2269 Let There Be Light  
  
"It's definitely going to work this time!"  
  
A group of tired engineers, scientists, and Awakened stared at a young woman wearing a formal suit, a buttoned-up blouse, and a white lab coat with numb eχpressions. The woman looked just as tired — there were dark circles under her eyes, many strands of hair had escaped her messy bun, and her lab coat was charred in several places.  
  
However, her scathing gaze was still full of vigor and energy.  
  
"Chief Bethany... h—how about we call it a day?"  
  
"Please..."  
  
"Somebody find Master Quentin... only he can save us!"  
  
Hearing the complaints, Beth frowned. "What is this I'm hearing? A mutiny?"  
  
The engineers, the scientists, and the Awakened paled.  
  
"N—no..."  
  
"Of course not, Chief!"  
  
"We were just joking, Chief!"  
  
She nodded in satisfaction, then turned to a complicated control board in front of her. Outside, Bastion was shrouded in darkness. A bright moon hung above the lake, bathing it in pale radiance, and although the streets weгe illuminated here and there by mundane or enchanted lanterns, most of the city was resting in the embrace of shadows.  
  
The city was too large and populous to be entirely asleep, but most citizens were sleeping in their homes, waiting for dawn to come so that they could continue their work. After all, nobody could work in darkness.  
  
Well... few people could.  
  
Beth turned her head and looked at one of her Awakened subordinates — a stunning girl with pale skin and raven-black hair, barely out of her teenage years by the look of it. The girl was a recent addition to the team and worked as somewhat of an intern, assisting everyone who needed help with menial tasks while she was learning the ropes.  
  
Unlike the rest of the sorry bunch, the youngest member of the team never complained.  
  
"You there, Rani... you just returned from building the road across Godgrave, right?"  
  
The girl nodded with a smile. "Yes, Chief! I've worked on the Dark Road."  
   
The Dark Road stretched across the arms of the dead deity and the entire Collarbone Plain, connecting the human territories in the north. Some of its sections lay under the open sky, but most of it was shrouded by the eternal darkness that the Lord of Shadows had summoned before slaying the King of Swords and being slain by Changing Star in turn.  
  
Needless to say, building a road across a Death Zone had not been an easy project. Beth looked sternly at the rest of her subordinates.  
  
"You see, Rani spent months doing arduous manual labor in total darkness while terrifying Nightmare Creatures and carnivorous plants were trying to eat her. So, what are you, sorry lot, complaining about? When was the last time one of you was eaten?"  
  
The team members looked at each other.  
  
"Wasn't Russel eaten last week, though?"  
  
"Yes, I was! I spent a whole minute in an abomination's stomach! Luckily, Master Quentin was there to kill the beast... thank the Immortal Flame..."  
  
"The cable-laying crews are getting attacked all the time!"  
  
Beth grimaced.  
  
"Whatever! We are doing another run. You guys can sleep tomorrow!"  
  
As groans resounded in the control room, Rani summoned a leather backpack and pulled something out of it. The team members looked at a tin can with burning eyes.  
  
"Wait. I'm not seeing things, am I?"  
  
"Is that... coffee?"  
  
"It's coffee, guys! Real coffee!"  
  
Rani smiled. "Yeah. They are growing coffee trees in Ravenheart now, you know? I got a few cans as payment. How about I brew some for everyone while Chief Bethany does the calibrations?"  
  
The team members exploded with cheers. Some even shed tears.  
  
Beth, meanwhile, was studying the control board — half of it mechanical, half etched with runes and embedded with soul shards. "I don't get it... everything should have worked."  
  
She remained silent for a minute, then called for an Awakened operating the communication Memories.  
   
"Rivergate Hydro, it's Center. Are the turbines spinning? The generators are powered up, too? Okay... 1 see. Keep an eye on the readings and let me know if something seems out of the ordinary.”  
  
"Honey... 1 mean, Master Quentin, you repaired the cable, right? Are you sure that there are no other burned sections? What? What do you mean, a Nightmare Creature chewed through the cable? Why would it... never mind. Just let me know when you finish mending it!"  
  
"Fire crews, stand by. The delay was caused by a severed cable. We will make another attempt in ten minutes... no, it's not going to explode again! There is absolutely zero pоssibility that it will explode again. Nothing is going to explode! But just in case it does... you know what to do..."  
  
Soon, the delicious aroma of freshly brewed coffee filled the control room. The team members savored the invigorating drink while Beth was staring at the panels and discussing various details with her subordinates through the communication Memories. From time to time, she looked into the wide window to study the dark landscape of the city below.  
  
High above, the graceful silhouette of the Ivory Tower was contoured against the pale disk of the moon.  
  
Finally, Quentin sent a mеssage confirming that the cables laid from the dam built on the ruins of former Rivergate to Bastion were mended. The team members ran to their posts, and a tense silence settled in the control room.  
  
Beth remained near the control panel, accompanied by the young assistant, Rani. "..You re originally from NQSC, right, Rani?"  
  
The girl nodded.  
  
Beth took a last look at the readings, then inhaled deeply.  
  
"I'm from the Southern Quadrant myself. Although I spent quite a few years in NQSC as a student. Oh, and I visited later as a refugee, to pass through the Dream Gate.’  
  
She lingered for a while. "The infrastructure there... ah, it's simply divine. A work of pure genius. But..."  
  
Beth placed her hand on a large switch and suddenly smiled brightly.  
  
"In a few decades, Bastion will not be inferior in any way. And every other city in the Dream Realm, too.’  
  
With that, she pulled the switch.  
  
A strange hum suddenly filled the control room, reverberating through the walls. And then...  
  
The city outside the window suddenly lit up, just like her face had.  
   
  
Countless streetlamps shone with the bright, steady electric light.  
  
Like stars in the night sky.  
  
The darkness was chased away, replaced with pure, soft radiance.  
  
Beth exhaled slowly and smiled with satisfaction.  
  
"Told you..."