1830 Resistance to Change

Rain stopped, feeling her sense of joy dim a little.

A perplexed smile appeared on her face.

She wasn't a fool, so she had considered these things, as well. But didn't the importance of her discovery far outweigh such details?

"But it can save countless lives."

Tamar looked away and shrugged.

"Can it? Maybe in the short term... but what will happen when these new and untested Awakened have to face the horrors of the Dream Realm?

What can cowards who refused to face even the First Nightmare do? Surely, they will buckle and break, leaving humanity defenseless. In that sense, what you offer is poison, not salvation."

She sighed.

"That is not my opinion, by the way. That is just one example of what others can say... will say... to justify harming you and suppressing your discovery. They might not even do it out of malice, but out of sincere belief. Because what you offer does not just attack their authority, but also their identity. That, as well, is built around the Nightmare Spell for many."

Rain dropped the harness into the mud.

"You can't be serious."

Her voice was calm, but her eyes weren't.

Because... she could easily imagine a world where Tamar was right.

Take the two Domains, for example. On the surface, the royal clans were benefactors to those hundreds of millions of mundane people who now lived in the Dream Realm.

But if one looked at it differently, the citizens of the Domains were hostage to the royal clans. They could only be safe if their Sovereign protected them, and could only really attempt the First Nightmare — and thus step on the path to greater power — if the Sovereign or one of the Sovereign's vassals allowed them to.

In the future, when more and more people of the waking world settled in the Dream Realm, that would become the cornerstone of the authority of the royal clans.

Would they be willing to share that authority?

And then, there were the Legacy clans below the two royal houses, whose culture and identity were irrevocably connected to the dreadful challenges of the Nightmare Spell. They were already prohibiting their scions from saving themselves from the trial of the winter solstice by entering the Dream Realm in advance, purely out of belief that warriors had to be forged in fire.

Would they accept Awakened who had not faced the First Nightmare? Or would they find the very concept offensive?

The consequences of Rain's achievement went far deeper than she had considered.

Tamar sighed.

"I am deadly serious, Rani. You... should speak to the extraordinary person who guided you to Awakening, at least, before making any decisions.

They had to have been more aware of the repercussions than you are. Be mindful, though.

Make sure that they have your best interest in heart before listening to what they have to say."

She paused for a moment, and then added in a subdued tone:

"Until you do, no one must know that you are not a carrier of the Nightmare Spell. We... we'll tell them that we had no choice but to cross the realm boundary and leave the Song Domain while escaping from the Tyrant, and that you had your First Nightmare as a result. That will work as a temporary measure, at lest."

Rain looked at her soberly.

Tamar was young... but she was a member of a Legacy clan, as well. She served the Queen as a vassal.

So, she was the exact type of person she had warned Rain against.

'Can I trust her?'

After what they had experienced together, Rain wanted to believe that she could. But in a sense, covering the truth would mean betraying the trust of Tamar's clan and Queen Song.

Would she really do that?

Rain sighed.

"One thing I don‘t understand, Lady Tamar... is why are willing to hide this secret for me."

The young Legacy looked at her from the muddy stretcher. Her face was pale and stern... which was a bit of a comical look for such a young woman.

After a while, she looked away, remained silent for a moment, and said stiffly:

"Well, aren't you a member of my survey team? I am responsible for your well—being... as a superior.

So... if something happens to you, a stain would be left on my reputation. And I value my reputation very much."

Rain stared at her silently, keeping a straight face.

'... Adorable!'

By that time, the night had already fallen, and the three moons were high in the sky. So, she couldn't see Tamar's expression very well.

She did see something else, however.

With a sigh, Rain unsheathed her hunting knife.

Moonlight glistened on the sharp blade as she bent down.

Tamar seemed to flinch when she saw the knife.

"W—what are you doing?"

Rain cut the harness, separating it from the stretcher, and looked at the young Legacy with a neutral expression.

"I'm sorry, Lady Tamar. I'm afraid you'll have to go over the edge, after all."

Tamar's eyes widened.

"W—what?"

Rain stared at her for a few moments, then laughed and pointed in the direction of the edge.

"You might not see it from the ground, but actually..."

Out there in the darkness, far below, a scattering of lights was shining faintly through the water vapor.

It was the city built by Tamar's clan on the shores of the Lake of Tears.

Rain stood up and started dismantling the harness.

"The plan was to reach your clan's Citadel, but I don't really know how to cross all the canyons that stand in our way. It would be much easier to climb down from the plateau and reach the city. So... summon the brightest luminous Memory you have.

We're going down."

Tamar was looking up at her with a frozen expression.

After a while, she scowled in outrage.

"Rani, y—you! Was that supposed to be funny? !"

Rain shrugged.

"I don't know. I thought it was pretty funny..."

Soon, they left the stretcher behind. Tamar was strapped to Rain's back with the rearranged harness, holding onto her shoulders with trembling hands. Before, Rain would have never dared to climb a slick, sheer slope while carrying such a heavy burden — but now that she was an Awakened, nothing seemed impossible for her anymore.

With the bright light of the luminous Memory illuminating the vertical surface of the weathered stone, she carefully started the descent. Her physical strength seemed inexhaustible, so all she had to do was pay attention and keep in mind how far from the wall her center of gravity was.

That said, the Moonriver plateau was terribly high, so reaching the Lake of Tears was taking an eternity. The Weeping Goddess flowed down on both sides of them, but the stretch of the slope Rain had chosen was relatively dry.

At some point, she sensed Tamar's tension and started talking to calm the younger girl down.

Rain talked about all the things she was looking forward to after Awakening.

Like not having to do laundry or carry a heavy backpack while climbing mountains...

Mainly these two things.

And having soft hands.

"That is what you were worried about?"

Tamar's voice sounded incredulous.

Rain grinned.

"Listen, Princess Tamar... you might not know it, but humble laborers like me take skincare very seriously."

The young Legacy remained silent for a while, then sighed in embarrassment.

"No, actually... I get it. Girls from Legacy clans all secretly look forward to becoming Awakened. We train really hard, you know, so by sixteen, your hands are a nightmare in and of itself..."

Rain laughed.

It was already dawn by the time they reached the water.

Rain had been worried that she would have to swim to shore, but there was no need.

Tamar's luminous Memory was very visible in the dark night, so the inhabitants of the city had long noticed a strange spark slowly crawling down the sheer cliffs.

So, there were boats waiting in a semicircle around the base of the cliffs, with armed Awakened on them.

Now, their dreadful journey was truly over.