1986. Bait and Switch

Morgan sighed as she saw the water break in a dozen places, far in the distance, and grotesque tentacles shoot from the depths. Carried in them were the massive corpses of the Nightmare Creatures that dwelled in the forest some of them the very same Nightmare Creatures whom she and her Saints had wounded, but failed to finish off in yesterday's battle.

The corpses were launched into the air like morbid projectiles, tracing low arcs as they trailed torrents of blood behind them. One was shot down by Nightingale, who had drawn his bow in the blink of an eye. Another exploded into a cloud of bloody haze when a pebble tossed casually by Raised by Wolves collided with it midair.

But the rest landed on the rubble with disgusting squelching noises, some crashing into the wall and making it tremble with deafening thunderclaps.

A series of shockwaves rolled across the lake, making the water ripple.

Morgan studied the bloody mess left in the wake of the obliterated corpses with a dubious expression.

“Leave it to my brother to find a common language with the Nightmare Creatures…”

The effects of this spectacular blood offering were already letting themselves be known. The lake boiled, and dozens of hideous shapes rose from its dark depths, following the scent of blood...

Following it to the shore.

It seemed that the Prince of Nothing had finally found a way to attack the ruined fortress with both Transcendent and Corrupted forces at the same time.

Grimacing, Morgan summoned a bow and shouted a command:

“Aether, Athena! Let loose!”

As they heeded her command, she briefly glanced at the bow in her hand.

This one, she had received in her Third Nightmare. It was a good bow, but she still missed her old one... the bow that her father had forged for her.

It was not the only Memory he had given her, and Morgan had never cherished the Warbow that much she was primarily a swordsman, after all. Still, it had been a loyal companion to her for quite some time.

Strangely enough, Morgan did not remember what fate befell that Memory. Had it been destroyed in Antarctica? Or had she simply returned it to the arsenal of Clan Valor after Transcending, knowing that an Ascended Memory would not be worthy of her strength anymore?

She seemed to have a vague recollection of bestowing it upon someone... interesting. And cute? One of the promising Knights, perhaps...

She couldn't remember.

‘What was I thinking about?’

Suspecting that she had not gotten enough sleep, Morgan summoned an arrow and nocked it on the string.

Below the wall, Aether and Athena were starting.

The Saint of Night was standing on the surface of the water, not far from the shore, bathed in moonlight. Above him, distant starts shimmered with a silver radiance.

And as the waters of the lake suddenly rippled all around him, that radiance suddenly grew brighter.

Morgan could not see Aether's eyes, but if she could, she would have witnessed them shining with cold silver light.

In the next moment, the sharp rays of starlight seemed to solidify, raining on the lake like a radiant net.

The depth dwellers that had risen their hideous heads above the water were cut terribly by the falling strings of light, letting out pained wails as their fetid blood poured into the lake.

Some received only shallow wounds, some were hurt quite badly. One lake monster had even lost much of its head — it was still alive, but the other abominations were already rushing in its direction. Soon, the water boiled, and the wounded abomination was torn apart by its own brethren.

There was no honor among the Nightmare Creatures.

Athena was less flashy in her attack, but even more devastating. Looking around, she chose a slab of stone the size of a PTV, picked it up easily, and tossed it in the direction of the attacking abomination with terrifying force.

The giant piece of stone tore through the air with dire speed and fell into the lake like a bomb, causing a tall fountain of foam to shoot into the sky.

Although it was quite dark, Morgan could tell that the foam was not white, but crimson - Athena rarely missed, so her crude projectile must have obliterated at least one enormous abomination completely.

A moment later, her own arrow found its way between the scales of an especially revolting Nightmare Creature, exploding from the back of its misshapen head in a torrent of gore.

Nightingale was releasing another arrow, as well - having the advantage of a high vantage point, he was even more deadly.

Morgan was not usually competitive without reason, but falling behind her subordinate was a shameful thing.

Smiling faintly, she strained her muscles and drew the heavy bow again.

In the next minute or so, both the surface and the depths of the lake had turned into a scene of bloody slaughter, with a storm of starlight raging across it like a beautiful mirage.

The Nightmare Creatures stirred awake by the scent of blood were all powerful, the weakest of them of the Corrupted Rank.

And yet, the Saints defending Bastion were not weak, either. Aether's starlight, Athena's barbaric projectiles, and the arrows sent flying by Morgan and Kai fused into a devastating barrage, mangling the bodies of the abominations and reaping their lives.

Sadly, it was not as deadly as she would have wanted. Killing a Great Abomination was no easy feat even for Saints, after all - several of them had to concentrate their attacks on the more powerful dwellers of the depths and waste quite a bit of time to bring a single one down, while the rest were free to reduce the distance between them and the shore unopposed.

Which was a cause for concern.

And throughout all of it, even consumed by the thrill of the battle, Morgan was keeping an eye on the lake and the dark shore beyond, She could not miss the moment her brother decided to join the battle.

...Where are you?'

Frowning a little, Morgan lowered her bow for a moment and bellowed:

“Aether! Retreat!”

She was disappointed. She had hoped that using their only healer as bait would produce more of a result.

The Nightmare Creatures were already dangerously close to where the Saint of Night was standing on water. Sparing one look at the approaching horrors, he turned around and dashed back toward the ruins.

Athena covered his retreat by sending an especially enormous piece of rubble barreling through the air.

It displaced a veritable flood of water, causing towering waves to spread in all directions from the point of impact.

And when the plume of foaming water fell down, Morgan finally saw what she had been searching for.

Behind it, in the distance, a gargantuan fin rose above the surface of the lake, cutting it like a colossal blade.

Typhaon was coming.

...Or rather, her brother was, wearing the once-fearsome Saint as a suit.