1632 New Developments

Rain was woken up by the delicious smell of breakfast. She spent a few minutes in sweet drowsiness, enjoying the warmth of her bed and the softness of her pillow, then yawned and sat up.

Immediately after, she winced.

'Ouch.'

Her whole body was sore, which was not at all unfamiliar, but still unpleasant. The rigors of hunting Nightmare Creatures were not something a mundane body could handle easily, so she needed a few days of rest to recover from the fatigue.

...Unlike the Awakened, who could bounce back from straining themselves to the extreme in a matter of hours.

Whimpering pitifully, Rain climbed from under the furs and performed a few simple stretching exercises. When her stiff muscles relaxed a little, she sighed and finally went to the makeshift kitchen situated at the opposite side of her den, where the tantalizing aroma of freshly cooked food was coming from.

Rain's lair consisted of one rather spacious room and a modest bathroom. It was mostly below ground and did not get a lot of light, since the only window was situated near the ceiling. As a result, most of the space was drowning in deep shadows. It was also one of the reasons why the rent was so cheap.

Her bed took one of the corners, while the kitchen took another The largest portion of the room was used for training, and lastly, the whole part near the entrance was meant for storing hunting spoils. The workbench where she mended her belongings and crafted new equipment was also there, littered with various tools, materials, and feathers for Fletching arrows.

It was a bit messy, and a bit too spartan. Few people would have wanted to live in a place like that, and Rain wasn't really living here either. Her time was usually divided equally between the den and her much more comfortable family home. Staying with her parents was nicer, but having a place of her own also felt good, not to mention provided endless convenience.

She wouldn't want her mom and dad to faint every time she came back to Ravenheart caked in blood and covered in bruises. They were already very disapproving of every decision she had made in the past few years. But what could she do? She couldn't really say that her shadow talked to her, teaching her how to kill Nightmare Creatures and telling her to do strange things.

Rain was already an adult and could make her own decisions now, anyway. She was twenty!

"Eat your breakfast before it gets cold, young lady. And don't forget your vegetables!"

Her teacher's voice made Rain flinch.

Pouting slightly, she sat down at the counter and moved the plate closer. Her sour expression did not last, though, swiftly replaced by delight. Rain was very hungry after the hunt - in just a few minutes, all the delicious things her teacher had prepared were gone.

Putting the utensils down, Rain said sedately.

"Thank you, teacher."

He was surprisingly good at cooking, for an evil deity. Rain never saw her teacher eat, but she suspected that he was secretly a gourmet... was that the reason he had chosen to haunt her? Because she stupidly recommended him a good brand of instant ramen once?

A cold voice scoffed from the shadows, sounding a little bashful nevertheless:

"What are you thanking me for? Proper nutrition is also a part of good training. This is actually nothing. Let me tell you, when I was about your age, I was dining on Great Monsters..."

After hearing that last part, Rain almost choked on water and glanced at her shadow fearfully.

'He's... he's joking. He must be joking. Is he joking?’

She stared at the shadow for a few moments, then hurriedly turned away.

Some time later, Rain left her den carrying the hide of the Stone Worm, She had left most of her weapons behind, but kept the tachi in a scabbard at her belt. No matter how safe the streets of Ravenheart were, she never parted with her sword.

There were a few errands Rain had to run.

First, she went to the town hall of the mundane district to report the completion of the mission. The Stone Worm had been harassing the farmers in the lowlands for a few weeks, so there was a reward set by the authorities for its extermination, which Rain now received with a wide smile.

There were a lot of tasks and missions issued by the town hall every day. Most issues were handled by the retainers of the royal clan or the servants of one of the vassal clans, but there were always things they didn't have time or numbers to handle promptly. Therefore, anyone could take on a task or two and receive a corresponding reward.

The town hall also handled many private missions, so there was never a lack of opportunities for unaffiliated talents. Of course, only Awakened took the combat missions. Unsurprisingly, Rain turned heads every time she came here, and every clerk knew her by name.

She had long learned to ignore the stares.

After receiving the reward, Rain studied the mission board for a while. She was not in a hurry to take on a new task, but it was a good way to stay informed about what was happening in and around the city.

'A new road crew? Strange...'

It seemed that the royal clan was assembling a new road construction crew, but its scale seemed much greater than all the previous ones. The pay was also much higher, which made the offer extremely alluring. However, it seemed like hazard pay - the description Implied a higher than usual danger lever of the new job.

Strangely enough, there was no mention of what region of the Dream Realm the new road was meant to connect to. More than that, from what Rain knew, there were already crews building roads to all neighboring Citadels. So... where would this new one lead, exactly?

In any case, that was none of her business. Rain had no intention of trying to get hired as a worker, and no one would employ her as a guard. Still, a lot of Awakened would probably leave the city once the construction started, so that was something to account for...

Deep in thought, she left the town hall and headed to the lower levels of the district, where the largest market was located.

Descending a set of steep stairs cut into the dark slope of the volcano, she asked in a confused tone:

"Teacher, doesn't that new road crew seem strange? Where are they building a road to?"

He remained silent for a while, then laughed quietly.

"Strange? No, not at all. As for where they are going, that's simple enough to guess, They are going east"

Rain frowned.

East? There was nothing much east of Ravenheart, only the Death Zones. Granted, the Sword Domain lay beyond them, but that didn't change the fact. What was the point of building a road to a wild and deadly region of the Dream Realm?

Her teacher was not making any sense - which, admittedly, happened quite often.

'He's just trying to sound smart to cover up his lack of knowledge. How clumsy!'

Smiling, Rain shook her head and continued descending the stairs.