2270 Food For the People  
  
Far away, in Ravenheart, a woman with stunning emerald eyes was standing on a stone platform, hiding from the falling ash under an elegant umbrella. The lower part of her face was protected from the wind by a fluffy scarf, and she was wearing an exquisitely embroidered dress under a fashionable coat.  
  
The woman was looking down at her dainty shoes with regret. The soft leather was already covered in soot, and the silver buckles had lost their shine.  
  
She sighed.  
  
“Ah. I really hate this place.”  
  
All around her, the city was boiling with life. Ravenheart had expanded greatly in the last year, spilling over the slopes of the volcano like a stone forest. The settlement on the great bridge had grown, as well — in fact, the length of the bridge was not enough to house every Awakened anymore, so there were enormous platforms hanging from it like terraces, with their own streets, buildings, gardens, and parks.  
  
The latter were encased in glass, of course, in order to protect the fragile plants from the bitter cold.  
  
There was another platform being lowered from the side of the bridge at the moment. Its unimaginable weight was supported by enormous cables, which in turn were being held by towering Nightmare Creatures. The hideous abominations were grinding their fangs and growling, their hulking muscles drawn taut under their hides — below, a swarm of Awakened builders were getting ready to receive the platform and affix it to the rigid frame.  
  
Nightmare Creatures were everywhere in Ravenheart, actually, performing all kinds of tasks  
  
— all thanks to Beastmaster and her eerie Aspect. That was in large part why the city had been able to change and expand so swiftly.  
Only the magnificent black palace on the other side of the bridge remained unchanged. Well... the palace itself was the same, but its master was different.  
  
The woman looked at the distant palace with a dreamy smile, then caught herself and turned back to the city with a sigh. “What a dreary place."  
  
Since the most readily available resource here was dark stone, most of the buildings were of the same color. In fact, there used tо be very little colors in Ravenheart at all — only black stone, white snow, and ash. Now, however, there were plenty of vibrant islands in the stark sea of black and white. Here and there, crowns of crimson trees rose above the buildings, and crimson flowers bloomed along the streets. Overall, the aesthetic sensibility of the city was vastly improved.  
  
The woman looked at the splashes of vibrant crimson with satisfaction.  
  
After all, she was the one responsible for introducing color and vibrancy to Ravenheart...  
   
Even if it was just to pass the time.  
  
Soon enough, she saw a caravan climb the slope of the volcano and enter the city. Nightmare Creatures were pulling the heavy carts full of precious cargo, with human guards walking alongside them with confident strides.  
  
"Finally!"  
  
Soon after the caravan arrived, a tall figure entered the platform and looked at the woman's dainty shoes and elegant umbrella with a dubiоus expression.  
  
“Hey, Bliss."  
  
The woman looked at the stranger coldly. “Welcome to Ravenheart, Saint Helie.” Then, she smiled brightly behind her scarf, took a step forward, and gave the taller woman a hug.  
  
“You're finally here!"  
  
Helie grinned, as well, then laughed. “You're going to poke my eyes out with that umbrella...”  
  
Bliss took a step back and held the umbrella higher to shield both of them from the falling ash.  
  
“Come, come. I just bought this coat! Do you know how hard it is to wash off soot?" The two Saints left the platform and headed deeper into the city at a brisk pace. As they walked, Helie looked around, and then said hesitantly:  
  
"This place does not quite seem to suit you, Bliss."  
  
The other woman sighed.  
  
“Oh, I hate it here. But what could I do? Not everyone has an ancestral Citadel to return to like you lofty Legacies. We, newer Saints, are a transient sort... granted, Summer Knight did offer me a prime piece of real estate during the war." She smiled brightly.  
  
“But I turned him down. So, when Song Seishan invited me to come here personally, there was no reason to say no. Don't worry, though — I'll be done in a few years and come back east. In fact..."  
  
Her emerald eyes glistened.  
  
“You brought it, right?"  
  
Helie looked at the lively Saint with a hint of resentment and nodded.  
  
“I did. You know, I just returned from the Eastern Quadrant. But instead of welcoming me from the battlefield with open arms, you sent me on a lethal errand to Godgrave instead. Have you no shame?" Bliss grinned.  
   
  
“What I don't have are hooves. But you do. So, you can get to Godgrave and back way faster."  
  
Helie looked at her in disbelief.  
  
“Wow. Just... wow. How callous!"  
  
Soon enough, they entered a large building on the outskirts of the city. It was guarded by dozens of Awakened warriors and a handful of Masters, all wearing tense expressions on their faces. Helie glanced at them briefly, then frowned.  
  
Somehow, it did not seem like the soldiers were protecting the building from potential threats from the outside. Instead, it seemed like they were protecting the city from the building.  
  
“Bliss... just what did Seishan ask you to do?"  
  
The other woman folded her umbrella, took off her scarf, and smiled.  
  
"You'll see!”  
  
A younger woman appeared out of nowhere, looked at them, and then asked nervously:  
  
“Saint Bliss, is it here?"  
  
Bliss nodded.  
  
"Indeed. You two should know each other... Helie, this is Ascended Shakti. Shakti, this is Saint Helie. She brought the new samples."  
  
Helie studied the younger woman. She vaguely remembered seeing her among the Fire Keepers.  
  
“Let's go!”  
  
A few minutes later, Helie was standing in front of a heavily reinforced glass dome, looking inside with a troubled expression. Inside the dome... a sea of scarlet moss was growing on the rich ashen soil. Here and there, bones of Nightmare Creatures protruded from the carpet of moss, growing smaller at an alarming rate.  
  
In fгont of the cell, there were various tables loaded with different, quite mundane plants.  
  
Bliss and Shakti were preparing to open the dome to allow Helie to deposit the plants of the scarlet jungle she had scavenged and stored in a special Memory to be transported.  
  
She hesitated for a few moments, then asked:  
  
“Can you tell me now?"  
   
  
Bliss looked at her, then pointed to one of the tables.  
  
“You see that? That... is a common potato." Then, she turned and pointed at the glass cell.  
  
“And that is moss from the Godgrave jungle.”  
  
Helie nodded.  
  
“And why is the moss from Godgrave here?"  
  
Bliss smiled.  
  
"Do you have any idea how miraculous that jungle is? How fast its flora grows, and how resilient it is? Well, of course you do. We both suffered that damned jungle during the war, after all.”  
  
Then, she picked up a potato and showed it to Helie.  
  
"On the other hand, there are three billion people that need to be fed once they are all resettled in the Dream Realm. So, if we can just transplant some qualities of the scarlet moss to a common potato... imagine the possibilities!"  
  
Helie stared at her silently for a while. "Bliss... don't tell me... that you plan to crossbreed the horrors of the scarlet jungle with waking world's plants?"  
  
The elegant Saintess blinked a couple of times.  
  
“Well, of course not. I am not planning to..."  
  
As Helie sighed with relief, she added:  
  
“I already did. Where do you think all those trees and flowers on the streets of Ravenheart come from?"  
  
With that, she put the potato down like a precious jewel and turned back to the dome.  
  
“Come!”