2027: Godheart

Godheart…

That was the word Rain heard being spoken around the camp of the battered Seventh Legion. The calamitous battle between the two great armies had taken place in the central part of the Breastbone Reach, right above where the dead god's heart would have been.

Hence, people were calling it the Battle of Godheart.

As fitting of a name as any, really. There had been nothing divine about that damn battle, but many hearts had been scarred and broken in its maw.

The camp of the Seventh Legion was noticeably emptier than it had been before.

Their own little corner of it was, too… luckily, not because the cohort had sustained losses. It was simply because Fleur had been called upon to help treat the wounded, and Ray was keeping her company.

So, Rain and Tamar were left alone.

Rain prepared dinner while Tamar went about her centurion duties. With that done, they ate in silence and then fell asleep on the spot, too exhausted — both mentally and physically — to even hide from the oppressive radiance of the overcast sky in their tents.

They did not have a lot of time to rest.

As soon as the worn-out soldiers were able to march, the Song Army was going to abandon the temporary camp and retreat north, toward the Collarbone Plain. The Sword Army would most likely pursue… so, the march was promising to be tough and unforgiving.

A few hours later, Rain and Tamar were woken up by Fleur and Ray, who had returned from the field hospital. The delicate healer looked like someone on the verge of suffering essence exhaustion, and her stealthy boyfriend was not much better.

Rain yawned, rubbed her eyes, then pushed the half-full pot of army stew toward them.

"Here… eat."

Ray gave her a nod of gratitude and sat down. Fleur, meanwhile, glanced at Tamar.

"Your father is looking for you. He's in the field hospital."

Noticing Tamar's sharp gaze, she put a hand on her shoulder and added in a soothing tone:

"His wounds were serious, but he is doing well now. Don't worry."

Tamar lingered for a moment, then nodded and rose to her feet.

Rain did not have anything better to do, so she decided to follow the young Legacy.

The two of them walked through the camp of the Seventh Legion, eventually crossing into the avenue separating it from other divisions of the Song Army. As they walked, they could hear the soldiers talking about the battle in numb, subdued voices.

Some were sharing their fears and concerns about the retreat and the future prospects of the Song Army. Most, however, were talking about Changing Star…

And the Lord of Shadows.

Rain threw a brief glance at her shadow, feeling a little strange.

She had witnessed the clash between her brother and the seven Saints of Song. The fury of it, the chilling scale, the destruction…

Despite his reassurance, she had been worried sick while watching, clenching her fists and forgetting to breathe. It had been such a strange situation to find herself in — the Lord of Shadows was one of the enemy champions, after all, and yet, she could not help but root for him instead of her own side.

At the end, his towering figure crumbled into darkness, and the battle continued on a much smaller, human scale. So, Rain had not seen how it ended, but she learned the result soon.

Her brother had defeated the seven Saints, including three of the Queen's daughters. Crushed them, really.

He had also killed six Saints — one with his own hands, five more with the help of his servants.

No wonder people could not stop talking about him, shivering in fear as they shared the details of the bloody clash.

Rain herself felt obligated to feel frightened.

…Of course, she couldn't. The image of her whimsical, grumpy, and quietly caring brother was the opposite of terrifying. How could she be afraid of someone who made her delicious, puffy pancakes to celebrate a successful hunt?

She wondered what the soldiers of the Song Army would think if they learned that the great and terrible Lord of Shadows was in the habit of making her nutritious breakfasts.

'I'd better keep it to myself…'

The field hospital was not far, but it still took some time for Rain and Tamar to reach it.

Neither of them was in the mood to talk, and they had not spoken a word about the battle to each other.

As they walked, however, Tamar glanced at Rain and hesitated for a few moments.

"Are you okay?"

Rain raised an eyebrow.

Of course, she wasn't okay.

None of them were.

...Nevertheless, she forced out a grin.

"Sure. Why?"

Tamar frowned a little.

"You just seem… unlike yourself, somehow."

Rain remained silent for a while, then shrugged with a helpless smile.

"You noticed, huh? Yeah… I don't know. I guess I just feel a bit weird today."

She couldn't quite explain it, but there was indeed something different about her ever since the conclusion of the battle. It was subtle and almost imperceptible, neither physical nor spiritual… but it was definitely there, at the heart of her being.

They reached the field hospital. It was an enormous canvas pavilion permeated with the stench of blood and sweat — the scene inside was like a painting of hell, but luckily, it wasn't as bad as it could have been.

Many of the wounded in the center of the battlefield had been miraculously healed by the white flames of Lady Nephis. Of those that remained, the heavier cases had been treated by the Awakened healers already… it was just that there weren't that many potent healers in the world, and those that belonged to the Song Army did not have endless essence.

So, the soldiers who had received relatively minor wounds could only wait while being treated by mundane medics.

Rain grimaced and tried not to cover her nose.

The officers were being treated in a separate space inside the pavilion. She stayed back, letting Tamar go inside alone, and waited patiently near the entrance.

However,she could still hear some of the conversation between her friend and her father, the Saint of Sorrow.

"...I heard that you met Telle of the White Feather clan."

Oh, so that was the name of the beautiful Feather Knight. No wonder she was so troublesome.

"Yes… I lost."

Tamar's restrained voice betrayed a hint of dejection. The Saint of Sorrow seemed to chuckle before saying calmly:

"That is alright. I lost, too."

There was a long stretch of silence, and then he added with a sigh.

"It is strange, isn't it? The Lord of Shadows had saved my daughter's life, but today, I went into battle intending to kill him. Changing Star is meant to be one of the greatest threats to the Song Domain, but today, she healed and saved our soldiers…"

Rain did not hear the rest, because at that moment, a quiet whisper resounded in her mind.

[Hey… I need to talk to you.]

She hesitated for a moment.

[Talk, then? I'm listening.]

However, her shadow shifted slightly in the trembling light of a luminous Memory, as if shaking its head.

[No, not here. Go find somewhere private.]

Rain sighed.

Was she going to be swallowed by that weird cottage again?

But she did not really mind.

Perhaps her brother would be able to explain the subtle change that had happened to her on the battlefield…