2207 Limit of Loyalty  
  
Their battle was just as furious as always, but it felt a little different.  
  
Because Morgan was tired, and because she was enjoying herself a little bit more.  
  
She was strong, she was fearsome. Her Aspect was brimming with dire power — one that was sharp enough to cut down anything and anyone who stood in her way.  
  
Or so she had thought before.  
  
Over the past months, though, Morgan's edge had become a little dull. Any sword would lose its sharpness if someone kept hammering it against a hard surface, after all... and her brother's vile presence was much too difficult to cut.  
  
Still, Morgan met him once again, and fought him once again.  
  
By now, they knew the depths of each other's lethality all too well. She was a tide of living metal that drowned and shredded everything it touched. He was an insidious fiend who used stolen bodies and overwhelming force to exhaust and strangle his enemies, leaving them no chance to survive.  
  
The ruins shuddered and turned to dust as Morgan battled Mordret and his Transcendent vessels. The wave of liquid metal flowed through them like a tide, enveloping the few remaining structures аnd toppling them one after another. The lumbering figures of Mordret's stolen bodies pursued, tearing at it with their fangs, their claws, and the power of their Aspects.  
  
Some of them drowned in her flowing form and wеre eviscerated, while others managed to deal damage and bring her agony before being cut down.  
  
Morgan felt a strange divide within herself...  
  
She was enjoying the furious abandonment of battle. But at the same time, she felt like she was simply going through the motions.  
  
It was both exhilarating and tedious in equal measure.  
  
She wanted to stop.  
  
But she did not... could not.  
  
She refused to.  
  
As her reserves of essence dwindled and her voluminous steel body slowly shrank as more and more of the liquid metal was frozen, annihilated, or swallowed by rust and corrosion, the mocking words of her brother pursued her:  
  
"Ah, dear sister... aren't you repeating yourself? You contorted your Transcendent form into this hideous sword apparition seven battles ago. Or was it five? Ah, but it had fewer hands back then, I guess... still, do you really think that a few additional blades will save you?"  
  
"Oh, look... isn't it Saint Naeve? Seems like he is missing his head, poor fellow. Goodness gracious, didn't he have a daughter? I guess you'll have to break the news to her soon. If you manage to run away from me again, of course..."  
  
"Have you heard? They are chanting the name of Changing Star all over the world. Dear father has always preferred her to you, and now, the whole world does too. They have already forgotten your name, Morgan. Was there a second princess in the Sword Domain? Who? That is what they are saying, or so I've heard..."  
  
Morgan laughed.  
  
As if she cared...  
  
Dismissing her Transcendent form and rolling down from a pile of rubble, she spat a mouthful of blood and rose to her feet shakily, using her sword as support.  
  
Then, she looked around with a pale smile.  
  
"Oh, look... all your vessels are dead."  
  
Her smile faltered, though, when more blood flowed out of her mouth.  
  
Morgan bent in a painful coughing fit, then straightened and wiped her mouth tiredly.  
  
"And also, do you ever shut up? Why do people even call you the Prince of Nothing? They really should call you the Prince of Running His Mouth, instead..."  
  
As Mordret — his original body — jumped down from the ruins of a tall wall and landed softly a dozen or so meters away, she looked at him and grinned.  
  
"Right. It's because you were discarded by our father like trash, then tossed aside by the Dreamspawn like trash. You know what they say... one man's trash is another man's treasure. Doesn't seem to apply to you, though... bastard."  
  
Her brother's smile grew a little forced.  
  
At least she wanted to believe that it did.  
  
Mordret chuckled.  
  
"I'll enjoy ripping out that dirty tongue of yours, sister... again."  
  
Morgan struggled to raise her sword and smiled.  
  
"Do try."  
  
He descended upon her like a natural disaster. Technically, Morgan was stronger than her brother — her Aspect bestowed many boons upon her, after all, while his had little to do with direct confrontation. However, she was wounded and exhausted after dealing with the vessels... and he was a Titan, as well, while she was a mere Beast.  
  
Their power was almost evenly matched.  
  
