2036 : Promised Storm

Rain was laying on top of her bedroll, too tired to move. The interior of her tent was like an oven, and the merciless sky was pummeling the word with heat outside. The mere thought of the radiant expanse of the sun-bleached bone, which seemed to glow like snow in the pouring sunlight, made her eyes ache for the comfort of shadows.

Which was why the flap of her tent was closed, submerging the interior into a comfortable dimness. The passive enchantment of one of Rain's Memories kept her cool, and she could finally breathe.

The past few days had been… challenging.

The Song Army had set out north, marching at a truly punishing pace. They had to escape the pursuing enemy, sure, but the soldier had not even had the chance to recover from the battle. Enduring the dire hardship of the hellish march immediately after that calamity was like a cruel torture.

Everyone was slowly breaking under the strain…

It wasn't easy to break Awakened, but Godgrave was just the place to accomplish that.

The situation was only made worse by how disheartening it felt to be destroying the extermination outposts as the army retreated north. They had fought long and hard to establish them, after all — battling the scarlet jungle was a harrowing affair, but it had felt rewarding. As if they were banishing something vile and odious into darkness to build a place under the sun for humanity.

What did it feel like to dismantle these outposts with their own hands, then?

The Seventh Legion had destroyed only one, so far. It had to be done in a rush, so the fortress had been set on fire immediately after the garrison evacuated. Luckily, the most widely available building material in Godgrave was wood, and the flames spread quickly.

It was not quick enough, though. The Blood Sisters surrounded the burning outposts and bombarded it with ranged attacks, reducing the fortress to rubble. What had taken weeks of battling the dreadful jungle and enormous effort to build was reduced to a smoldering pile of charred debris in a matter of minutes.

As the soldiers watched the scene of destruction in grim silence, it was hard not to feel as if all the blood, sweat, and tears they had spilled were for nothing.

By the time the legion moved on from the blackened ruin, the first scarlet vines were already crawling out of the fissure.

'Damn it all.'

Rain shifted and glanced at the deep shadows nestling in the corners of the tent. It was so hot inside…

After remaining silent for a while, she said in a low tone:

"You know… you can already make cooling enchantments. Why don't you enchant the whole tent, while you're at it?"

There was silence for a few moments, and then, a chuckle came out of the shadows.

"Mostly because it would take time away from more important matters. Why don't you learn runic sorcery and enchant the tent yourself?"

Rain smiled in the darkness.

"I just might. Can I really learn it?"

A familiar figure emerged from the shadows, sitting down on the floor of the tent. He shrugged.

"I don't see why not… a friend once told me that it would take no more than a century, but with your apparent talent, it should be much faster. A few decades, at most."

Rain sighed.

"...Figures."

Then, she studied him with a neutral expression.

"Why did you come out?"

Sunny smiled.

"I have something for you. Give me your hand."

Still laying on the bedroll, Rain outstretched a hand. He took it gently with his own and raised the other one. A moment later, a beautiful bracelet forged from black silver manifested itself from strands of darkness, and he put it around her wrist.

Rain studied the bracelet with curiosity. It felt cool to the touch, contrasted starkly against her smooth alabaster skin. The craftsmanship was beautiful, and the fit was flawless.

"It's pretty. But what is it?"

He let go of her hand and leaned back a little.

"A Memory. Bind it, then think about wanting to know your state."

A new Memory was always a welcome surprise. Rain sat up, infused the beautiful bracelet with her essence, waited for it to take hold, and then thought about… her state.

'What state is he even talking about? Like… tired, sweaty, and miserable?'

However, in the next moment, a field of shimmering runes suddenly ignited in the air in front of her.

Rain froze.

"Is… is this?"

He nodded.

"Yes. It is something I came up with for myself after being cut off from the Spell. It is not nearly as omniscient and only has rudimentary functions, of course, but it's still handy to have around."

Rain smiled.

So these were the infamous runes… strangely enough, seeing them suddenly made her feel like a real Awakened.

It was just that reading them was another matter entirely.

Sunny had taught her the basics of the more widely spread dead languages of the Dream Realm in the past four years, and especially the original runic language that the Spell used. It was a necessity — after all, they had been aiming to make her an Awakened without becoming infected by the Spell, which meant that it would not be providing her any translations.

Luckily, Rain had turned out to be quite talented at languages. So, she could read the runes… in theory. She just had little practice actually doing it.

Still, she was incredibly curious to learn what the bracelet would tell her.

So, Rain remembered her lessons and glanced at the shimmering runes.

They read:

Name: Rain.

True Name…

She concentrated.

'Promise… Promised? Promised Storm?'

No. The runes were similar, but if one studied them carefully, a different meaning revealed itself.

There was a stormy darkness to her name, a vivid image of the vast black sky. But there was also a glimmer of hope to it, a promise that the darkness would be dispelled, and a glimpse of a beautiful light shining somewhere far away.

There was also a hint of melancholy to her name, because relief and light were still far in the distance.

Rain looked at the runes once again and read them properly this time.

True Name: Promise of a Distant Sky.