1715 There Are No Washing Machines in Ravenheart

'Well done...'

Rain had just killed an Awakened Demon, but hearing her teacher's praise was strangely just as validating. Or rather, it made the act of slaying the Huntsman feel more meaningful... in any case, it was a nice feeling.

Too exhausted to move and hurt all over, she simply lay in the mud and rested. Her gaze was directed at the sky, which was as empty as her mind. Feeling too lazy to think, Rain simply stayed still and savored the moment, unbothered by the encroaching cold.

By then, the ghostly flames had been mostly extinguished, with only a few small tongues of fire dancing here and there above the ravaged swamp.

While she was spacing out, her teacher disappeared somewhere. Soon, he emerged from the shadows, carrying her bow, backpack, and other things she had left on the outskirts of the forest.

Placing most of it on the ground, her teacher then walked over and carefully covered her with her winter coat.

"Here, don't catch a cold."

Rain smiled faintly, enjoying the warmth.

Her teacher, meanwhile, approached the corpse of the Huntsman, looked at it curiously, and gave it a little kick. Then, he circled it slowly, mumbling some nonsense in a hushed tone:

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"Chalice Knights... Chalice Knights... wait, don't tell me. Were these the poor bastards who drank Jade Queen's nectar? Soon, there was nothing but bestial need left... huh, they might be. What fools! Even my little sister knows not to drink everything given to her by shady characters..."

'It's you... you're the shady character!’

Rain wanted to scoff, but then decided against it.

Instead, she asked:

"Teacher... can I Awaken now?"

She knew the answer, of course, but hearing it again would give her confidence.

He smiled.

"Well. You've already made great progress and learned how to sense your essence. I'm pretty sure that absorbing the soul shards of this demon will be the final straw and serve as a catalyst to make your essence Awaken. Of course, that alone won't make you an Awakened."

Her teacher looked at the mud with a finicky expression, then reached into the shadows and pulled out an opulent wooden chair out of them. Placing it on the ground, he sat down and let out a satisfied sight,

"The problem is that there will be no vessel to store your essence, and no bridge between your soul and your body... at least that is how I understand it. However, you will be able to control your essence - and by controlling it, you will be able to create such a vessel, which is itself the bridge. A soul core. It will require time and effort, but with your level of enlightenment, I am sure that you will manage splendidly. When you do form a soul core... that is when you'll undergo a rebirth and become Awakened."

Rain listened to his voice silently, then sighed.

"...How long will it take?"

Her teacher chuckled.

"I have no idea. That wholly depends on you... but, from what I am told, learning to control essence is the hard part. Forming a soul core is relatively easy, albeit tedious. So... a few months? A year? We'll have to wait and see."

'I bet I can do it in a day.’

Rain didn't voice her defiant thoughts and smiled.

"What comes next?"

Sitting comfortably on his luxurious chair, her teacher smiled.

"Ascension is a step of rising above one's mortal nature. You will have to accumulate power by improving the quality of both your soul essence and your body. That can be achieved naturally, by slowly refining the essence, or by slaying powerful enemies. Once your essence reaches a qualitative change, the last step is to reform your soul core. That's... a bit tricky."

He shook his head.

"The easier part of the process is learning how to access your Soul Sea. The harder part... sadly, it requires the knowledge of a soul refining technique. In the past, many such techniques were known to us humans, but sadly, that legacy has been lost. These days, everyone simply relies on the Nightmare Spell."

Rain raised an eyebrow.

"So, what? I can't Ascend? Should I just go and jump into a Nightmare?"

Her teacher furrowed his brow.

"Can't Ascend? Who do you think your teacher is? Of course, you can Ascend! The fact that no one else has a soul refining technique doesn't mean that I don't, or that I can't invent a new one from scratch."

Rain turned her head and stared at him dubiously.

'So does he have one, or is he going to invent one?’

Well, it didn't really matter to her now. She was not even an Awakened yet, so Ascension seemed distant enough to not feel real.

Even the Awakening...

Rain sighed.

"...I still want to challenge a Nightmare."

She had decided that she wouldn't, but that didn't prevent her from fantasizing about becoming a carrier of the Nightmare Spell.

Her teacher stared at her somberly.

"What? Why?"

She pursed her lips.

"I just want to, okay? Fine, it's great that i can form a soul core and Awaken! But will i really be an Awakened? What kind of Awakened doesn't have an Aspect? Not to mention... not to mention that 1 won't be able to receive any Memories from the Spell! All those Awakened in Ravenheart are walking around in suits of shiny armor and wielding enchanted weapons. Clothes that clean and repair themselves! Quivers that never run empty! Best of all, they can just summon and dismiss their equipment instead of having to lug it around while climbing mountains!"

The Path of Ascension was too laborious without the Spell. Rain was willing to accept that finding her Aspect and Flaw would take her a long time, perhaps even longer than becoming a Master.

But the Memories... simply not having to launder her clothes would be worth it!

