1930 Bright Future

'That... is Ki Song's mother.'

As Sunny thought that, surprised, the memory dissolved into the stream of Cassie's consciousness, and another one surfaced.

Orum, now an Awakened, was standing at the edges of a crowded square in NQSC. His figure was more muscular, and his posture was upright and confident — a far cry from the skinny refugee youth he had been once.

He had survived the end of the world... mostly thanks to Song Jiwon, who had taught him how to harvest soul shards, absorb them to grow stronger, summon the runes to learn about his Aspect and Attributes, manifest Memories, and much more.

On that day many years ago, they had fought their way out of the flood of the infected... the Nightmare Creatures, as they were called now... and then joined a caravan of other survivors, escaping across the desolate wasteland toward the Northern Quadrant Siege Capital.

Song Jiwon — now known as Ravenheart — was also responsible for the fact that he had survived the winter solstice a few months later. They parted ways after that, thrown into different corners of the Dream Realm by the Nightmare Spell, but Orum often thought about his savior and wondered how she was doing now.

And her daughter, who had been born soon after the two of them Awakened.

That was why he had been glad to have stumbled into her today, out of the blue.

Ravenbeart had not changed much. She was still easygoing and confident, quick to smile, and a little mysterious... it was only that there seemed to be a hint of heaviness hidden deep in her beautiful eyes now, and she seemed more mature.

"Take this."

She handed him a snack from a street vendor — the same synthpaste cake everyone was having, powdered by an excessive amount of artificial spices — and looked at the huge projection towering above the crowd in the middle of the square.

On it, a solemn ceremony was taking place.

Orum received the snack with gratitude and looked at the screen, as well. Ravenheart took a bite, grimaced, and then pointed at the projection.

"Oh, I recognize some of those guys. Let's see — the one who looks like he only has one expression should be good old Warden of Valor... he's not that bad, actually, just terribly stiff. The handsome devil next to him is Immortal Flame. Then... goodness gracious, is that who I think it is? That must be him. Nightwalker... so the rumors are true! He does exist. Let me see, who else..."

There were more renowned warriors beside them.

The people whose image was projected above the crowd were the best and the brightest humanity had to offer... the militant heroes of the new era. Everyone had fought relentlessly to make sure that the world did not fall apart, of course, but these remarkable individuals had carved their names into history.

And now, they were about to do it again.

Orum glanced at Ravenheart and asked, feeling a little self-conscious:

"You know them?"

She shook her head.

"No, not really. Small people like us rarely get the chance to brush sides with the big guys, don't we?"

He smiled.

Ravenheart was being falsely modest. Sure, her fame was nowhere near someone like the Warden or Immortal Flame, but she was far from ordinary. After all, she was one of the rare individuals who had earned a True Name from the Spell, as well.

One of the people in the projection, meanwhile, was finishing a speech.

"...but we endured. We survived. We thrived! The Nightmare Creatures are now fully eradicated across countless cities, and we have reclaimed our planet. However... it is still too early to celebrate. There are still many more cities that must be liberated, and many more people that need to be saved. And so, to achieve this glorious goal and protect humanity from the perils of the uncertain future..."

The speaker took a dramatic pause, and then finished with a bright smile:

"I am proud to announce the formation of the United Human Government!"

The crowd exploded with applause and cheers.

The old countries were gone, and in the chaos of the new era, the survivors had been united around local powerhouses — mostly Awakened champions. There was a lot of cooperation between various stronghold cities, especially recently... in no small part because those same powerhouses were often fighting side by side in the Dream Realm when they slept.

So, this was welcome news. People felt as if a semblance of stability was returning to the world.

Ravenheart clapped her hands together, as well.

"Good. Things were getting crazy in some parts of the world lately... both worlds, I mean. There are all kinds of lunatics out there, some holding significant power. This new United Government will probably push them out, slowly but surely."

Orum nodded.

"Yeah. I'm just glad that some kind of universal order will be established. Honestly, I felt like we'd devolve back to feudalism for a while."

He was actually powerful enough to become a feudal lord himself... a small—time lord, perhaps, but a lord nonetheless. Still, that was not the world he wanted his sister to grow up in.

Ravenheart gave him a curious look.

"I mean... we probably still will. But at least this new feudalism will have a nice veneer and a sleek PR department."

With that, she finished her snack and headed away from the square.

"Come on, Orie. The whole city will be celebrating today... we should have some fun while we can, shouldn't we?"

Ormn chuckled, threw one last glance at the projection, and followed.

"Sure. just the two of us?"

Ravenheart flashed him a smile.

"Actually, I had one more person in mind..."

Half an hour later, Orum found himself looking at a shy, incredibly sweet little girl hiding behind her mother and throwing cautious glances at him.

He blinked.

"Is that you, Little Ki? Gods, when did you get so big?!"

The last time he saw her, she was a tiny, wrinkled infant swaddled in a bundle of cloth.

So many people had died during the first months of the Nightmare Spell that simply surviving was seen as a great accomplishment. Surviving while being pregnant, like Ravenheart did, was nothing short of a miracle... as well as a testament to how exceptional she was.

So, this little girl's life was a miracle. She had been born and survived against all odds.

But it was only looking at her now, grown up and resembling an actual human, that Orum finally felt it.

How far they had come...

And that the world was not ending anymore.

That they had saved it.

Looking at the shy little girl, he smiled.

"What, don't you remember your Uncle Orie? Ab, I'm hurt. I was there when you were a tiny little baby, you know..."

He couldn't help but wonder what future awaited this sweet child.

Surely, she would live a long life. Her future will be warm, bright, and full of happiness…