1817 Shelter and Food

Among Tamar's Memories, there was an enchanted cloak. Its enchantment wasn't very useful in their current situation, but the cloak itself was just what Rain needed.

Harvesting two long branches from the dead trees, she used it to create a makeshift stretcher. Rain held the front end of the stretcher, while the rear end dragged on the ground. For the young Legacy, it wasn't the most comfortable way to travel - but if she was suffering, she did not let it show.

As for Rain herself, she quickly warmed up from the strain. Hauling Tamar over a long distance in this manner was not very plausible, but luckily, they weren't going far just yet.

For now, their plan was to find shelter and wait for about ten days before summoning the Echo. That much time should be enough for the survey team to return to the main construction camp, or at least get close to it. So, all Rain and Tamar had to do was survive that long.

It was especially important that Tamar remained alive, because with her death, the Echo would disappear as well. Then, the survey team would be in peril...

Remembering the porters she had become friends with, Rain grimaced. She had put on a cynical facade in front of the young Legacy, and although there was some truth to her words, in all honesty, she wasn't willing to save herself by sacrificing those people, elther.

Plus, Rain was not helpless. Although the Moonriver Plain were much more dangerous than the wild reaches around Ravenheart, she still stood a fair chance of surviving here.

‘I'll take it one step at a time.’

For now, they had to find shelter. Then, procure food and water. After that... she was going to think about it later.

Soon, the ruins drew near. They were too large to be a solitary building, but too small to be the remains of a town. Stone walls rose from the ground, once tall and magnificent, now crumbling and covered in cracks. Rainwater was spilling out of the cracks, and it seemed as if the ruins were weeping.

There was no telling what that place had been once, and currently, Rain wasn't that interested in solving the mystery.

Instead, her gaze fell on the ground and grew tense.

'Damn it.’

She stopped without approaching the ruins and gently placed the stretcher on the ground. Tamar's face paled from the jolt, but she stubbornly refused to let her pain show.

"What is it?"

Rain studied the ground with a somber expression. A few moments later, she sighed.

"There are prints on the ground."

Tamar turned her head to look.

There were indeed traces of something having stalked this area in the mud. The prints weren't too large, and were clearly animalistic in nature. Judging by their size and depths, the creature - or creatures - weren't too large.

Still, it was a cause for concern.

The ruins Rain had hoped to take shelter in were occupied.

The two young women looked at each other silently.

Eventually, Tamar asked:

"What do you want to do? We... we can go further away from the canyon."

Rain remained silent for a while, then slowly shook her head.

"There's no point. Whatever it is that lives in the ruins will be faster than us, by far. Once it crawls out and catches our scent, it will find us no matter how much distance we can cover before nightfall."

Which wasn't much distance at all.

The state of the paw prints hinted that they had been left many hours, but less than a day ago. So, Rain suspected that the inhabitant of the ruins was a nocturnal predator, Even if she hauled Tamar away with all her strength, they were not going to outrun a Nightmare Creature.

She sighed.

"It has to die."

Rain looked at Tamar, then asked her to summon her Memory weapons. Soon, a small arsenal appeared from sparks of light on the ground in front of her.

The brutish zweihander was a beautiful and fearsome weapon... not to mention utterly deadly. Unfortunately, Rain could barely lift it - she could muster just enough strength to swing it from side to side in a crude and graceless arc, but there was no hope of doing that with any semblance of speed and accuracy. Which meant death in an actual battle.

To her delight, Tamar possessed an enchanted bow and a quiver of arrows, as well. But... Rain could not even draw the bow. It was too heavy, and one would have to have a bear's strength to bend its limbs.

There was a beautifully austere battle spear, as well. Sadly, it was even worse than the zweihander. While its weight wasn't as great, the balance was different, so Rain almost toppled while trying to lift it.

Dejected, she stared at Tamar for a few moments, gaining a new appreciation for the younger girl's slender physique.

'How is she so strong with a body like that?’

The young Legacy had been brandishing the brutish greatsword with elegant ease, and even Jumping over canyons while wielding it. Awakened possessed Immense physical prowess, but Tamar seemed especially strong, or at least knew how to utilize her strength especially well.

