1734 Behind Closed Doors

After the initial pleasantries, it was time for the actual negotiations. However, Sunny did not have to strain himself too much most of the work had already been done by Nephis and Cassie, so he could just reap the rewards of their efforts.

Still, he felt a little wistful.

The situation was reminiscent of the last time he had to negotiate with Valor - back then, it was Morgan who had come to represent the Great Clan, as well. Sunny had been a mere Master and in hot water with her family because of the incident in the Night Temple, trying to avoid becoming their retainer at all costs.

‘Times have changed...'

Today, he was trying to come to Valor's side, instead. However, the situation was entirely different.

His position had been hopelessly below the Great Clan back then, and therefore, there had been almost no room for negotiations. Now, Valor needed him much more than he needed them... at least on the surface. As such, he held all the leverage, and could dictate his terms freely.

Morgan sipped her wine and smiled.

"So, let me get it straight, Lord Shadow. You are willing to ally yourself with the Sword Domain in the upcoming war. You will fight on our side, aiding our armies to the best of your ability. Which, by the way, must be truly a sight to behold, considering how Impressed my sister seemed after returning from Godgrave. Taken, even..."

Sitting by his alde, Nephis remained perfectly Impassive.

He noticed her grip on the stem of her glass tightening, though, and smiled behind the mask.

Morgan continued:

"However, you refuse to swear allegiance to my father. You also insist on retaining sole ownership of your Citadel... which, as you must know, is the most precious thing you possess, in the context of this conflict. More than that, you are only willing to make a personal deal with my sister, not a pact with Clan Valor as a whole. Am I correct?"

Sunny nodded.

"Indeed."

Morgan laughed again.

"Ah, really... if I hadn't known any better, I would have thought that you harbor impure thoughts about my little sister, Lord Shadow, You... you don't, do you?"

He answered evenly:

"Not at the moment, no."

Nephis spared him a calm glance, Before Morgan could reply, however, Sunny added in the same aloof tone:

"I hear that Clan Valor offered a marriage alliance to the House of Night, Lady Morgan, but you were refused by that young Saint. I wonder if the rumors are true."

His wording was ambiguous, leaving room for Interpretation. Did he mean that Clan Valor was refused, or that Morgan herself was?

Her smile turned a little sharper, her tone sullen:

"I must say... for a famous recluse, you are very well-informed, Lord Shadow."

By now, everyone powerful enough to be informed of his existence had to be wondering about his identity. Someone as strong as the Lord of Shadows could not have appeared out of nowhere the Legacy Clans, especially, would not believe that he was a nobody. They believed in family background and pedigree too much... and for a good reason, considering their own accomplishments.

From what Sunny knew, the most popular theory about his background was the very same that had often made his ears bleed as Mongrel - that he was tied in some scandalous way to the founder of the House of Night, Nightwalker. Some considered him an outcast from the Song Domain, while some were certain that he was the bastard son of some Legacy Clan in the Sword Domain.

Those who knew more about the truth of the world even suspected that he had been secretly raised by the mysterious third Sovereign, Asterion, perhaps hailing from the same destroyed fringe faction as him.

6

Sunny wanted them to speculate as much as possible. The wilder their Imaginations ran, the further they would move from the truth, while simultaneously deepening the Impression of him in their minds.

Morgan shook her head and smiled.

"In any case... It's fine. You don't have to swear allegiance to my father. And you can keep your Citadel. Of course, we will need you to make some concessions in return."

Sunny raised an eyebrow behind the mask.

He had expected that Morgan would acquiesce to his demands. However, he had not expected that she would do it so easily.

His refusal to accept Anvil as his king was easy to swallow. Right now, the King of Swords needed his strength more than his fealty - Sunny could maintain his independence, not becoming a part of the Sword Domain, until the war was over. It didn't matter too much, because once the war was over and Anvil conquered the world, forcing a recalcitrant Saint to submit or be eradicated would not present a problem.

If the war was lost, though...he would be dead, and therefore problem-free.

The Citadel, however, Sunny had thought that Valor would fight for the ownership of the Nameless Temple harder, It presented them with an enticing opportunity to spread the Sword Domain Into Godgrave before the war had even started, after all.

‘I guess they are really wary of me offering my services to Song Instead.’

Or maybe there was something else at play. He would have to ask Cassie later.

For now, though....

Sunny stared at Morgan silently, then said without any emotion:

"That is good to hear. What concessions?"

She looked at him, interlocking her fingers and resting her chin on them.

"As my sister has informed you, the war will start with both clans establishing fortresses on the shoulders of the dead god. From there, we will venture deeper across the breastbone, slowly conquering Godgrave and searching for the Citadels in the Hollows. We will fight each other desperately in the process, of course, trying to stall the enemy."

Sunny nodded, prompting her to continue:

"Although you can keep ownership of your Citadel, you will need to make it available to the forces of Clan Valor, In short, we will establish a secondary fortress there, garrisoned by a relatively small, but elite force of Awakened and Masters. They will have to place their anchors and make use of the Gateway, of course,,, but no Saints, as per our agreement"

She smiled.

"I do not need to tell you how great of an advantage it would be to possess an operational base in the depths of Godgrave. Not only will we be able to hasten our exploration of it, but we will also have an opportunity to put pressure on Song from two sides, forcing them to allocate a significant force to defend their flank... unless they wish to have their supply lines cut, of course."

He considered it for a few moments, then nodded.

"Acceptable."

Morgan continued:

"Second, you will have to assist our Saints in establishing safe passages through the Hollows and share your knowledge of local topography, including the probable locations of unclaimed Citadels, the hunting territories of powerful Nightmare Creatures, and the general characteristics of the abominations dwelling in Godgrave. Having advance knowledge of these things will be of great help to the war effort, no doubt."

Sunny tilted his head.

Venturing into the Hollows was dangerous, but unavoidable, He had expected a condition like that.

"I agree"

She smiled and picked up her wine glass, bringing it to her red lips.

"Well, and lastly, all the rest that one would expect from an ally. You will participate in general battles against the enemy, take responsibility for your stretch of the battlefront, and so on. I trust a warrior like you won't be reluctant to prove his mettle."

Sunny smiled behind the mask.

"I don't have a desire to prove anything to anyone, but sure. These terms suit me fine."

Morgan nodded and offered him her hand.

"If only everyone was so easy to persuade. Then, I will look forward to working with you in the future, Lord Shadow."

Sunny took her hand, feeling a bit... disappointed.

That was it? Wasn't it a bit anticlimactic?

They were talking about the war that would reshape the world, throw all of humanity into chaos, and potentially destroy it.

And yet, the words they spoke were so mundane.

But then again, maybe the fate of humanity had always been decided by dry conversations between very few people, held behind closed doors in opulent chambers,

He smiled.

"I am looking forward to the future, as well.”