1633 Public Sentiment

The market was a large and lively place, Numerous stalls were set up in the open, with more respectable storefronts visible here and there. Almost anything could be bought here, starting with materials harvested from the carcasses of Nightmare Creatures and ending with rare items brought over from the waking world via the Dream Gate.

Weapons, home appliances, fashionable clothes, crafting tools - whatever one needed, it could probably be found here.

Of course, items of true quality were sold in other, more exclusive places. Some of the elite shops were not even situated in the mundane district, so potential customers had to brave the chilling cold of the Bridge or send Awakened retainers to complete the purchase. Still, most citizens of Ravenheart visited the market when they needed something.

Rain knew the place well, and swiftly made her way to the area where the harvested materials were sold. After haggling with a familiar merchant, she sold off the Stone Worm hide and weighed her coin purse in her hand, full of satisfaction.

With this payment and the reward she had received in the town hall, Rain was flush with money! Best of all, she had managed to bring the Stone Worm down without suffering any wounds, so she didn't even need to hire a healer, Healers were rare, and therefore prohibitively expensive.

Awakened warriors were the ones habitually sustaining Injuries, but they also had a lot of spending power. Rain did not, so most of the money she had made in the past years ended up going toward her medical expenses.

But not today!

Whistling joyously, she left the market and made her way to one of the many public baths in Ravenheart. Due to the volatile nature of the region, there were numerous hot springs here, and soaking in them had quickly become the favorite pastime of the citizens. If there was such a thing as tourism in the Dream Realm, the capital of Song would definitely have been a popular destination due to its hot springs...

'Maybe in the future.'

Before entering the bathhouse, Rain stopped in a dark alley behind it. A shadow separated from her own and settled in the darkness, then waved casually. Leaving her teacher alone, she proceeded inside to enjoy some privacy.

'Aaahh...'

Soon, having taken a shower, Rain submerged her weary body into the hot water and felt the many pains bothering her dissolve in it. There were many mystical minerals in the mountains surrounding Ravenheart, so these springs were supposed to have healing effects, She didn't know how true that statement was, exactly, but visiting the baths was definitely both pleasant and reinvigorating.

She had mostly come here to clean herself, though. It wouldn't do to come home covered in sweat, grime, and the stench of blood. The cleaner and fresher Rain looked in front of her parents, the less they would worry about her. So, she made a habit of visiting a bathhouse after every hunt.

Still... it wouldn't harm anyone if she soaked in the hot water a bit more...

And maybe a bit more...

Any maybe a bit more...

After all, was she pressed for time? No...

As Rain was relaxing with her eyes closed, she couldn't help but hear bits and pieces of conversations that other people were having around her.

A woman's voice was tinged with worry as she said:

"Have you heard about Valor?"

Another answered with confusion:

"Huh? Heard what?"

"The King of Swords! They say that he was actually replaced by a vessel of Skinwalker, all the way back in Antarctica!"

"Shhh, lower your voice! Have you gone crazy, to talk about a Supreme that way? That... that can't possibly be true,"

"I'm telling you, it is! I heard it from my sister, who heard it from her neighbor, who heard it from an actual Master!"

"There is no way..."

"But it would explain a lot of things, wouldn't it? The resource shortages we're having. It's all because of those Valor people! It's like they want us to starve. And aren't they a bit strange? Why does everyone in the Sword Domain treat our Queen with such disrespect? That nasty nickname they gave her..."

"Hmm. That is strange, indeed..."

"If their king is a vessel of that thing, then who knows how many people there have already been taken! Gods, it's so scary. We are lucky to have come to the Song Domain. I hope they stay far away from us."

"But my cousins are in the Sword Domain..."

"You must tell them to be careful, then!"

Rain shook her head and slid deeper into the water to block out the hushed conversation.

'Aren't they being ridiculous?’

Strangely enough, that ridiculous rumor was quite persistent. She had heard some version of it many times already, almost as if someone was spreading it on purpose.

On the other hand, some hostility between the two Domains was inevitable. They were both still dependent on the waking world, after all, which meant that there was a competition for resources.

And competition bred resentment, especially when one's livelihood was at stake. Resentment, in turn, bred these kinds of rumors. Plus, a vast majority of mundane humans living in the Dream Realm had come from Antarctica - they were traumatized and anxious, sometimes letting fear get the better of them.

In any case, the public opinion of the Sword Domain was slowly changing for the worse in Ravenheart. There was nothing like that four years ago, but now, such sentiments were not uncommon.

"Why can't they just be happy that someone else is doing well?'

Rain threw the two scaredy women out of her heads and tried to enjoy herself in peace.

Eventually, she emerged from the bathhouse looking as smooth and pink as a newborn baby. The rugged leather outfit was stuffed into her pack, replaced by much more casual, neat and tidy civilian clothes.

The frightful monster huntress was gone, replaced by an innocent and lovely young woman.

If the group of young Awakened she had met at the city gate saw her, they would probably not believe their eyes.

Feeling a bit strange in her simple dress, Rain put on an ashcoat made from light, beautifully embroidered fabric, Pulling down its hood, she went to the dark alley, retrieved her teacher, and headed toward the upper levels of the city.

She was going home.