest knew this one all too well, since it was Madoc, Warden's oldest.   
  
The next one was Jest's own little rogue. His son was four, and had mischievous sparks dancing in his innocent eyes. That innocence was pure deceit, of course… the little fella was a real menace, to the point that Jest never knew whether to despair or feel proud when confronted by his mischief.  
  
The impossibly cute girl was, without a doubt, Immortal Flame's daughter. Her bright smile was a sight to behold, and there were adorable dimples on her chubby cheeks… she seemed to be the ringleader.  
  
And finally, there was a timid boy who was not quite three yet, same as the girl. This was probably the first time he had found himself surrounded by so many strangers, so he stuck close to the outgoing girl and listened to her carefully.  
  
Seeing such a serious expression on such a cute face made Jest want to laugh.  
  
The boy, of course, was Anvil, Warden's younger son.  
  
Noticing him, little Anvil suddenly smiled and waved a hand.  
  
"Uncle Jest!"  
  
Jest waved back.  
  
'Ah… but really. Anvil? Poor kid… he will really need to develop a sense of humor, with a name like that…'