1829 A New Way

Before the sun set, the minions of the dead Tyrant accepted the death of their ruler. Rain watched with a dark expression as the countless hands stopped moving for a while, and then started to claw at the flesh of the dead abomination.

The corpse was going to come undone much sooner than she had expected, allowing the monstrous hands to prowl freely.

She wanted to be as far away from the swarm of them as possible when that happened.

Soon, she was pulling Tamar's stretcher through the mud once again. It had been torturously hard and exhausting before... but now, Rain did not feel any strain at all. It was so easy that the bitterness of her past efforts seemed like a joke.

She was slowly coming to terms with the fact that she had become an Awakened, smiling brightly from time to time.

Tamar was slowly coming to terms with it, too.

The young Legacy spoke from the stretcher:

"But... how, exactly, did you do it?"

Rain considered if she should break into a sprint, but then decided against it.

"Well. It is hard to explain with words... the first thing you should know is that natural Awakening works in reversed order from the one induced by the Spell. You must learn how to sense and control your essence first, and form the soul core later."

She remembered her early days in Ravenheart.

Back then, she had barely known her teacher...

"Your essence has to Awaken first. There are a few ways to make that happen, but the only one I know of is to absorb the essence of Awakened creatures."

Tamar shifted quietly on the stretcher.

"Soul shards used to be extremely precious in the waking world, so very few mundanes ever had a chance to acquire many of them before. The situation is even more dire now... with how many new Awakened and Masters are out there, everyone is striving to saturate their cores."

She paused for a moment, and then added scornfully:

"You must be very rich, Rani, to have acquired so many. For a simple porter."

Rain grinned.

"Who? Me? No, I'm a bit poor... actually, I never once managed to buy a soul shard. I just went out there and hunted down Nightmare Creatures, one at a time. Mostly Dormant, and a few Awakened."

The young Legacy let out a long, exasperated sigh.

"You crazy mundane girl..."

Rain chuckled.

"Well, anyway. Then, you have to learn how to sense and control your essence. That part is the hardest. I don't really know how to describe it, since there are no words in human language to do something like that. Plus... it's a bit of an impossible task, to begin with. How do you describe the sense of balance? How do you describe colors to a blind person? It's like that.

Well, you should know — I am sure you, Awakened, struggle all the time to explain various things to mundane people. I mean... we, Awakened."

She paused for a few moments, then continued calmly:

"The last part is to form the soul core. That is what I have been doing ever since we've met. The process is rather simple, if a bit tedious. You just need to control your essence and make it flow in a circle, like a whirlpool. If you do it long enough and well enough, your essence will start to solidify. And then, at some point, a chain reaction will start, birthing the core. That is how you become Awakened, and what is what happened to me yesterday."

Tamar remained silent for a while.

Eventually, she asked:

"That doesn‘t really make sense. You couldn‘t have learned all of this on your own... someone extraordinary must have guided you. But that is not even the issue. Alright, I'll accept that you are a mundane girl who habitually hunts down Nightmare Creatures. That much is theoretically possible, at least. But it would also mean that you should have stayed comfortably in a well-defended city during the last and most sensitive part of your Awakening. There was no reason for you to work as a laborer in a road construction crew... even without taking into account that such a job would slow down the process of refining a soul core, it is simply beneath someone of your ability."

Rain coughed awkwardly.

Now that she had decided to share the truth with Tamar... how much, exactly, was she supposed to share?

She couldn't reveal the identity of her teacher, because that was not her secret to share.

As for the rest...

She hesitated for a moment.

"To tell you the truth, I got myself into some trouble in Ravenheart. So, I was advised to disappear from the city for a while."

Tamar scoffed.

"I'm not surprised."

She remained silent for a while, then asked in a serious tone:

"One thing that I can't understand, Rani... is why you have decided to share your secret with me."

Rain stopped and turned around, looking at the young Legacy with a hint of dark amusement in her eyes.

"Well, the cat was out of the bag after I killed that Tyrant. So, I had two choices... either tell you the truth or toss you over the edge of the waterfall.

Although... I might still choose the latter..."

She stared at Tamar for a moment, then turned around and exploded with laughter.

"Gods, the expression on your face... relax, it was a joke. Plus, why would I keep it a secret? I want as many people as possible to know. That way, fewer kids will be dying in the First Nightmare. Fewer of them will be sent into a literal Death Zone on the winter solstice like you were, too..."

Rain couldn't help but be giddy. The intoxicating feeling of strength and potency permeating her body, the pride and relief of having finally accomplished the goal she had been pursuing for so many years, the promise of a gentler future that she could potentially help usher in...

It was enough to make her head spin.

While she was basking in joy, Tamar's cold voice resounded from behind:

"Rani... you are a bit naive, aren't you?"

Rain glanced at her in confusion.

"What's that about?"

Laying on the stretcher, the young Legacy looked at the sky tiredly and let out a long sigh.

"You absolutely cannot tell anyone about how you Awakened. At least not while you are so weak and lack protection. If you knew what's good for you, you really should have tossed me over the edge of the waterfall."

Rain blinked a couple of times.

"What? Why?"

The younger girl shifted and looked up at her, her gaze somber.

"Just think about it. The entire power hierarchy of our world is built around the Nightmare Spell. The entire economy too, more or less. Those who wield power can do so because they control the resources people need to survive. Awakened warriors are one such resource... perhaps the most important one. Now, you possess something that can render all that authority meaningless. What do you think will happen to you when those in power learn about your existence?"