Shaking her head, Rain gave up on the youg Legacy's main weapons.

Instead, she only picked up a kindjal - a simple double-edged dagger with a straight blade and a sharp tapered tip. It had no guard or decorations to speak of, but there was a lethal beauty to its simplicity.

The length of its broad blade was a bit too long to be a dagger, but a bit too short to be a short sword.

Rain weighed it in her hand and nodded.

"I'm off."

Tamar grimaced and tried to crawl off her stretcher.

"Wait..."

She picked up the enchanted bow and pulled the quiver closer to herself, then sat up, facing the ruins.

"If it's... if you can't handle it, draw it into the open. I'll try to bring it down from the ground."

Rain studied her for a few moments with a neutral expression.

She was trying not to smile.

Tamar's intent was gravely serious, but with her legs outstretched and fixed straight by splints, she looked a bit comical, sitting there on the ground like a doll.

Eventually, Rain gave her a nod, gripped the enchanted dagger, and headed for the ruins.

The shape of the weapon was only marginally more advantageous than her hunting knife. However, it was a genuine Memory - and of the Ascended Rank, no less.

Even if Rain could not use any of the dagger's enchantments, its sharpness alone would be of great help.

Feeling tense and uneasy, she silently entered the ruins. A few moments later, her figure was swallowed by darkness.

Tamar was left sitting in the mud, gripping her bow tightly. The jacket Rani had lent her fell to the ground, but she could not even feel the cold. Looking down at the jacket, she noticed that it was lined with a fine alloy mesh - the stitching was very neat, but it had clearly been reinforced to become a makeshift piece of protective gear by hand.

She stared at the Jacket for a few moments, surprised, Tamar was no stranger to all kinds of armor- however, as a Legacy, she had always been meant to become an Awakened. So, the armor she was knowledgeable about was in the form of powerful Memories and defensive Aspect Abilities.

Such a minuscule, mundane method of protection as lining one's jacket with reinforced alloy would have never crossed her mind.

It was so strange.

Rani herself was strange.

She seemed... too calm, and too capable. Most of all, her mental fortitude was entirely out of place. By all accounts, she should have been terrified and on the verge of panicking. It was Tamar who was supposed to be the one to maintain her composure in any situation, as an Awakened warrior should.

And yet, why did it seem as if Rani was more prepared to face the horrors of the Dream Realm than she was?

As if, for her, all of it was just a normal Tuesday.

‘...Can she be a Valor spy?’

That would be reasonable. However... somehow, Tamar did not believe it.

She gritted her teeth and faced the ruins.

For a few minutes, there was only silence.

And then, the silence was torn apart by a chilling roar.

Deep within the ruins, a heavy object collided against the stones. She heard a faint sound of something sharp grinding against the ancient walls, One of them seemed to crumble with a loud crack.

Tamar raised her bow and prepared to draw the string.

A while later, a slender figure walked out of the darkness.

Rani's clothes were soaked with blood, but the blood was too dark to have come from a human. Her expression was nonchalant.

She was wiping the blade of the enchanted dagger on the sleeve of a black military bodysuit as she walked.

Approaching Tamar, the strange porter flashed her a smile.

"An Awakened Beast. We were lucky."

Tamar looked up, staring at the mundane girl silently.

...Is that what she calls lucky?'

An Awakened Beast was supposed to be a herald of death for a mundane human. Even the government soldiers used heavy suits of mechanised armor and powerful rifles to face one.

Soon, Rani dragged her into the ruins. Finally sheltered from rain, Tamar felt a little better.

They entered a spacious hall in the central structure of the ruin. It was dark inside, but that did not prevent her from seeing the body of a large beast laying on the stone floor. The lower part of its body was buried under rubble, and its throat was savagely slit, seeping with blood.

Sitting down on the floor, Rant leaned back tiredly.

After a few moments of silence, she suddenly smiled.

"Here's shelter. And look..."

She pointed at the dead abomination.

"There's food."

Her smile dimmed a little.

"Now, I just need to find water…”