1831 Abstract Concept

Dressed in a comfortable night—gown, Rain was sitting on a bed. The bed was wide and soft. The sheets were immaculately clean and crisp... a far cry from the cold cradle of mud she had been sleeping on for many days.

It was also much nicer than her own bed in Ravenheart, so... she had nothing to complain about

The room itself was spacious, but austere. The Citadel of Clan Sorrow was cut into the cliffside, so the walls surrounding her were that of rough stone. The furniture, however, was quite elegant and beautifully made.

There was a single arched window in the room, opening to the pale lilac expanse of the evening sky. The roaring of the Weeping Goddess seemed quiet here, somehow, but also constant, like a persistent hum.

The air was fresh and smelled of water.

The peaceful, but uniquely austere mood of the somber Citadel helped Rain imagine easily where Tamar's overly serious demeanor had come from.

She sighed.

Things had happened fast after the two of them reached the Lake of Tears. First, Rain and Tamar were brought to the city built on its shore — it was much smaller than Ravenheart, but still lively. The architecture style was distinctly different, as well, favoring flat roofs that served as gardens — as opposed to the capital, where most roofs were slanted and covered by tiles to avoid snow and ash accumulating on them.

They did not spend much time in the city, though.

The Saint of Sorrow was currently away, but Tamar's mother was there. After receiving news of her daughter showing up severely wounded, she immediately sent retainers to retrieve her.

Rain and Tamar were taken to the Citadel, which was cut directly into the vertical side of the great waterfall and oversaw the city from high above.

Tamar was treated by an Ascended healer. Rain, meanwhile, was welcomed as a guest of Clan Sorrow.

She met the matriarch of the clan, as well as a few elders. Everyone had treated her graciously — from the Awakened retainers and mundane citizens to the members of the direct family.

Tamar had briefly shared the story of how the two of them had ended up in such a sorry state, including the fake version of Rain's Awakening.

Everything seemed fine.

And yet, Rain was in a heavy mood.

That was because she had heard a lot, and inferred even more, from the conversations with the locals.

The war... seemed imminent.

Some of the people she had talked to were aware of it, while some were not. Nevertheless, everyone was alarmed and uneasy, as if there was invisible tension permeating the air.

Many things had happened after the survey team left the construction camp and lost contact with the rest of humanity.

The conflict between the two Great Clans had grown much more dire. Valor continued to demand that Silent Stalker and Master Dar of Maharana Clan were handed over, and Song continued to refuse. There were all kinds of unrest on the streets of Bastion and Ravenheart... NQSC, even.

There had been protests and violent clashes between the followers of the opposing Domains. A large crowd was chanting threateningly in front of Clan Song's compound in the waking world.

Someone had tossed makeshift incendiaries at the fortress walls surrounding the location of the King‘s Dream Gate in the Northern Quadrant. A few young Legacies had already fought openly, devastating a public venue. They were arrested by the agents of the government, but the government itself was behaving strangely, as if frozen by fear, indecision, and internal conflict.

And those were only the outward signs.

The more dire omen was how deserted the Citadel of Clan Sorrow seemed. There were Awakened warriors, but too few of them. There were members of the direct family, but only the less powerful ones.

Which told Rain one thing.

The Queen was secretly mobilizing her forces.

The road Rain had helped build was almost complete, and soon, legions of the Song Domain would march on it, heading to Godgrave.

The war, which was an abstract concept before, was almost palpable now.

It was much sooner than she had expected.

And so, Rain was sitting quietly on the bed, watching as the sky turned dark beyond the window.

Finally, when all sunlight was gone and deep shadows devoured the room, a familiar presence emerged from them.

Her teacher leaned on a wall and applauded quietly. His smile was as carefree as it had always been.

"Congratulations! You are an Awakened now."

Rain looked at his dark silhouette sternly.

"... Where the hell have you been?"

He gave her a vague shrug.

"Oh, you know. Here and there. Hiding in the shadows, taking a beach vacation, sitting idly on my dark throne. Why? Didn't you do well without me?"

Rain lingered for a few moments, then let out a heavy sigh.

"I wouldn't call it "well", exactly... but, sure.

Actually, I did fine."

He grinned.

"Fine? You are the first human of your world to have Awakened without that pesky thing... what do you call it? Oh, the Nightmare Spell. Great job, Rain! You really made me proud."

She silently extended her hand and opened her palm.

"Give it, then."

He raised an eyebrow... or at least she thought he did, since she couldn't see his face clearly.

"What?"

Rain frowned.

"My Memory! You promised me a Memory after I killed the Huntsman."

Her teacher laughed quietly.

"Right. Don't worry, I will. I'll even throw in one more for that Awakened Tyrant. And a third one as a free bonus, for a return customer."

He hesitated for a moment, and then added more sincerely:

"But really, good job. Awakening, killing the Tyrant... and not leaving that girl to die, too. I'm not sure that I would have done the same as a Sleeper."

Rain looked away, feeling a little embarrassed.

"... Thank you. Anyway, I was never really a Sleeper.

That would have been embarrassing — I'm way too old to be one..."

After that, neither of them spoke for a while.

Eventually, Rain asked:

"So, what now?"