2197 Boiling Pot  
  
Rain did not get a good look at the prisoner Saint Seishan was supposedly escorting. She did glimpse the beautiful princess herself, whose presence was just as soothing as always —however, there was an eerie escort of empty-eyed pilgrims in the way, so it was hard to see who had been captured by the Queen's daughter.  
  
Rain stayed in the shadows, leaning on the wall of an armory among other idle soldiers. Her brother remained silent until the strange prisoner convoy disappeared from view, heading toward the stone keep where the Queen herself was rumored to reside.  
  
Then, he suddenly separated himself from her shadow.  
  
"I'll go snoop around a little. Don't get into any trouble while I am away."  
  
Rain scoffed.  
  
"Who am I, a kid? Why would I get into trouble?"  
  
He remained silent for a few moments, then said in a dubious tone:  
  
"Yeah..."  
  
With that, the shadow stealthily glided away.  
  
Rain sighed, then stretched her tired body and went about her business. She spent some time getting the water rations and refilled the Green Canteen, then waited some more to get an allotment of synthetic firewood for their campfire.  
  
Finally, she returned to the part of the camp assigned to the Seventh Royal Legion and found her cohort. They made a fire, igniting it with a Memory, and boiled some water to brew powdered coffee — the mostly empty can of it was a luxury Ray had won from an officer in a game of cards. After that, they put a pot over the fire to prepare the usual Song Army stew.  
  
Rain stared at the stamped tinfoil wrappers left from the bricks of synthetic firewood absent-mindedly as the wind dragged them across the surface of the dead god's bone. The contrast of the mundane and the mystical was pretty evocative... she was just not sure of what.  
  
Eventually, she sighed and looked at Tamar.  
  
"I saw Princess Seishan while I was getting water."  
  
Tamar just stared at the fire.  
  
"Oh."  
  
The Saint of Sorrow had said that he would speak to the princess once she returned to the camp. So, they would probably leave this dreadful place soon.  
  
Rain felt... conflicted about the prospect. Sure, she wanted nothing more than for the horror to end. But on the other hand, she felt terrible about leaving her fellow soldiers behind and escaping to safety simply because her friend had some connections at the top.  
  
Not everyone had a Transcendent father. What was going to happen to countless young soldiers who did not?  
  
She had a pretty good idea what would happen to them — thousands of them, at least — and was not sure what would haunt her more. Would it be the harrowing siege, or the act of running away like a coward?  
  
'That is how they get you.'  
  
The other members of the cohort seemed to be struggling with the same thoughts, so no one said anything for a long time. However, their silence was an answer in and of itself. In the end, self-preservation seemed to be winning over the misguided sense of devotion.  
  
Well, it was not too surprising. Many people had been idealists when they joined the Song Army. But after experiencing the horrors of war, their worldview irrevocably changed, and their hearts changed as well... devotion was a scarce currency in Godgrave these days. At least devotion to the symbols that had failed them, and to the leaders who had led them to hell.  
  
Rain and her friends had already fought and bled plenty for the Song Domain. Did they really have to insist on staying when someone was telling... ordering them to leave?  
  
She was still drowning in doubt, and the stew was still bubbling in the pot when there seemed to be some kind of commotion aгound them. Looking up, Rain noticed that there was more movement in the vast courtyard of the Greater Crossing Stronghold than usual.  
  
The entire camp seemed to be boiling, not much different from the stew.  
  
'Huh? Is there going to be another assault?'  
  
That did not make much sense. The battle had just ended recently, and even if the Sword Army decided to attack twice in one day, it would not have caused so much activity. Those who had to man the wall were already on the ramparts, after all, since the entire contingent worked to defend  
  
the fortress in shifts.  
  
'What is going on?'  
  
Just as Rain thought that, Tamar caught a soldier who was running by and asked in an incredulous tone:  
  
"What is happening?"  
  
He looked at her with wide eyes.  
  
"W—what? Lady Tamar, you haven't heard?"  
  
The Seventh Royal Legion had suffered grave casualties in the siege — just like every other legion of the Song Army — so there were gaping holes in the chain of command. New orders did not travel to the rank and file as fast as they used to.  
  
Granted, Tamar was an officer, so it was a bit strange that she was caught out of the loop.  
  
"Heard what?"  
  
The soldier stared at her dazedly for a few moments.  
  
He seemed to be both excited and terrified... but mostly terrified.  
  
Eventually, he took a deep breath and said loudly, a feverish glint appearing in his eyes.  
  
"An attack! We are attacking!"  
  
Tamar frowned, then asked while putting an emphasis on the word "we":  
  
"What... what do you mean we are attacking?"  
  
He grinned darkly.  
  
"It's just as I said! The order has just come down from the Queen. We are abandoning the fortress, crossing the chasm, and storming the camp of the Sword Army — all legions, all auxiliary troops, even the Saints. It's an all-out offensive!"  
  
Tamar let the soldier go, stunned. He hurried away, soon disappearing from view.  
  
Rain, Tamar, Ray, and Fleur looked at each other.  
  
Eventually, Ray opened his mouth and said in a shaky voice:  
  
"So... I guess we're not becoming caravan guards anymore?"  
  
Rain pursed her lips.  
  
"The order seems to have been given almost immediately after Princess Seishan returned. So, the Saint of Sorrow might not have had the opportunity to settle things with her yet. Or he did, but the transfer got lost in the chaos. In any case, if we want to leave... we still can."  
  
Storming the siege camp of the Sword Army... an all-out offensive... Saints joining the fight.  
  
Crazy! It seemed crazy!  
  
'What the hell is the Queen thinking?'  
  
Rain looked at Tamar.  
  
"So, do we want to leave?"  
  
Tamar met her gaze expressionlessly.  
  
She remained silent for a few moments, then said in an even tone:  
  
"I did not receive the transfer order. So, I intend to stay."  
  
Rain sighed.  
  
Well, of course. She would.  
  
'Damn Legacies...'  
  
Shaking her head, she turned her head and looked at the bubbling stew with regret.  
  
"What are we standing around for, then? We need to start gathering our things. Even if we are going to be marching into battle instead of running away, we're still abandoning camp. So get your stuff quickly!"  
  
...Some time later, her brother snuck back into her shadow. He settled inside of it, remained silent for a bit, and then asked incredulously:  
  
"Did I not say to stay out of trouble?"  
  
Rain raised an eyebrow.  
  
"I did, though?"  
  
He sighed.  
  
"Look around."  
  
All around them, the Song Army was seething and boiling as it prepared to go into battle... perhaps the final battle of this hellish war. The legions were assembling into marching columns, the enthralled Nightmare Creatures were roaring in frenzy, and the Saints were summoning their battle Memories, ready to lead the charge.  
  
Her brother inhaled slowly, then growled:  
  
"...That looks like trouble to me!"