1985. Ruined Fortress

Tonight, her brother had decided to try something new.

Instead of launching simultaneous attacks from the four cardinal directions, he seemed to be gathering his forces in the south, where the walls of the fallen castle were the most damaged.

Nightingale had noticed movement between the ancient trees, but sadly, he could not tell them more about what was happening in the dark forest one of Mordret's vessels possessed an Aspect that allowed him to hide himself from the gazes of living beings.

There were ways to predict the timing of the attack, though.

Morgan was looking at the shifting line where the water touched the ruin. After a while, there was a shallow wave, and the lake seemed to climb up a little, swallowing more of the ancient stone.

She sighed.

“Typhaon has entered the lake.”

Typhaon had been one of the most powerful Saints of the House of Night... as well as Aether's father. Now, however, he was one of the most powerful vessels in Mordret's possession, and a true curse for the defenders of Bastion.

His Transcendent form was so immense and terrifying that his presence on the battlefield could be traced by simply paying attention to the lake. When he transformed, the amount of displaced water was so great that the level of the lake rose visibly.

It was an ill omen.

Standing by her side, Aether looked down, his handsome face turning grim and distant. Naeve and Bloodwave shifted slightly - it was that monster who had wounded them so severely in the last battle against the Transcendent vessels of the Prince of Nothing.

A moment later, there was another wave, and the water rose even more.

Morgan smiled.

“The big octopus is also coming. How wonderful.”

Saint Knossos was another heavy hitter among the Transcendent champions taken by her brother.

Not too long ago, he was one of the pillars of the Great Clan, as well as its elder — and before that, he had been Nightwalker's peer and the head of one of the Stormsea Clans that joined together to form the House of Night.

Nightwalker himself was long gone, but Knossos had survived decades of trials and tribulations of the Nightmare Spell.

He did not survive Mordret of Nowhere, though.

Now, his body was one of the most dire threats to Morgan and her Saints. His Transformation was that of a gargantuan kraken, and together with Typhaon, these two abominable creatures were the hammer with which her brother bludgeoned the defenders of the ruined castle every battle.

The rest of his vessels all possessed powerful Transcendent forms, but none could compare to the sheer size and terror of the two behemoths.

Morgan inhaled deeply and listened to the night for a few moments.

The world was at peace. The lake was still and silent, with a beautiful tapestry of stars reflecting on its surface. The water murmured as it washed the shore, and a mild wind sang in the moonlit darkness.

This was her home, her birthright, and her burden.

That stillness was not going to last long.

She looked across the lake, studying the distant shore.

“Prepare yourself. It's starting.”

Just a few moments after she spoke, the lake suddenly grew restless, and taller waves crashed into the rubble.

“Aether, Athena.”

Those two were their vanguard. Aether silently leaped off the wall and dashed toward the lake, but Raised by Wolves lingered for a moment and glanced at Morgan.

It was a bit irritating to crane her neck to look the tall beauty in the eyes, but Morgan obliged.

“Yes?”

Saint Athena smiled.

"You Royal Highness, venerable Princess Morgan... how many times have I told you to call me Effie?"

Morgan's brow twitched a little.

She remained silent for a moment, then answered with a forced smile:

"About the same amount of times as telling me to put some meat on my bones?"

Her unruly subordinate laughed while jumping down.

"Well, you should! Even my son is less picky with his food!"

A few moments later, she landed on the rubble below and followed Aether with unhurried steps.

Morgan held back the urge to roll her eyes.

'What nonsense. I am not picky.’

...She just had standards.

As she watched, Aether reached the lake. Unlike his two clanmates, the younger Saint did not possess an Aspect tied to the depths instead, his lineage had manifested itself in the startling affinity to the night sky and starlight.

Still, he wasn't helpless when surrounded by water.

Instead of plunging into the lake, Aether simply stepped onto its surface and continued to move forward.

Behind him, on the shore, Athena activated her Ascended Ability. In the next moment, Morgan felt a rush of invigorating power permeate her body. Her pale cheeks flushed a little, and a hot breath escaped from her mouth.

She felt strong, tireless, and full of unbridled potency.

Every time Morgan experienced this exhilarating sensation, she understood why Raised by Wolves was so beloved by the government soldiers and the civilian population better... among other things, of course.

The rest of her Saints were feeling the effect of Athena's power as well. Despite the fatigue and exhaustion of the past weeks, they suddenly looked impatient to join the fray.

Bloodwave gave Morgan a long look and asked, his deep voice sending shivers running down her spine:

“What about us?”

She shook her head lightly.

“Stay back. We'll face them on land today.”

The white-haired Saint scowled, but listened to her order.

It would be a disadvantage to leave him and Naeve out of the water, thus incapable of using their Aspects fully.

But Morgan had a bad feeling about today's attack. It was high time for her brother to come up with some new diabolical tactic...

And more importantly than that, she had her own diabolical plans as well.

For them to come to fruition, she had to lure the enemy away from the lake.

Soul Reaper simply leaned on her ghostly glaive, looking at the surging water with a lazy smile. Her icy blue eyes were cold and ruthless.

“Staying on land suits me fine. It's quite a welcome change, really.”

Behind her, Nightingale silently summoned his bow and rose into the air, looking at the lake intently.

His mesmerizing green eyes seemed to glisten in the darkness, reflecting the pale moonlight.

A moment later, his expression tensed.

Morgan sighed, knowing that she would not like what he was about to say.

“What is it?”

Saint Kai sighed.

“...They're dragging corpses across the bottom of the lake, leaving trails of blood behind.”

He hesitated for a moment, and then added with a hint of dejection:

“I think we'll have more guests today than we anticipated.”