1855 Sudden Assignment

Considering how fast the road to Godgrave had been built, Rain really should not have been surprised — but the warcamp of the Song Army was being constructed at astonishing speed.

Just a few days had passed since they made it to the collarbone of the dead deity, and yet it already resembled a city. Of course, it was mostly a tent city, considering how hard it was to deliver building materials to this dreadful land.

The lack of materials was not the only problem they faced, either. There was something much more dire slowing down the construction — the fact that the camp was endlessly besieged from all sides by the vile abominations of the scarlet jungle.

The jungle might have been pushed back, but it did not disappear. Even after being reduced to ash, it was already crawling back from the cracks in the ancient bone. The sun-bleached surface of the plain was covered by red moss and vermilion grass once again, and one could see the jungle grow and spread at astonishing speed with a naked eye.

The soldiers of the Song Domain had spent each day battling the constant onslaught of Nightmare Creatures, stalling them until the fortifications were completed.

Luckily, most of those Nightmare Creatures were newborns. They were immensely powerful and absolutely lethal, but at least the Awakened could contend with them… albeit just barely. When something more terrible emerged from below the ground or was allowed to grow truly dangerous by devouring other abominations, the Ascended officers and Transcendent generals took to the battlefield.

The Seventh Legion had participated in defending the camp, as well. Rain had lost count of how many arrows she let loose. It was a good thing that she was wearing the Puppeteers Shroud — its bracer, made from lusterless black leather, was still in one piece. A mundane one would have been already shredded by the string of her powerful bow.

Tamar, Ray, and Fleur had also participated in the battles, earning more than a few scratches here and there. Luckily, Saint Seishan was an experienced leader and stellar commander, so the casualties suffered by the Seventh Legion were among the lowest among all divisions of the Song Army.

Still, their first week in Godgrave had been a horrid nightmare.

...Invading a Death Zone was just as harrowing of an endeavor as it sounded.

There were no nights here, so counting days was a bit hard. Nevertheless, Rain was more or less sure that it was currently early morning. She splashed some water on her face in the washroom attached to the barracks and was in the process of preparing breakfast for the cohort when a subtle voice suddenly resounded from her shadow:

"Rise and shine!"

Rain turned her head and stared at the shadow.

She was rarely alone these days, and there were many powerful people in the camp. So, there were few opportunities for her to talk to her teacher — they had only exchanged a few words since the army entered Godgrave.

Rain could barely remember the last time she spoke to him so little. She missed her teacher's company… although, of course, she would never admit it aloud.

"What happened?"

He would not have risked exposing his presence without a reason.

Her teacher sighed.

"I won't be able to accompany you for the next few hours. So, be careful… and don't stand out."

Rain frowned.

"What? Why?"

There was no answer. Instead, Tamar — who had woken up even earlier — walked over to the fire, covering a tired yawn with a hand.

"Who are you talking to?"

Rain looked at her, remained silent for a moment, then smiled.

"Just talking to myself."

Tamar shrugged and sat down, then looked at the fire.

There was supposed to be a large kitchen with dedicated staff to feed the legion, but it had not been built yet. So, for now, each cohort was provided with supplies to cook for themselves.

"Are Ray and Fleur still asleep?"

Rain nodded.

Recently, she had been surprised to learn that the other two members of the cohort were an item even since meeting at the Awakened Academy. They did not show it often — which was understandable, in current circumstances — but the two were more or less inseparable.

Rain's addition to the cohort had saved Tamar from the awkward fate of being the perpetual third wheel.

The Legacy girl sighed.

"Alright. Then, come with me."

Rain raised an eyebrow.

"Huh? Where are we going?"

Tamar rose, swept her hair back, and dusted off the pauldrons of her armor.

"There is a big meeting happening at the command pavilion. Two members of our cohort are supposed to escort Lady Seishan as honor guards. Congratulations... try to look presentable and don't do anything outrageous."

Rain's eyes widened. She took the pot off the fire, placed it on the ground, and hurriedly stood up.

"Wait! Why our cohort?"

The younger girl shrugged.

"Probably as a sign of respect to my father. In any case, I received orders to arrive immediately. There's no time to waste, so let's go."

Rain blinked a couple of times, glanced at her shadow, and then followed Tamar to the center of the Seventh Legion's encampment.

They met the Queen's daughter there. That was the first time Rain happened to be so close to Saint Seishan — she tried very hard not to stare, but it was a bit hard. The woman was just too beautiful, mysterious, and mesmerizing.

And there was a… a presence about her. Rain couldn't quite explain it, but she felt funny near the graceful princess of Song. It was as though a strange sense of calm and tranquility had overcome her.

At the same time, her blood turned cold in her veins, and her tattoo moved slightly, constricting her arm.

Tamar and Lady Seishan exchanged a few words. They seemed to be acquainted with each other, albeit on a very shallow level — which was not surprising, considering their backgrounds. Finally, Tamar introduced Rain to the princess.

Saint Seishan looked at her and smiled elegantly.

"Awakened Rani. I'll be in your care."

Rain felt frozen for a moment, then bowed awkwardly.

"M—my lady."

With that, they headed to the command pavilion, which was situated in the heart of the camp.

As they walked, the wind carried the sounds of battle from the exterior of the encampment. The fighting never really stopped, so Rain had grown somewhat used to it. She still shivered, though, earning a stern look from Tamar.

'What? It's not like you're not having nightmares almost every night, yourself!'

She made an attempt to look calm and fell behind Saint Seishan, playing the role of an honor guard… which was a bit ridiculous, really, considering that the task of protecting a Transcendent was not something an Awakened like her could do.

Soon, they reached the command pavilion — which was a larger tent reinforced with some masonry — and walked inside.

There, Rain almost lost her composure.

'D—damnation!'

The "big meeting" Tamar had mentioned… the Legacy girl seemed to be the queen of understatement!

The diffused sunshine was pouring through the blue fabric of the tent, flooding its interior with cold light. Bathed in it…

Was everyone.

Every Saint of the Song Army, and most of the prominent Masters serving the Queen. There were a few Awakened, as well, most of them escorting their officers like Tamar and Rain were.

Rain had already been overwhelmed from being in proximity to one Saint…

But now, she was looking at dozens of them!

There were other princesses other than Lady Seishan, as well…

She took a shaky breath and barely managed to regain her composure.

However, a moment later, that composure was shattered by a sudden, explosive thought.

'I'm… I'm not going to meet the queen, am I?!'