2293 Finer Things in Life  
  
After the cocktails, it was time for the pastries.  
  
The pastries were pretty and delicious - granted, they were not as delicious as what Rain was used to, having been pampered by her brother's pancakes and waffles. His repertoire was somewhat limited, though.  
  
Enjoying a gorgeously glazed eclair, Rain couldn't help but smile in delight. 'Should I introduce him to custard?'  
  
Everything about this morning was wonderful. Their pretty clothes, the sophisticated interior of the cafe, the glistening vista of the Mirror Lake, the lavishly served cocktails, the delicate and delicious pastries. 'Argh, that is what I've been missing!'  
  
Her later teenage years had been spent in Ravenheart, hunting down Nightmare Creatures. The city had been in the process of being built from the ground up back then, as well, populated mostly by displaced refugees. There had been a lot of work to be done, but not a lot of refined culture. Later, Rain ended up on the frontline, and after the war was over, she spent her time among busy engineers and laborers.  
  
The finer things in life had mostly escaped her until now, so she was enjoying the rare chance to feel like an actual girl for once. Plus, young cities in the Dream Realm had places like this one now, as well as theaters, operas, dancing halls, and much more. People wanted to enjoy leisure and entertainment after working hard, so local leisure culture was developing speedily.  
  
Rain, Telle, and Tamar chatted lazily as new delicacies and pretty cocktails arrived. 'It feels peculiar, really. Now that there is no Crushing, the Chained Isles are completely different. It is much safer there, and we can actually fly as high as we want. Naturally, the Nightmare Creatures feel just as liberated, so even those of them who used to stay in place are moving around. It's a proper mess, but once we cleanse the islands in the immediate vicinity of the Sanctuary, we will be ready to receive settlers…'  
  
'They are working on building more flying ships. There are severаl thousands of Fire Keepers now, but only one Chain Breaker… sadly, while building a flying ship is not that hard, building one that is not going to turn to splinters at the first sign of danger is a big problem. So, not much luck on that front, for now. Our Spellsmiths are trying to create flying Echoes as a temporary measure, instead, but they are not creating them rapidly enough. Only the Masters get one.'  
  
'Oh, I don't know. I am pretty busy these days. Right, have you heard, girls? Saint Thane is apparently working on a new version of Dreamscape, this one designed specifically for the Dream Realm. It is supposed to serve as a communication space between different cities, as well as a training tool to prepare mundane citizens for the First Nightmare.'  
  
Telle couldn't help but let out a sigh.  
  
'Really? Oh! That would be wonderful. I love the Chained Isles, but being stuck all the way up north is so boring sometimes.' She sipped her cocktail, looking at the Mirror Lake with a distant expression on her exquisitely beautiful face, then turned to Rain and Tamar.  
  
'Speaking of Nightmares…'  
  
The festive mood turned a little somber all of a sudden.  
  
The blonde girl hesitated for a few seconds. 'I am thinking of challenging the Second Nightmare in no more than a year. What about you two?'  
  
Although she did not ask directly, her underlying question was transparent. Telle was asking if they wanted to challenge the Second Nightmare with her.  
  
For an Awakened, there was no question more intimate than that. There was also no clearer indication of how much the person trusted you.  
  
Rain felt both touched and wistful. She glanced at Tamar briefly, then smiled softly. 'Well… I can't, for various reasons. But Tamar was actually thinking the same.'  
  
Rain would have loved to challenge the Second Nightmare with Telle and Tamar… however, she was not a carrier of the Nightmare Spell, and therefore, she couldn't. She was walking a different path from them.  
  
Tamar nodded calmly.  
  
'Actually, I already have the core of the cohort assembled, including а healer… as well as a few people in mind I want to recruit. If you are not going to assemble a team out of retainers of your clan, then we will be happy to have you. After all, it is hard to find warriors of the same caliber as Telle of White Feather.' A corner of her mouth curled upward faintly.  
  
Telle remained motionless for a moment, then cleared her throat to hide a shy smile.  
  
'Oh… well, you aren't wrong. I am indeed quite formidable.' She hastily picked up her cocktail, took a long sip, and then added in her usual calm tone:  
  
'There is no one else in White Feather who can go into a Nightmare with me, at the moment. So… I am very interested in that cohort оf yours, Tamar. Are they Fire Keepers, too?'  
  
Tamar shook her head. 'No. But we… train together, I guess. And our instructor is a real devil.'  
  
Rain pretended to be busy with her glass. Tamar was talking about the Shadow Clan, naturally. It was no secret that her brother and his graceful Shadow, Saint, were preparing his subordinates for the dangers of the Second Nightmare. Tamar, Telle, Ray, and Fleur - two fearsome warriors, an elusive scout, and a healer. That was a good core for a cohort of challengers. With a few more talented people involved, they would stand a veгy good chance of becoming Masters.  
  
'When will I become a master?'  
  
Rain did not know, since things on that front were vague and progressing slowly. She finished her cocktail, called a waiter, and smiled at him, making the young man blush. 'Can we get the check?'  
  
Then, Rain looked at her friends and grinned. 'You do know what comes next, right?'  
  
Tamar and Telle looked at each other with uncertainty.  
  
'What?'  
  
Rain sighed languidly. 'Argh, these sheltered Legacies.'  
  
'Shopping!'