1820 Waiting for Rain

In the end, her worst expectations had not come true.

But it was very close.

The Tyrant had not happened to be there by coincidence. It was, in fact, following their scent. Rain saw from afar as its ugly shape rose from the canyon, pulling itself onto the stone with a dozen monstrous hands. The creature looked like a hideous giant that was on the verge of toppling under the weight of its bulging hump.

However, it wasn't really a hunchback. Instead, the mound on its back was simply there to allow for countless arms to protrude forward, all ending with terrifying claws.

The most eerie part was that the abomination looked vaguely human-like, as if it had been a person once. If it had, then it must have been eons ago.

After climbing out of the canyon, the Tyrant spent some time wandering near the edge, its oversized head low to the ground. Dragging Tamar away with all her might, Rain couldn't help but glance back, into the distance, from time to time.

She couldn't understand what the Tyrant was doing.

But when it wandered to the ruins, spent some time there, then stumbled south, she realized something.

The abomination was sniffing for their scent.

That would mean that they were done for... only it didn't. Because there was one detall playing to their advantage.

The Tyrant was blind.

Rain herself had blinded it, putting two arrows through its eyes. So, even though the creature seemed hellbent on following them, it couldn't simply rush in their direction. It had to follow their scent laboriously, stumbling across rough terrain as it forged a path forward.

Its hatred seemed to be truly boundless, though, because even after a few hours, the ghastly figure could still be seen far in the distance, wandering the plain in search of them. They couldn't lose it.

'Curses...'

Rain was slowly increasing the distance between them and the tyrant. Her arms were on fire, as if her muscles would melt at any moment. Her breathing had turned hoarse, and she felt like she was drowning. It took all of her resolve and determination to keep pushing forward, dragging the makeshift stretcher behind her.

Just a few hours had passed, and she was already in such a sorry state, So, despite the fact that the distance was increasing, Rain did not feel at ease.

That was because she knew that she wouldn't be able to keep this pace up indefinitely. More than that, once the night fell, they would have to stop.

She would need to rest. Tamar was not doing too well, either with her injuries, what she needed was to remain still and recuperate, not be jolted painfully every few moments as her stretcher dragged across bumps and creases. Her broken legs had to be a cause of constant torment.

Even if Rain could push through her exhaustion and Tamar could endure the rough handling, it was simply too dangerous to travel across the Moonriver Plain at night. Despite the abundance of moonlight, it would still be dark, and the fact that there was a Nightmare Creature pursuing them did not mean that there would be none ahead of them.

'Bad, bad. It's bad!'

Unlike them, the Tyrant did not need to rest. It was not afraid of the darkness, either. So, Rain had to get as far away from him as possible before nightfall, so that they would not be caught until dawn.

What would happen if the abomination did find them?

Sucking in a hoarse breath, Rain glanced at her shadow again.

Her teacher was mercurial and unfathomable, but she was pretty sure that he would not let her die.

What about Tamar, though? Would his benevolence extend to a stranger from a Legacy clan? She wasn't sure.

The lives of the survey team members were also tied to Tamar's life.

So, Rain could not stop.

'I'm going to die...'

It felt like she would die from the strain long before the abomination caught her.

And yet, she persisted.

...By the time the sun disappeared behind the horizon and the three moons rose into the sky, she could barely feel her hands. But she could not see the Tyrant anymore, either.

Rain found a stone mound to shield them from the wind and placed the stretcher down. Then, she simply fell to the ground, breathing heavily.

She was so tired that she couldn't move. Tamar wasn't much better, laying motionlessly on the stretcher. Her face was even paler than before.

The barren land was bathed in moonlight. In the darkness, its harsh desolation looked beautiful and shrouded in mystery. A myriad of bright stars shimmered in the sky, veiled here and there by heavy clouds.

"Rani... are you alive?"

Tamar's voice sounded weak.

Despite everything, Rain couldn't help but chuckle.

"It seems so."

After a while, she asked in a subdued tone:

"Do you think that the Queen's authority extends this far? If we die... will we turn into pilgrims?"

Tamar remained silent for a while, then sald evenly:

"Of course. Otherwise, you would have already fallen Into the First Nightmare."

Rain sighed. She couldn't argue with the truth.

Some time later, she finally mustered enough strength to sit up. Leaning on the cold surface of the stone mound, Rain stared at the sky dejectedly.

She was suffering from thirst even more than she did from physical exhaustion. So, she hoped that rain would come.

‘With a name like mine, can't the heavens be a little merciful?'

A strong enough downpour could wash away their scent, as well.

Deciding to be optimistic, Rain asked Tamar to summon her helmet.

They consumed some of the remaining meat in silence.

Afterwards, the young Legacy looked at her somberly and said in a subdued tone:

"...You can just leave me behind and save yourself, you know."

If Rain wasn't slowed down by the need to drag her wounded companion along, she would have had a much higher chance of escaping from the Tyrant. That much was obvious.

She scratched the back of her head and answered half-heartedly:

"Aren't we heading for the Lake of Tears? That is where your clan's Citadel is located. What am I supposed to say if I show up there alone? Sorry, 1 left your daughter to die because she was too heavy? I doubt they'll welcome me warmly after that..."

Tamar looked at her silently for a few moments. Unexpectedly, a faint smile eventually appeared on her face.

"...I'm not that heavy."

Rain sighed.

"And I'm not that strong. Now... go to sleep. You need rest. We'll move on at dawn, so there's no time to waste. I'll take the first watch and wake you up at midnight."

Tamar wanted to say something, but just nodded silently in the end. It had been a terribly long day, and she must have been mentally exhausted from dealing with the pain and mental burden. Soon, her eyes closed, and she swiftly fell asleep.

Rain studied the sleeping girl's face for a few minutes, then took a deep breath and stared into the darkness.

Despite the terrible fatigue, despite being tormented by thirst... she still knew what she had to do.

'If you want to get out of here alive, all you need to do is Awaken.’

That was what her teacher had said.

So, Rain sat motionlessly, felt the flow of soul essence within her, and concentrated deeply, making it revolve faster and faster.

After a while...

She felt cold drops falling on her face. A minute later, the rain had turned heavy, shrouded the world with a rustling veil.

Never losing control of her essence, Rain smiled, picked up Tamar's helmet, and crawled out from beneath the overhanging stone ridge.

Placing the helmet on the ground, she allowed the downpour to pelt her freely and continued to force her essence into a raging whirlpool.

Deep within her soul, another grain of sand was being formed.

‘Teacher is always right…’