Her teacher suddenly laughed.

"So this is what it's about? Memories?"

Rain glared at him for a few moments, then gestured weakly to herself.

"A weird apparition like you might not care, but look at me... soot, ash, sweat, swamp water, mud, blood, and gods know what else! This is what I have to deal with after each hunt. There are no washing machines in Ravenheart, either! I'll need to wash it all by hand or pay a laundress... that's after I pay the healer to patch me up. And speaking of patching things up, these clothes need to be mended, too!"

Her teacher shook his head, laughing.

"Oh... oh, I see. So it's not devastating enchantments and mystical powers that you envy, you just don't want to do laundry..."

She opened her mouth, speechless.

"That's not true!"

He smiled crookedly.

"It's not?"

Rain gritted her teeth.

"...I also don't want to carry all that weight on my back!"

Her teacher leaned back and laughed again.

"Unbelievable..."

After having his fill of laughter, her teacher shook his head and stood up. Looking around, he picked up a piece of charred wood and scribbled something on it with his nail.

His nail cut the wood like a diamond blade.

A few moments later, he nodded in satisfaction and tossed the piece of wood to Rain.

"Here, catch."

She raised a hand and caught the piece of wood, then hissed quietly when her side pulsed with pain.

‘Ouch...'

Bringing the strange gift to her face, Rain studied the letters carved on its surface.

They read:

"You have received a Memory."

She frowned.

"What's this?"

Her teacher shrugged with a smile.

"Treat it as a Memory coupon. What, did you think that only the Spell could reward people with Memories? Well, wrong! Your teacher is awesome, so he can make Memories just fine. Let's see... you killed an Awakened Demon this time, so I'll make you an Awakened Memory of the Third Tier."

Rain blinked.

"You can make Memories?"

He returned to his chair and grinned.

"Sure! And, unlike the Spell, I'll even customize it to your liking. More than that... listen, I really don't want to badmouth the competition... but the Spell, it really has no imagination whatsoever. Why limit Memories to powerful weapons, enchanted armor, and mystical tools? There are so many mundane things that would make for an amazing Memory! That bodysuit of yours? I'll Memorize it, no problem. Do you want a pillow that is always cold or a magical toothbrush? Your teacher can make that happen, as well."

He looked at her with a smug expression.

"Hell, I can even make a roll of toilet paper into a Memory. If you don't go overboard, it will never run out."

‘Why the hell is that bastard talking about toilet paper…’

Rain stared at her teacher for a while, then blinked a couple of times.

"Are you telling me that you have been able to create Memories this whole time?"

He nodded.

"Strange question, but yes, sure."

Slowly, Rain's blood started to boil.

"So why... the hell haven't you made me any Memories, then?! Was watching me suffer fun for you?!"

He glanced at her with an offended expression.

"Huh? What are you talking about? I was always planning to arm and equip you. It's just that you are still a mundane human. Until you form a soul core and Awaken, your soul can't even contain Memories. Blame yourself for being so slow! What's so hard about becoming the first human in history to Awaken naturally, huh? Do I ask for much?!"

She took a deep breath and turned away, staring at the sky again,

'What an insufferable, cheapskate deity! Who... who can make Memories…’

Slowly, a few grandiose thoughts entered her mind.

After a while, though, Rain sighed.

"Well, It's good enough. Teacher is amazing! Sure, 1 won't have an Aspect, but having Memories is already great. Receiving them directly from someone Instead of earning them from the Spell is a little weird... I guess, it's not much different from how Legacies Inherit Memories from their clans, though."

Her teacher frowned, then chuckled suddenly.

"Hey, now that I think about it, aren't you a Legacy yourself? Your big brother can provide everything a Legacy clan can, and much more on top of that."

She looked at him scornfully.

"Oh? Teacher is like a Legacy clan now? So, do you have a Legacy Relic, then?"

He tilted his head with a smile.

"A bunch of them, actually."

Rain blinked a few times.

'Does he really?'

Actually, she wouldn't be surprised.

"...Well, what about a Citadel, then?"

He grinned.

"A Citadel? Sure, I have one of those... it's a huge temple built of black marble, shrouded in eternal darkness, Granted, it's a bit of a fixer-upper, but what can you do? My Citadel is almost as old as the universe. The ambience there is great.”

She stared at him silently.

"That's great. Speaking of great, since it's teacher, there has to be a Supreme in our clan, no doubt. Should I consider myself royalty? Might as well, right?"

Her teacher coughed in embarrassment.

"Ah... well... technically, our clan doesn't have a Sovereign at the moment..."

Rain's eyes gleamed with triumph.

'His capacity for nonsense has a limit, after all!'

"...but we do have a Supreme Devil. I used to bully the little bastard a lot in the past, but now that he's all grown-up, it's not very fun."

She took a deep breath, turned away, and stared at the sky.

The sky was indifferent and beyond reach.

'...I give up.’