2181 Break Point  
  
Rain was sprawled on the ground, breathing shallowly. She was too tired to move, and had no desire to either. There was a black fabric covering her face, so it was a bit dark, at least... the merciless radiance of the incandescent sky would have easily penetrated mundane cloth, but she was brazenly using [In Case of Emergency] to hide from the suffocating light.  
  
Who would have known that she would miss the frigid nights of Ravenheart one day?  
  
It was so dаmn hot.  
  
And she was so damn spent. Physically, mentally... emotionally.  
  
The siege of the Greater Crossing had been a terrible affair. In fact, Rain had no words to describe how terrible, terrifying, hideous, and utterly horrid it had been. The endless battles, the heavy losses, the dwindling supplies... the torturous, ever-present heat. By now, the soldiers were not even despondent, they were simply numb.  
  
As if their capacity to comprehend horror and their endurance had been completely overwhelmed.  
  
...It was quite a feat, to overwhelm the mental endurance of her fellow soldiers. All of them had overcome Nightmares and braved the dreadful reaches of the Dream Realm to become Awakened, after all.  
  
All except for her. She had never set foot into a Nightmare... at least not a Nightmare created by the Spell.  
  
The nightmare she was living had been created entirely with human hands. Four hands in particular — four lofty, royal hands.  
  
Rain was too tired to think about the King and the Queen. She had no energy to feel resentment. Her eyes were covered, and while she had no essence to spare on frivolous things, the passive effect of the [Piece de Resistance] was still enough to prevent her from baking in the heat.  
  
She could stay still.  
  
"Rani..."  
  
Rain groaned.  
  
She remained motionless for a few moments, then slowly sat up. [In Case of Emergency] slipped from her eyes, and the merciless radiance of Godgrave battered them with blinding intensity. She squinted with a grimace, waiting for her pupils to adjust to the light.  
  
It felt like someone was driving nails into her head.  
  
Soon enough, Rain could see Tamar, Ray, and Fleur — the four of them had sprawled on the ground almost in a pile after descending from the wall. Their tents had been destroyed days ago during one of the battles, and with the supply situation being what it was, no one was going to issue them new ones.  
  
Of course, there were plenty of empty tents in the camp of the Song Army these days. Too many soldiers had died, after all... but finding and salvaging an empty tent was too much work, so they had simply been sleeping on the ground.  
  
It was Ray who had called her. Raising a hand, he said tiredly:  
  
"Water."  
  
Rain sighed, then summoned the Green Canteen and handed it to him.  
  
Then, she looked around.  
  
The Song Army had stubbornly endured the endless assaults, but that did not mean that it was unscathed. On the contrary, the courtyard of the great fortress where the army was camped looked like a graveyard, instead.  
  
And the soldiers looked like walking corpses. These days, it was hard to tell them apart from the Queen's pilgrims at times.  
  
Everyone was shocked into numbness by the relentless siege.  
  
However...  
  
That had changed subtly in the last few days.  
  
Rain could not quite describe it, but it was as if a feverish tension was slowly permeating the air.  
  
Because the soldiers could feel it... that the siege was going to end soon.  
  
There was no deep reason behind that feeling and no profound calculations they had made to come to such a conclusion, but nevertheless, everyone was suddenly infected by the idea.  
  
The reason was simple... people had a breaking point, and the soldiers had long reached theirs. If it was this bad in the camp of the Song Army, then their enemy had to be faring even worse —attacking a fortress was far more arduous than defending it, after all. Rain and her comrades knew that they were going to break soon, and so, they hoped that the Sword Army would break first.  
  
Some even hoped for a miracle, even though there were no benign miracles in the world of the Nightmaгe Spell. Only harrowing omens.  
  
Well, and there was a more concrete reason, as well.  
  
It was that the Saints had been involving themselves in the battles as of late.  
  
Before, the prohibition of the Queen prevented them from taking part in the defense of the fortress, but all kinds of rules and boundaries had become vague now. As a result, the Saints of both Domains entered the fray from time to time, relieving the Awakened soldiers.  
  
Of course, once a Saint from one side joined the battle, a Saint from the other side would arrive to prevent them from doing too much harm.  
  
But the Song Domain had more Saints than the enemy, at least. And Changing Star herself had not drawn her sword yet, limiting her occasional participation to healing the soldiers.  
  
Since the Saints were fighting, the situation must have been really desperate.  
  
Ray drank a bit of water from the Green Canteen and handed it to Fleur. Fleur handed it to Tamar, and Tamar returned it to Rain.  
  
