2226 Pebble Stew  
  
The six Saints stared at her in confusion. The expressions of the Night Saints were, quite predictably, subtly different from those of the government Saints — who seemed to have learned about the loop recently.  
  
Morgan observed their reactions with morbid curiosity.  
  
Eventually, it was Naeve who broke the silence:  
  
"The battle... is over? What do you mean?"  
  
Morgan fished the damn pebble out of the stew and shrugged.  
  
"You probably don't remember, but I borrowed a very special Supreme Memory from Soul Reaper a while back. That Memory, in combination with my Aspect, allowed me to force the same day to repeat itself over and over again. This day, to be precise. The seven of us have battled my brother countless times today, and we have lost countless times. Each of you died a variety of gruesome deaths… if I recall correctly, you were beheaded the last time, Saint Naeve."  
  
'Good thing I came to my senses in time. The stew was about to be burnt...'  
  
She removed the pan from the fire and looked at the six Saints.  
  
"But it’s meaningless now. I won’t borrow the Supreme Memory again, and I won’t turn the time back again. Today will be the last time I battle my brother in these ruins. So… if you die this time, you’ll remain dead forever. Therefore, I am giving you a chance to leave. No strings attached."  
  
They stared at her in stunned silence.  
  
For a while…  
  
Then, Naeve gritted his teeth.  
  
"We came here… to avenge the slain members of our clan… to stand against this monster!"  
  
His voice was full of powerless fury and indignation.  
  
Morgan looked at him coldly.  
  
"You failed."  
  
She sighed, then went about scooping the stew into their bowls.  
  
"Vengeance is a noble goal, Saint Naeve, and I would never advocate something as tasteless as forgiveness. However, there is some wisdom to what people say — before you embark on a journey of revenge, you should dig two graves... one for your enemy, and one for yourself. Fools tend to believe that this saying admonishes revenge as a path to self-destruction, but I disagree. I rathеr see it as a warning that those seeking revenge must be prepared to die if they want to succeed."  
  
Morgan handed Naeve a bowl of steaming stew and looked him in the eye.  
  
"So, are you prepared to die? I think you do… I know you do, since I saw you die a hundred times. However, don't you have a family out there in the waking world? What will happen to your daughter if you die? What will happen to the survivors of the House of Night if all three of you die? Shouldn't you concentrate on protecting the precious things you have left instead of avenging the things you lost?"  
  
She did not really care about whether Naeve lived or died that much. But... his daughter was cute. So, Morgan did not want to see the little girl lose her father on her account.  
  
The Saint of Night looked at her with dark intensity.  
  
"...You did not seem to care about that when you made us your cannon fodder, Lady Morgan."  
  
She smiled.  
  
"That was because I believed I had a better cannon back then. But things have changed."  
  
Morgan sighed.  
  
"Go, return to the waking world and forget about my brother. The remains of your clan are with the government now — they'll need Saints to guide them across the oceans. The House of Night may cease to exist, but you might rebuild it as well. The decision is yours."  
  
She turned her gaze to the government Saints.  
  
"And it was a pleasure to fight side by side with the three of you. Really, it was quite spectacular — not that I had expected anything less from my sister's companions. But everything good must come to an end. The government will be in a precarious situation once the war ends, since it won't be needed anymore... since Earth won't be needed anymore. The winner won't care about the waking world. So, the waking world will need you."  
  
They glanced at each other, something strange revealing itself in their eyes for a moment.  
  
Morgan ignored their strange gazes and summoned a beautifully crafted, flawlessly clean spoon into her hand.  
  
Picking up her own bowl, she said:  
  
"Eat. The food is getting cold."  
  
The six Saints looked at her somberly, then at each other. Eventually, though, they picked up their bowls as well...  
  
No one else had a set of Memory utensils, of course, and the ones they used were quite appalling.  
  
The meal passed in dead silence.  
  
Morgan suspected that this would be the last time  
  
they shared food, which made her feel a little wistful. But only a little.  
  
After the meal was finished, she went away to give them some time to discuss things among themselves — not too much time, though, since her brother would undoubtedly attack soon.  
  
By the time she returned, the decision seemed to have been made.  
  
Naeve, Bloodwave, and Aether looked at her silently for a while.  
  
Eventually, the youngest — Aether — gave her a small bow.  
  
"Lady Morgan. We will be departing."  
  
She smiled at him faintly.  
  
"Better not waste any time, then."  
  
He hesitated for a few moments before nodding stiffly.  
  
"I... I hope we will meet again, one day."  
  
'The bastard. You should not have rejected me if you were going to act sentimental.'  
  
With that, the three Saints of the House of Night left. They returned to the waking world, disappearing from the moonlit ruins without a trace.  
  
The emptiness they left behind felt larger than  
  
Morgan had anticipated.  
  
She lingered for a bit, then shifted her gaze to the three government Saints.  
  
It was a bit surprising that they were still here.  
  
Morgan raised an eyebrow.  
  
"Not leaving?"  
  
They remained silent for a while.  
  
Soul Reaper Jet was leaning on the crumbling wall, looking at the fire lazily. Raised by Wolves was sitting on a piece of rubble, tossing his famous Memory — the Black Beast Locket — into the air and catching it again absentmindedly, a strangely somber expression on her usually lively face.  
  
Nightingale was studying Morgan, as if searching for something.  
  
Eventually, it was Raised by Wolves who broke the silence:  
  
"My family home is in Bastion, you know."  
  
Morgan gave her a curious glance.  
  
"But your family is safe and sound in NQSC. Does it really matter?"  
  
She smiled darkly and did not respond.  
  
Instead, Nightingale asked, his voice as pleasant as always:  
  
"Lady Morgan... the war is about to end, is it not?"  
  
One way or another."  
  
She looked at his obnoxiously handsome face and shrugged.  
  
"The final battle should be happening any day now... it might even be raging as we speak."  
  
He hesitated for a few moments, then asked:  
  
"Why are you giving up, then?"  
  
Morgan smiled bitterly.  
  
What did he know? That fool...  
  
"I have not given up. It's just that... I already lost."  
  
In the next moment, though, her smile turned cold and sharp.  
  
"That is no reason to surrender, however. No matter what happens, I intend to defend Bastion until I die."  
  
'Or until my brother dies... that would be much better.'  
  
Nightingale looked at her with a hint of sadness in his eyes.  
  
His voice was like honey:  
  
"I'd prefer if it you didn't."  
  
Morgan gave him a strange look.  
  
She lingered for a few moments, then shook her head in bewilderment.  
  
"What do I care about your preferences?"  
  
Nightingale remained silent for a while, then looked up and let out a heavy sigh.  
  
"No, you don't understand... I'm afraid I must insist."  
  
Morgan frowned.  
  
'What does he…'  
  
Before she could finish the thought, however, Nightingale looked at her and said, a strange firmness finding its way into his beautiful voice: "I am truly sorry, Lady Morgan. But... please don't move."  
  
And as he spoke, an eerie power suddenly constrained Morgan, crushing heг like a vise and paralyzing her body.  
  
Obeying his command, she froze.