1634 Scenic View

Rain stopped at a popular bakery and spent a good chunk of her coins on a set of delicious pastries. Her younger siblings were moody teenagers now, but... she still liked to pamper them, when she got the chance. Or at least try to.

Teenagers, sadly, were not easy to pamper.

‘They're probably off to school already...'

Letting out a sigh, Rain walked along the steep streets of Ravenheart while enjoying the weather. It was on the colder side today, but the air was crisp and clear, not at all like the stale air of NQSC. There was no ash falling from the sky, either, so the breathtaking vista of the sprawling vertical city was not obscured.

Across the great stone bridge, a lonely peak pierced the sky, its slopes covered in snow. The beautiful palace of the Queen was hidden by a blizzard, though, so Rain could not enjoy its dark awe and splendor.

Her thoughts slowly drifted to the Awakened Nightmare Creature she was meant to find and slay. What Class would it be? How long would the preparations take her? What strategies would she employ, and what contingencies should she put in place?

Would she even survive that fight?

Thinking about that somberly, she ascended rather high, Now, she only had to get closer to the Bridge, and she would be home.

But before Rain reached the neighborhood where her parents lived, she noticed a crowd of people gathered on one of the scenic observation platforms. She stopped to listen to what they were talking about, curious to find out what the matter was.

Their voices sounded excited:

"Are you sure that he is coming back today?"

"I'm sure! He already delivered the last of this year's Sleepers to the cities in the south. There's nothing left for him to do but return."

"I'm so excited! I missed the day he departed, so I didn't see!"

"I saw. I want to see it again, though..."

Rain tilted her head, confused.

Who were they waiting for?

Her teacher suddenly mumbled in a subdued tone:

"Gods, how is it even worse now..."

Did she imagine it, or did his voice sound a little... grumpy?

Before Rain could ask, though, a swift shadow suddenly streaked across the city.

She looked up just in time to see a wondrous creature sailing through the sky. The weather was clear, so she could witness it even from a distance...

It was a dragon.

A beautiful dragon was flying above Ravenheart. Its somber scales were the color of the midnight sky, and with sparks of sunlight reflecting on them, the great beast was like a plece of starlit night that moved across the bright heavens. Its wings were open, casting a vast shadow, and it was that shadow that Rain had noticed.

A chorus of excited volces washed over her a moment later.

"It's him!"

"Night Singer!"

"Nightingale!"

"The Dragon Slayer!"

Indeed, the magnificent creature was Saint Kai, the Dragon Slayer. He had arrived a few weeks ago and then left to search for Sleepers scattered across the Song Domain during the winter solstice. Now, it seemed, the search was over.

Rain watched as the beautiful dragon flew across the great bridge and landed gracefully in front of the obscured palace. Soon, its great body disappeared into the blizzard.

She let out a quiet sigh, feeling a strange mix of emotions.

Funnily enough... she actually knew Saint Kai.

One of her tutors had some kind of relationship with the famous idol, so Saint Kai - although he wasn't even a Saint back then had graciously agreed to give her a few archery lessons. Later when he Transcended and became one of the pillars of the government forces, their paths crossed a couple of times because of her father.

Rain's father had nothing to do with battling Nightmare Creatures, but he was one of the senior government liaisons in Ravenheart. His work was administrative and mostly had to do with logistics, but still, that meant meeting exalted figures quite often.

In fact, Rain was familiar with Saint Jet that way, as well.

'Come to think of it...'

Wasn't it weird how many famous people she knew? Rain had even spent some time with Lady Changing Star herself! Of course, she was most comfortable with Effie... Saint Raised by Wolves... who for some reason used to live just a couple of houses down the street, back in NQSC.

Sadly, the government Saints spent most of their time in the waking world, and when they came to the Dream Realm, each was assigned to a specific region. Effie was far away, in Bastion, so they had not seen each other in a while.

The same went for Lady Nephis and Lady Cassia, both of whom had been kind to Rain in the past.

Of course...

All these renowned people might have been Transcendent warriors, but which one of them could claim to be a dark deity? In a sense, the weirdness of knowing her teacher toppled all her other strange acquaintances, combined.

In any case, Rain was just that a passing acquaintance in the lives of these exalted figures. She doubted they really remembered her, let alone had thought about her sometimes.

Why would they think about an insignificant mundane girl?

Her teacher, on the other hand, thought about her too much! It was hard to escape his nagging...

'Maybe I'll meet them again after becoming an Awakened.’

Throwing one last glance into the distance, where the graceful figure of the black dragon had disappeared, Rain turned away and continued on her way home.

Soon, she reached a pretty two-story house, opened the door, and walked inside with a bright smile.

"...Mom! Dad! I'm home!"

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Unknown to Rain, the figure of her teacher lingered outside, staring across the great bridge from the shadows.

Just at that moment, the snowstorm subsided, and the beautiful palace of black obsidian revealed itself on the steep mountain slope,

Sunny studied its breathtaking beauty for a few moments, and then pursed his lips a little,

His gaze was dark.

"Jade Palace..."

Being that close to another of Ariel's creations was rather uncomfortable.

Of course, it was also one of the reasons he had come to Ravenheart…