1818 Moment of Respite

Even though did not show it, she was still reeling from the short, but lethal battle with the Awakened Beast.

A creature like that was not something she had not faced before, but those encounters had always been preceded by careful planning and preparation. Challenging an abomination as powerful as that blind was a chilling experience.

Luckily, the beast had been slumbering deeply when Rain entered the ruins. She stalked them silently, found the enemy, and managed to devise a feasible plan without alerting the abomination.

Then, she cut her arm and stirred the Nightmare Creature awake with the scent of blood. Luring it out of its lair, Rain toppled a badly damaged stone wall on the beast, burying it under rubble. The enemy was immobilized - even if only for a few moments. So, she rushed in, dodged its deadly claws deftly, and sliced its throat open with the sharp blade of the Ascended dagger.

It all ended in a heartbeat. Rain wasn't even injured... of course, she could have very well lost her life, One mistake was all it took to die. If she had hesitated even a little or had been a split second too late to dodge the monstrous claws, the beast would have been gnawing on her bones by now.

But it was dead instead.

So... It all worked out, in the end.

‘I don't like it'

Rain had grown accustomed to hunting Nightmare Creatures, but the lack of control in this Improvised battle made her feel uneasy. She didn't like gambling with her life.

Letting out a sigh, she glanced at Tamar and then went about making a fire. The young Legacy had a tinderbox Memory, so Rain did not have to go through the tedious motions of forcing the damp wood to catch flame by hand. Soon, the ruin was illuminated by warm orange light, and the two of them were warming themselves in front of the fire.

The rain had turned into a dribble by then, so she couldn't collect rainwater anymore - at least not conveniently.

'It would be easier to wait for the canyon to fill with water once again.'

She would walk there later. Rain had to scout their surroundings, anyway.

For now, though...

She weighed the enchanted in her hand once again, then sighed and rose to her feet.

"Wait here."

Dragging the carcass of the dead beast outside with some effort, Rain dressed it down and salvaged a fair deal of meat. She had no salt to cure it, and there was not enough wood to smoke it. So, most of the meat was destined to spoil shortly.

If they were lucky, though, it could last them just long enough.

Returning Inside, Rain skewered the meat on sticks and began to roast it. It would have been better to do it over coals, but open fire worked, as well.

Tamar observed her actions silently. All in all, she was holding up well despite the terrible injuries.

After a while, the young Legacy asked:

"Rani... who are you?"

Rain raised an eyebrow.

"What do you mean? I'm a porter. Before that, I was a laborer in the main construction camp. They pay members of survey teams much more, so I volunteered."

Tamar scrutinized her for a few moments, then shook her head.

"You are too skilled to be a simple porter. Archery, swordsmanship, wilderness survival. Most of all, your mentality is not that of a mundane person."

Rain looked at her dubiously.

"I'm sorry, Lady Tamar... but have you spent a lot of time with mundane people?"

The younger girl frowned.

"What do you mean?"

Rain smiled and concentrated on the roasting meat.

"I mean that you Legacies are a bit isolated from the rest of us mundane folks. You grow up being trained by your clans instead of going to school, and only attend the Academy for a month or two to make connections with fellow Sleepers. Then, you assume an Important position and spend all your time surrounded by Awakened warriors. So, how would you even know what a mundane person should be like?"

She glanced at Tamar and shrugged.

"Well, alright. I might be a bit of an outlier. But, still... why can't I have great combat skills? Every child in the world is trained to be able to defend themselves. I trained especially diligently, both in school and with private tutors. That was because once upon a time, a Nightmare Gate opened near me. So, I was motivated."

Rain paused for a moment, and then added with a shrug:

"I worked long and hard to prepare myself for the First Nightmare. It was just that my Nightmare never came - I wasn't chosen by the Spell, and remained mundane. There is no inherent difference in skill or determination between mundane people and Awakened, wouldn't you say? It's just a matter of luck."

Tamar studied her for a bit, then asked:

"That might have been so in the past, but the situation is different now. With your talent and skill, you stand a great chance of surviving the First Nightmare. So why didn't you apply to challenge one? All you had to do was return to the waking world, and let the Spell take you. Your training would not have been wasted."

Rain remained silent, then sighed.

"People don't just risk their lives for no good reason. I value my life a lot, you know. Because there is someone out there who treasures it."

Her expression turned somber.

She hesitated for a few moments, and then added:

"My older brother died challenging a Nightmare. My parents have suffered enough, so I don't want to risk putting them through that pain again."

Rain did not expect the proud Legacy to understand - Legacies were a ruthless bunch, after all.

But, to her surprise, Tamar seemed to feel her words deeply.

The younger girl lowered her head and looked at the ground.

After a while, she said stiffly:

"...Mine too."

Rain looked at her in confusion.

"What?"

Tamar sighed.

"My older brother died challenging a Nightmare, too. He was much older than me, and very talented. The pride of our clan. He became a Master at an early age, and challenged the Third Nightmare after a while. And died there."

Her expression was stoic, but her voice was tinged with heavy emotions.

Eventually, the young Legacy shrugged.

"Well, the age gap between us was too big, so I did not know him well. I just thought I'd share... since you did first."

Rain looked at her quietly for a while, then turned away.

"Thank you for sharing."

With that, she pushed a skewer of roasted meat into Tamar's hand and rose to her feet.

"Now eat. I'll go scout the surroundings a bit."

Rain left the ruin and explored the area a little, eating the meat as she walked. Eventually, she made her way to the edge of the canyon.

All in all, the situation seemed much less dire than she had expected. There did not seem to be any more Nightmare Creatures around, which meant that they would probably be able to hide in the ruins for many days.

Now, she just needed to collect water.

Sitting at the edge of the canyon, Rain sighed and looked down, into its dark depths, waiting for the chasm to start weeping.

‘What will I use to collect water? Unless Tamar has a suitable Memory, her helmet will have to do…’

At that moment, her body suddenly tense, and her eyes widened.

Her expression froze.

Because she saw...

Out there in the depths of the canyon, a massive shadow was moving.

Grabbing onto the rocks with its countless hands.