1596 Wind of Change

The sun had risen above the horizon, bathing Bastion in warm radiance. The morning was already in full swing, and so, Teacher Julius finally had to go.

"Goodness gracious, look at the time!"

He coughed, then looked at Beth with a smile.

"I am sorry, young lady, but this old man has to leave. I promised to meet a former colleague of mine, Master Rock. Now that he left the Academy to pick up his mace, it's tough for us to cross paths. If I miss him today..."

Beth shook her head.

"Don't worry, Professor. I'm meeting someone else, as well."

Soon, the elderly Awakened left. Beth continued to sip her hot chocolate, her weary gaze fixed on the beautiful white castle in the distance. Sunny, meanwhile, remained behind the reception desk, idly studying the latest issue of the Monster Almanach — an annual publication containing information about all the Nightmare Creatures humans had encountered in the last year.

His interest in these abominations was not at all theoretical. Powerful Memories demanded exceptional materials to be created, after all, and most of those materials came from the carcassess of slain abominations. Granted, a nobody like him rarely received an opportunity to trade for truly valuable trophies that Awakened brought back.

Especially here in Bastion, where the enchanters of Valor kept the best materials for their own use.

Still, if he knew where to search, he could hunt the suitable Nightmare Creatures himself.

'Instructor Rock, huh...'

Sunny couldn't remember when he last saw the giant man. It was strange to know that one of his first instructors had not only returned to the battlefield, but also Ascended at some point in time.

The news of the Sovereigns having conquered the Fourth Nightmare and the existence of the Dream Gates had truly invigorated humanity. With a vast and perilous frontier to conquer and make safe for the settlers, countless people had found new motivation to fight. Many of those less powerful were also burning with passion, wishing to help out however they could.

Some simply dreamed of forging a better life for themselves in the new world.

In any case, winds of change were blowing both over the dying waking world, and over the Dream Realm, which was killing it.

'I wish him luck.'

At that time, the Silver Bell rang again, and new customers entered the Emporium. Sunny rose from his seat to welcome them.

It was a young couple, both dressed in the kind of clothes Awakened usually wore outside of battle. Armor-type Memories often had layers, and those layers could usually be summoned and dismissed independently. So, many Awakened simply dismissed the heavier elements of their armor and walked around in the base layer, which could look like anything.

In fact, it often ended up looking peculiar at best, and bizarre at worst. Strangely enough, the latest trend in the fashion world was to imitate this unconventional style, which was why many idols and public figures were sporting strange combinations of bespoke gambeson jackets, linen trousers, tunics, bodysuits, and kimonos these days.

However, the couple was not trying to be fashionable. Both the young woman and the young man were seasoned Awakened warriors, which anyone who knew anything about the world could see at first glance.

There were a lot of people like them after Antarctica, all easily recognizable by the hint of icy coldness left forever in the depths of their eyes.

The young woman was petite, with mousy hair and an unassuming face. Her gaze, however, was calm and confident. The young man had unruly hair and mischievous eyes, a light smile never leaving his lips. The quiet seriousness of the woman did not fit well with the carefree attitude of the man, and yet, they looked oddly harmonious together.

The young man looked at Sunny and seemed disappointed for a moment.

"Oh! It's you, senior. Uh... where's that cute little assistant of yours?"

Sunny tilted his head a little.

"She's in the kitchen."

At the same time, the young woman glanced at her companion.

"Why are you asking?"

The young man laughed.

"No reason, no reason! Gods, Kim, give your husband some credit... I was just surprised to see Master Sunless welcoming us personally, that's all..."

The couple were, of course, Kim and Luster — Sunny's former subordinates.

The government had taken good care of the veterans of the Evacuation Army, so Luster was now as good as new despite having been gruesomely injured in Falcon Scott. Kim was doing well, too. Due to her unique Aspect, the unassuming young woman was in high demand, being treated as a precious asset by the government.

The two of them had married not long after the Southern Campaign was over. Sunny was still bewildered by that fact, but also happy for them.

"Kim! Luster!"

Beth waved at the young couple, and they joined her at the table. Sunny walked over to receive their order, then retreated into the kitchen.

'What a strange combination...'

Kim had ordered waffles, while Luster had ordered pancakes. Beth, who seemed to have worked up an appetite, joined Kim in deciding on the waffles, as well... the odd thing, though, was that they requested a bottle of hard liquor, too.

Shaking his head, Sunny looked at Aiko and said:

"Aiko... get the good stuff from the top shelf."

She put the abacus away and looked at him darkly. His assistant was of very small stature, so it might have seemed like Sunny was bullying her by demanding the petite girl to get something from all the way on the tompost shelf.

However, after glaring at him for a moment, Aiko simply floated to the ceiling, got the bottle of the expensive whiskey, and presented it to Sunny. That was her Aspect — the Dormant Ability allowed Aiko to move objects, while the Awakened Ability allowed her to move herself.

"Thank you kindly."

Taking the bottle, Sunny picked up three glasses and went to deliver the whiskey to the esteemed guests.