Almost...  
  
In the end, Morgan still lost.  
  
Her sword clattered as it slid across the ground, and she staggered back, falling to her knees. Her severed hand landed a few meters away, fingers twitching as crimson blood seeped into the rubble.  
  
'Ah...'  
  
The pain was exquisite.  
  
Mordret glanced at her twitching hand, then looked at her with a pleasant smile.  
  
"Well, that surely brings back memories. Should I take your eye, as well? That would be fitting, I think. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."  
  
He seemed to be in a strangely good mood.  
  
Her brother always acted as if life was infinitely amusing, but today, his satisfaction seemed genuine for the first time.  
  
That filled Morgan with a sudden feeling of dread.  
  
She suppressed a groan and stared at him firmly.  
  
"...What are you so happy about, bastard?"  
  
Mordret scratched his head.  
  
"You keep calling me a bastard on purpose, don't you? How pitiful. At least I didn't kill our mother, you know?"  
  
Then, laughing, he walked over to Morgan and loomed above her, looking down with a twisted smile.  
  
"I'll let it go today, though. There's cause for celebration! After all... I have finally won."  
  
Morgan's eyes narrowed, and she pushed some air into her crushed lungs before saying through gritted teeth:  
  
"Have you lost what little remains of your mind? You've won nothing, abomination. I might have lost again, but we will just continue to repeat this battle over, and over, and over again... until you are defeated. I have plenty of patience, believe me. I am willing to fight you until the world ends, if need be."  
  
Mordret stared at her for a while, then threw his head back and laughed.  
  
"I have no doubt! My stubborn sister... ah, but you don't really need to defeat me, do you? You just need to keep losing until our father clashes with Ki Song in battle."  
  
Morgan just stared at him silently. They both knew it, so why was he mentioning it today?  
  
Mordret's smile slowly drained away, and he looked at her with a cold, dark expression.  
  
"What you failed to account for, though, is that I don't need to win here either."  
  
Her eyes widened slightly, and she winced, struggling to contain the pain.  
  
Her brother chuckled.  
  
"You've been defending Bastion so bravely, sister, so valiantly... but I don't really need to conquer it, do I? I just need to make sure that it is lost to our father. That it ceases to be a part of his Domain, and therefore robs him of its power."  
  
Morgan swayed a little.  
  
"What are you... I am still in control of Bastion. It is still mine. And you can't take it from me, no matter how hard you try."  
  
Crouching in front of her, Mordret leaned forward and whispered, his insidious voice flowing into her ear like honey:  
  
"Exactly. It is yours... not our father's. It used to be a part of the Sword Domain simply because you were loyal to the King. Where is your loyalty now, though, Morgan? How much of it is left?"  
  
She shivered.  
  
Mordret looked at her coldly and said with chilling indifference, all pretense of being a human lost from his voice:  
  
"You might pretend otherwise, but we both know... none of it is left, now. I helped you get rid of it. In these godforsaken ruins, I drained you of every drop of faith you had left in our father, and now, you are lost to him. He has lost you, and therefore..."  
  
Her brother stood up and looked down with a dark and triumphant expression.  
  
"...He has lost Bastion, as well. My mission is complete."  
  
Taking a step back, he looked up at the shattered moon and exploded with laughter.  
  
"Ah... it would have been so nice, so lovely to wrench control of this damned castle from your hands, but this... this is even sweeter, I think!"  
  
Morgan stared at him in stunned horror, numbly searching her soul for any lingering attachment to their father... to his kingdom... to his great Domain.  
  
But just like her brother had said, she could not find anything.  
  
'No... wait...'  
  
Stopping his laughter, Mordret lowered his head and looked at her darkly.  
  
His lips twisted into a faint smile.  
  
"...Time to die, sister."  
  
Morgan stared back at him.  
  
She lingered for a moment, and then said weakly:  
  
"Go to hell."  
  
With that, she activated the hourglass enchantment.  
  
The tide of time was turned back once more.  
  
...But even so, nothing could change the outcome of their battle, this time.