After everyone had their fill, Ray spoke hoarsely:  
  
"Something is going on, isn't it?"  
  
Rain raised an eyebrow.  
  
"What exactly do you mean?"  
  
The question was too broad. Many things were going on, most of them bad or outright terrible.  
  
The young man looked in the direction where a tall, scorched tent stood shining in the ruthless light — it was the command tent of the Seventh Legion.  
  
He said:  
  
"Nobody had seen Princess Seishan on the wall today. She seems to have disappeared somewhere... a few guys saw her leaving while we slept. Considering her position, the only thing that could force her to move is an order from the Queen. So, I bet something is afoot."  
  
Tamar remained silent for a while, then shrugged.  
  
"Even if something is, that's none of our business."  
  
Rain nodded.  
  
"I'm sure we'll learn in due time."  
  
With that, however, she glanced at her shadow.  
  
Unnoticed by anyone, the shadow subtly signaled her that they would talk later.  
  
She sighed.  
  
'So something really is afoot.'  
  
Ray, that guy... he truly had the instincts of a rat. He sensed danger better than most diviners in the employ of the Song Army.  
  
Just as he thought that, his face suddenly changed, growing pale. His eyes widened.  
  
A moment later, Rain sensed a deep shadow moving in their direction, and felt her heartbeat growing calmer.  
  
The shadow fell on their pitiful group, and she turned around to look up at the person who approached them.  
  
Then, she blinked.  
  
'O—oh?'  
  
There was a tall man standing above them, looking down with an aloof expression. His handsome face seemed to be carved from stone, and his eyes were as calm as a lake.  
  
She knew who it was, of course... it was the Saint of Sorrow.  
  
Tamar's dad.  
  
What Rain did not know, however, was what he was doing here. He had never once shown initiative to seek out his daughter since the start of the war.  
  
Until today.  
  
Tamar looked as surprised to see her dad as Rain did. She stood up hurriedly and bowed her head to greet him.  
  
"Father."  
  
He lingered for a moment, then nodded to accept her greeting.  
  
"Tamar. Let us talk."  
  
She studied him carefully.  
  
"You can speak in front of my friends."  
  
He spared them a short glance, then sighed.  
  
"...Alright. It is for the best, since what I am about to tell you concerns them, as well."  
  
The Saint of Sorrow paused for a moment, then looked directly at Tamar.  
  
"Leave the Greater Crossing Stronghold. I will arrange a transfer with Saint Seishan as soon as she returns. Your cohort will be assigned guard duty, escorting supply caravans from the Song Domain."  
  
Guard duty...  
  
That meant that they would have to return to the main camp of the Song Army, then descend from Godgrave to the Moonriver Plains... and come back with the next supply caravan.  
  
They would not have to participate in the defense of the fortress anymore.  
  
This was great news... however, it made Rain shiver.  
  
Her eyes widened as she stared at the Saint of Sorrow, stunned.  
  
There could only be one reason why he would sacrifice his dignity to arrange something like that.  
  
It was that he believed that the Greater Crossing would fall, and wanted to make sure that his daughter did not perish with it.  
  
'No way...'  
  
Rain knew that the morale in the Song Army was woefully low. The soldiers did not believe in victory anymore — or rather, they did not care about it anymore.  
  
But if the Saint of Sorrow, one of the most stalwart champions of the Song Domain, was doing something like that...  
  
It meant that hopelessness had infected even the Saints, now.  
  
Things were far worse than Rain had anticipated. Tamar's lower lip trembled.  
  
Nevertheless, she controlled her emotions and managed to maintain her composure.  
  
Her voice remained even:  
  
"What about you?"  
  
The Saint of Sorrow looked at her for a few long moments.  
  
Then, he said simply:  
  
"I'll stay."  
  
With that, he raised his hand, froze for a second, and hesitantly patted her on the shoulder.  
  
Not saying anything else, the Saint of Sorrow turned around and walked away, his broad back seemingly as solid as a cliff.  
  
Tamar was left standing, watching him leave with a distant expression.  
  
Rain wanted to comfort her friend, but at that moment, her shadow signaled her to move.  
  
Letting out a sigh, Rain frowned and stood up.  
  
She raised the Green Canteen.  
  
"I'll go and try to find some water. You guys rest."  
  
She left her cohort behind and headed in the opposite direction from where the Saint of Sorrow had gone.  
  
When there was no one around to hear her, she whispered:  
  
"What?"  
  
Her brother quietly:  
  
"Seishan is returning to the fortress. She's not alone, either... she's escorting a prisoner."  
  
He lingered for a moment, then said:  
  
"Go take a look."