1630 Ravenheart

From where Rain stood on the slope, she could see most of the city.

Ravenheart was separated into three distinct districts.

The largest by far was sprawled on the dark slope of the fuming volcano, protected from the merciless cold by its heat. This was where millions of mundane humans lived. Their homes were mostly built from black stone, so it seemed as though the entire city was a part of the mountain, intricately carved from its slope by some divine being.

The second district was built on the grandiose stone bridge that stretched over a bottomless chasm toward a distant snowy mountain. It was much smaller than the first one, but still rather large. That Bridge was home to most of the Awakened citizens of Ravenheart - since only they could survive the bitter cold and the strong winds blowing across it.

And finally, a sublime palace that seemed to be cut from obsidian glass stood at the opposite end of the great bridge. The palace was visible from anywhere in Ravenheart when the weather was good, its dark and ethereal beauty never failing to take one's breath away,

That was where Queen Song and her clan lived, and where the Gateway to the waking world was located.

...The Dream Gate, meanwhile, was located directly opposite the palace, on the slope of the volcano behind the mundane district. Supply shipments and new settlers arrived from it almost every day, lured by the promise of a better life.

Rain spent a few moments enjoying the view of the city, then hurried to the gate. She couldn't wait to reach her den and climb under a warm blanket.

There were a few familiar faces preparing to leave the city just as she was returning. A group of young Awakened were gathered in front of the gate, all clad in enchanted armor and wielding Memory weapons. A few of the young men seemed to be paying rapt attention to her.

Rain sighed.

‘These guys again...'

Her teacher didn't say anything, but she could feel an almost palpable scorn radiating from her shadow.

One of the young Awakened waved at her and smiled:

"Rain! Coming back from a hunt?"

She lingered, trying to come up with a polite way to avoid a conversation. Sadly, her mind was blank.

Eventually, Rain forced out a pale smile:

"Oh... yeah, I tracked down the Nightmare Creature that has been harassing one of theorms recently, A Stone Worm, Yeah..., it's dead."

The young man stared at her somewhat intensely, wearing an expression that she struggled to discern.

‘Why does he always stare at me? I'm crazy, I know! No need to make your distaste so obvious!’

To add insult to injury, the guy was very handsome... like all Awakened were...

He used to be one of the mundane humans that had relocated to Ravenheart, like her, but challenged the First Nightmare last year. Being more or less the same age, they had known each other before, a little. But now there was a great divide between their status and social standing.

"Is there something on my face?"

The young Awakened coughed and awkwardly looked away.

"N-no, no... ah, we are just leaving to patrol. Anyway, good to see you... oh! That, uh... is that a Stone Worm hide? I was actually hoping to purchase some scales. Do you want to... want to meet tomorrow, maybe? I have some spare coin to spend..."

Rain gave him a strange look.

The guy was clearly wearing a full suit of enchanted armor. From the look of it, it was an Awakened Memory, and of a high Tier, at that. Why the hell would he need Stone Worm scales?

He noticed her expression and coughed again.

"Ah! It's for a friend of mine. A friend."

'Weirdo…!’

Rain shrugged.

"Aren't you going on a patrol? You won't be back for at least a week. Sorry, I don't want my house to reek like a slaughterhouse, so I'll sell the hide tomorrow on the market."

The young men blinked.

"Oh... right..."

She shook her head, nodded at him, and walked away.

As Rain was leaving, though, she heard the Awakened whispering among each other:

"Huh? Who was that? Why is she wearing trash, does she have no Memories?"

"You don't know? That's Crazy Rain! She's a mundane girl who goes around hunting Nightmare Creatures."

"What? No way..."

"It's true. You only Awakened this year, so you don't know. She's infamous here in Ravenheart, actually. Some say that she has killed more abominations than all of us combined... no one knows why she's still alive, but she is."

"Damn, Too bad she's a lunatic..."

"Both of you, shut up!"

"Yeah, shut up! And don't her a lunatic!"

"She might hear.."

Rain walked away, leaving the annoying whispers behind.

Passing through the city gates, she pursed her lips and complained to her teacher:

"Why do those guys always stare at me and try to stir up trouble? Can't they just leave me alone?"

Her teacher answered in an incredulous tone:

"You don't know?"

Rain raised an eyebrow.

"Know what?"

There was a long pause, and then her teacher chuckled.

"They stare at you because you're pretty! There's no one prettier than my little sister!"

She couldn't help but burst into laughter, making a few people give her strange looks.

'Right. Perhaps talking to myself in the middle of the street is not the best idea... especially considering that they already think I'm crazy...'

Rain shook her head derisively.

"Who, me? There are thousands of female Awakened in Ravenheart, and each of them is prettier than me. I doubt an Awakened guy would ever give me a second look."

Of course, she knew that she was... not too bad, really, appearance-wise, By mundane standards. But the effect of the Awakening on one's body was simply too great.

'Ah... they all have such smooth and silky skin. And no calluses. A weathered brute like me cannot compete…’

Her teacher scoffed quietly in the shadows.

"Gods. How dense are you, girl?"

He remained silent for a few moments, and then suddenly gasped.

"...Wait. Eye candy café!"

There was another long pause, and then a dejected sigh.

"We are definitely siblings…”