2205 Run to Failure  
  
A shattered moon shone upon a shattered castle. The castle had always been a ruin, but now it was reduced to rubble. The rubble used to be surrounded by a deep lake, but now, the lake was gone.  
  
Its bottom had been revealed, in all its mystery and horror...  
  
Indifferent to what lay at the bottom of the lake, Morgan of Valor hunched over an alloy pan and looked into the fire numbly.  
  
There was a gentle gust of wind, and Nightingale landed nearby, greeting her and the other Saints. Then, a stronger gale crashed into the remains of a crumbling wall that protected the fire, and a small pebble fell from it down toward the pan.  
  
Morgan did not move, allowing the pebble to fall into the pan.  
  
A few moments later, she sighed heavily.  
  
'...I'm sick of it.'  
  
How many times had it been, already?  
  
The day repeated itself endlessly. Each time, she gathered her Saints and faced her brother in battle. Each time, they lost miserably and died. Over and over again, she suffered the pain of her body being torn apart and bгoken, activating the enchantment that reset time at the last moment.  
  
Rinse and repeat.  
  
It had been somewhat exciting at first. Morgan did not enjoy losing, but she loved battle. So, this closed loop of endless warfare was like a playground for her — a lethal and vicious playground, but a fascinating one nonetheless.  
  
Her brother, too, was a perfect enemy. He was strong, cunning, ruthless, and hateful... a worthy adversary for her own insidious mind, at last. Even better, he somehow retained the memories of all their prеvious battles, so the strategies he employed against her were both varied and increasingly diabolical.  
  
But the novelty had quickly grown old.  
  
Nobody was fond of hitting their head against a wall, after all. And Mordret was indeed a wall —an unbreakable barrier that she could not overcome, no matter how earnestly she tried. The power disparity was too vast. The resource distribution was too uneven...  
  
Even though the champions under her command had proven to be far more formidable than her already quite flattering evaluation оf them —especially the three government Saints — the Transcendent vessels Mordret controlled were deadlier. There were the Nightmare Creatures he kept subjugating, as well.  
  
And even though they wеre fighting on a battlefield of her choosing, the ruins of true Bastion failed to contain Mordret in the end.  
  
She had hoped that the Others would stifle him... maybe even destroy him. But although her brother had been held back by the threat of these eerie beings for a while, he seemed to have learned how to escape them eventually.  
  
During one of the more desperate battles, Morgan had even employed a perilous strategy to draw them forth — using her Transcendent form, she fashioned her body into a flat plane of polished steel that towered above the ruins like a replica of the Great Mirror, reflecting the shattered moon and the broken castle back upon the world.  
  
The swarm of the Others she had unleashed was a terror to behold, and resulted in some of the most harrowing deaths she witnessed even after months spent in the endless loop of hopeless battles. And yet, her brother had survived their onslaught for far longer than she had.  
  
Looking back, that was the breaking point when this endless death loop had gone from tiresome to tedious.  
  
And over many lost battles after that, Morgan had slowly grown numb. There was a difference between being defeated and surrendering to defeat... and while she was neither ready to nor capable of surrendering, it was getting hard to remember what she was fighting for, to begin with.  
  
'Desire...'  
  
Morgan often thought back to what her brother had told her during the Battle of the Black Skull. He had said that his desire to kill her was stronger than her desire to kill him, and that was why he was stronger.  
  
Back then, she had dismissed his words as mockery... and an indication of the difference in their technique, perhaps. Her brother was perfectly willing to sacrifice his body to achieve victory — he had plenty of those to spare, after all. But Morgan was held back by the deeply human need to keep herself away from harm, which gave him a profound tactical advantage in a sword fight.  
  
But now, she was starting to suspect that there was a deeper meaning to what her brother had said. Resolve, determination, conviction, those weren't simply empty words, not to powerful beings like them. All these passions were born of desire and fueled by it.  
  
Desire... was the source of all virtues, as well as of all sins.  
  
Mordret was driven by his ardent desire to avenge himself on his family, and while his wicked passion was as twisted as he was himself... what did Morgan have to offer in turn?  
  
The desire to win? To prove herself worthy? To earn the approval of their father... or, if not, then to at least save herself the biting shame of disappointing him?  
  
All those were too abstract, too empty. They had not seemed like that before, but they did now. More than that, these wishes had been forced upon her by others instead of coming from within her own soul. These small and meddlesome desires were only worthy of a princess who had been raised to be a tool.  
  
They were not fit to be called a passion.  
  
Morgan was not really passionate about anything, except maybe the pure art of war and combat itself. But that was not enough.  
  
Her heart was not really in the battle... at least not to the degree this battle demanded. And, therefore, she could not win.  
  
Luckily, she did not need to win. She just needed to hold out... out there in Godgrave, the final battle was swiftly approaching. A few more loops, and she would have accomplished her goal without even managing to defeat her brother.  
  
How ironic was that?  
  
Even knowing that the end was near, though, Morgan could not get herself to feel any excitement.  
  
She was tired, and all of it just all seemed senseless.  
  
'...Damn. The stew is ruined.'  
  
Wincing, Morgan extended a hand and fished the pebble out of the pan. Dropping it to the ground, she looked at the stew without much appetite.  
  
"Dinner is ready."  
  
Her voice was subdued.  
  
Nightingale gave her a strange look. She had developed a bit of tolerance to his looks by now, but still... the man was obnoxiously handsome even when he felt unsure. It used to make her want to tease him more.  
  
He was probably considering if she had been replaced by one of the Others now, full of trepidation.  
  
Well... maybe not.  
  
The government Saints had changed in the last few loops.  
  
It was barely noticeable, but Morgan had spent too many repeating days in their company to miss the subtle difference.  
  
Maybe they were the ones replaced by the Others...  
  
She smiled slightly.  
  
No, of course not. There was a much simpler answer to their changed attitudes.  
  
Even without her telling them, they somehow knew about the loop.