1825 Edge of the Abyss

The storm shrouded everything in impenetrable darkness. The roaring thunderclaps reverberated across the plain, and a deluge of water was falling from the sky, as if the heavenly floodgates had shattered under the immense pressure, dooming the world to be drowned.

Frequent bolts of lightning tore apart the darkness, replacing it with blinding light. And somewhere below, the tidal hum of the colossal waterfall was fusing with the raging song of the furious storm.

Rain stood at the edge of the abyss, looking at the black sky with a resentful expression.

Behind her, Tamar was looking back, at the hideous shape of the pursuing Tyrant.

There was nowhere for them to run.

"Rani! The Tyrant. . . "

Rain looked at the sky, and then took a deep breath.

Then, surrounded by the raging storm, she sat on the ground at the edge of the abyss. Crossing her legs, she placed her hands on her knees, and closed her eyes.

In a flash of lightning, her tranquil figure looked incredibly out of place.

She exhaled slowly.

‘Focus. ’

Rain concentrated on her soul. A radiant river was flowing within her, forming a furious whirlpool. At its heart, beautiful crystals of essence were being tempered by the crushing pressure.

The melodious song of her soul was louder than the storm, and much more compelling.

She couldn't hear Tamar anymore.

‘Form. Clash. Awaken:

Nothing else mattered.

Behind her, Tamar looked at her mundane companion in despair. Noticing that Rani was sitting on the edge of the abyss, unmoving, she was stunned for a moment. Then, a look of guilt and shame twisted her beautiful face.

She assumed that the older girl had completely exhausted her strength, both physical and mental.

It was already an incredibly valiant feat, to have persisted for so long without collapsing. Rani possessed enough willpower and conviction — or maybe stubbornness — to put most Awakened to shame.

But everyone had a limit.

"Rani. . . "

Tamar gritted her teeth.

Despite the terrible flood pouring from the shattered sky, the Tyrant never seemed to lose their scent. It moved slowly, keeping its head low to the ground. Countless hands were supporting its weight, sinking deep into the mud.

Rain was fully focused on her soul. Now that she did not have to walk or pull the heavy stretcher, the measure of control she could exert over her essence had increased. The radiant whirlpool spun even faster, and the pressure at the heart of it had increased even further.

There were countless crystals of solid essence there, by now, each no larger than a grain of sand.

They collided against each other chaotically, making her entire soul tremble. That trembling used to happen rarely, but now, there was no stop to it. It was as if Rain's soul was in the middle of an earthquake.

But it was not enough. Still, it wasn't. . .

‘Fuse! ’

Rain did not know whether her mental cry was a command, a request, or a desperate prayer. It was simply her will, expressed in a single world.

And just at that moment, either by coincidence or responding to her cry. . .

Two of the radiant gemstones collided. However, this time, they were not repelled by each other.

Instead, both cracked, and then. . .

Merged.

A sense of indescribable jubilation drowned her heart.

‘Finally. . . ’

After the first pair, it was as if an invisible catalyst had been added to her soul, starting a chain reaction. More and more of the tiny essence crystals became covered by a net of fine cracks, and then seamlessly fused with each other. Then, the larger gemstones consumed the smaller ones, or merged with those of the same size.

The process was incredibly violent, resembling the catastrophic ignition of a thermonuclear bomb.

The merging of the essence crystals reminded

Rain of nuclear fusion. . . the wondrous process that kept the distant stars burning in the cold, empty sky.

And it was indeed as if a star was being born at the center of her soul.

There was blinding light produced by the fusing gemstones. There was heat, as well. The very heart of her soul had turned into an incandescent, luminous sea, and she couldn't sense individual crystals anymore.

The whirlpool of essence was being slowly absorbed into that radiant sea.

‘. . . The soul core is forming’

Indeed, hidden in the sea of light, a soul core was being built within her soul. And that nascent core. . . was like a bridge between her soul and her flesh.

Rain felt as though a miniature star was burning in the center of her chest: waves of heat were radiating from it, slowly reaching her empty stomach and lacerated shoulders, then her tortured arms and legs, then her aching hands and feet.

Under that heat, her bones, muscles, organs and blood vessels were being rebuilt and revitalized.

She was being reborn. She was becoming stronger, faster, healthier. . .

It was euphoric.

With each second, his transformation was becoming more profound.

After some time had passed, the star burning in his chest finally cooled down. The luminous sea dimmed, and from it. . .

A radiant sphere was revealed, shining beautifully upon Rain's soul.

The heat was replaced with a soothing coldness.

That coldness washed over her body, taking away all the aches and discomforts that had been accumulated there over the past six days. Then it moved up, reaching her mind and soothing it.

She slowly opened her eyes.

‘Is this. . . what it means to be Awakened? "

Rain felt. . . powerful. Her body was suffused with ferocious strength, startling endurance, and boundless vitality. Her senses were sharper. Even her mind seemed to have become more profound, somehow.

Soul essence flowed freely through her body, seeping into her bones and muscles. It felt richer and more responsive. . . almost palpable.

The soul core was at the heart of it all, serving as the bridge between tangible and intangible.

A tired smile appeared on Rain's face.

‘I did it! ’

Lost in the depths of a furious storm, sitting on the edge of a bottomless abyss, surrounded by darkness, and pursued by a harrowing abomination. . .

The first human of the waking world had just

Awakened without taking upon the curse of the

Nightmare Spell.