1832 The Other Side

Her teacher sighed.

"That is up to you. Now that you have Awakened, we have more options. You are not a prisoner of the Song Domain anymore... so, if you want, I can take you to safety, to wait out this entire mess."

She faced him, not saying anything.

He chuckled.

"What? I have nice places to take my student to as well, you know."

Rain smiled faintly.

"Says the man who has lived in my shadow for four years."

The joke was just like countless others she had told in the past, but today, it did not land. She didn‘t feel it.

Rain shook her head.

"You know I wanted to Awaken because I wanted to be strong. Have I become strong to do nothing, then? Running away and hiding in a safe place sure sounds nice, on the surface. But do you really think that I would want to?"

Her teacher sighed.

"No, not really."

He hesitated.

"So what do you want to do?"

Rain remained silent for a long while.

"Tamar... told me to consult the person who had guided me to Awakening. Before trying to do anything. So, what? Was she right? Will I be silenced if I try to share my knowledge with the world?"

He walked over to the window and looked outside, his silhouette almost indistinguishable from the shadows.

"Well, that kid has some sense. What she tried to tell you was a bit too dramatic and extreme, but fundamentally, she is right. Of course, there are ways to go about it. You won't be able to offer this knowledge to the world freely, but the Sovereigns will not discard it, either. After all, it is another tool they can use. So, as long as you are willing to let them use it as they see fit, and are ready to accept that it will only ever be used sparingly... I can arrange that."

He turned around and smiled.

"Alternatively, you can entrust it to me. Your friend said that this knowledge should not be shared while you are weak and lack backing. However, she is wrong about one thing. You do not lack backing, Rain, since you have me. I might not be capable enough to stand against the Sovereigns... just yet... but I more than capable enough to disseminate information without being caught by them."

Rain frowned.

"What would be the point, though? You might be able to avoid them, but people who receive the knowledge from you won't be. So, the royal clans will just suppress them instead of me. Even if they fail to uproot the knowledge entirely, there will be countless victims. That is not what I want."

Her teacher grinned.

"Smart girl. Well... actually, that is all beside the point. In truth, you don't really need to hide that knowledge for long."

She raised an eyebrow, confused.

"I don't?"

He nodded.

"I'd say... by the end of this war, all your concerns will become moot. Or, well, we'll have bigger problems to solve at the very least. So, keep your secret safe until the war is over. Who knows, the situation might change entirely by then."

His voice grew a little lighter.

"In the meantime, work on becoming a Master.

Maybe find a way to manifest a Flaw and an Aspect. Right, now that you have a soul core, we will have to teach you how to enter your Soul Sea..."

Rain listened to him with a smile.

At some point, she said:

"Teacher."

He paused.

"What?"

Rain remained silent for a moment, then said quietly:

"I am going to participate in the war."

For the first time in a long while, he seemed a little rattled.

"What kind of... have you lost your mind?"

She shook her head slowly.

"No. Actually... I've been thinking about it for a long time."

Rain sighed.

"Tamar said that I am naive, and I know you think that way, too. But I am not. Yes, I tend to assume the best of people, even if some of them don't deserve it. But I am not a fool."

He blinked a couple of times.

"Assuming the best of people who don't deserve it is pretty much the definition of being naive."

She looked at her soft hands, illuminated gently by the moonlight.

"In any case, the Sword Domain is going to declare war on the Song Domain. If the King of Swords wins... then, an occupation will follow. I can't just sit on the sidelines and watch without doing anything."

He pursed his lips.

"What, do you think that the Queen is any better?

Valor might end up being the ones who initiate the war, but make no mistake. Clan Song wants it just as badly. More than that, what will change if one Sovereign replaces the other? Isn't it all the same for the simple people who live in the Song Domain? Not to mention that you don't belong to that Domain, to begin with. You are from a government family."

Rain looked at him somberly.

"A government family? Sure, I am. But, Teacher... for how much longer will the government exist? Once there is only one royal clan instead of two, do you really think that they will allow an independent power to remain without submitting to their rule? Neutrality will become a myth, by then. And anyone who did not join the right side in the war will be branded as a sinner. That includes government families like mine."

He lingered for a moment.

"I'm not sure about how much longevity the government has left, but you are right. The winner will certainly consolidate their power."

She shook her head.

"And yes, it matters which Sovereign rules the Song Domain. The royal clans might seem the same to you, but do you really think that the King of Swords, who is synonymous with Bastion, will treat Ravenheart the same as his ancestral home? That he won‘t siphon resources from the conquered lands to feed the central regions? More than that... by the end of the war, many people would have died. Citizens of the losing Domain will be occupied by the people who have killed their brothers, sisters, parents, and children on the battlefield. It won't be a peaceful process."

Her teacher sighed.

"Well... you are right. The King of Swords might certainly do something like that. And there will be some tension, and therefore some measures of suppression."

Rain smiled bitterly.

"And lastly, I do believe that both sides want the war. But, teacher... the people I know are in the Song Domain. Tamar and her clan. The porters from the survey team. The road managed who went out of his way to help me make more money while staying safe. The merchants who used to buy the materials I harvested. Our neighbors in Ravenheart, who brought us food when we arrived from NQSC. Young Awakened guards who welcomed me back from the hunts. And so many more. They are all good people. These are the people I know, and they are the ones who will suffer if the Song Domain falls to the army of Clan Valor. So..."

She looked away.

"I can‘t claim any sort of moral superiority by choosing to fight for the Queen, but I can't step back and do nothing, either."

Rain took a deep breath and looked at her teacher resolutely.

"So I‘ll do what I can. Little as it may be."

He stared at her for a long time, not saying anything.

Before, she could see a hint of his expression, but now, his face was entirely shrouded in darkness.

Rain suddenly felt nervous. She had never seriously angered her teacher before... did she do it now?

Eventually, though, he let out a long sigh and said in a grumpy voice:

"... You're not making my job easier, you know that?

Bah! What a troublesome student!"

Her teacher shook his head in dejection.

"But... I sort of expected that to happen."

He cursed.

"What can I say... I guess we are joining the army of Clan Song. Why the hell not? One side, two sides, three sides... at this point, what‘s the difference..."