1735 Toast to Loyalty

After Sunny and Morgan shook hands, the official part of the not-so-clandestine meeting was over. Of course, there were plenty of details left to discuss - what troops would be stationed in the Nameless Temple, how their accommodations would be organized, who would provide provisions to feed them, when the first mapping expedition would start, and a thousand more. But all these things could be decided at a later date, and in a less ostentatious company.

Morgan leaned back in her seat and raised her wine glass, smiling with satisfaction:

"This calls for a toast, if I do say so myself. The three of us will be fighting side by side soon, so... to loyal comrades. May we fare well."

Nephis took a sip of wine without saying anything, while Sunny simply stared at the table, full of regret.

He wasn't that attracted by the wine, but there was also a veritable feast in front of him, all dishes prepared by masterful chefs and both extravagantly expensive and endlessly delicious, without a doubt.

However... he was wearing a mask. So, none of these delicacies were destined to land in his mouth.

'Damn.’

Morgan looked at him with a smile.

"You aren't drinking, Lord Shadow?"

He stared at her silently for a few moments, then picked up the wine glass.

"To loyal comrades."

Sunny did not move, but on a wall behind him, his shadow picked up the shadow of the wine glass. It brought the shadow glass to its lips and leaned its head back, as if drinking. Then, it lowered its hand and returned to its previous position, copying his pose perfectly.

Morgan laughed.

"Fascinating."

Sunny smiled behind the mask.

It was indeed fascinating. The three of them were toasting to loyalty... each planning treason.

Morgan was playing nice for now, but as soon as the war was over, she would give the Lord of Shadows an ultimatum - submit or die. Sunny was promising to fight for Clan Valor, but he intended to betray them before the war reached a conclusion. Nephis was playing the role of an obedient daughter while planning to kill her adopted father, the King of Swords, and usurp his Domain.

This toast of Morgan's was quite funny, Sunny put the glass down, contemplating the ease with which Morgan had accepted his demanda. Was there really no other reason than to prevent him from siding with Song?

Claiming a Citadel in Godgrave could very well be the deciding factor of the entire war. Valor would not have given up on the Nameless Temple easily. Unless...

He turned his head and stared at Nephis, who was savoring her meal quietly.

'She wouldn't...'

Would she?

He lingered for a few moments, then asked in an indifferent tone:

"Why didn't you insist on claiming my Citadel, Lady Morgan?"

People usually tended to dance around the truth in these situations, but there was a benefit to playing the role of a reclusive, aloof, and eccentric Saint. If Sunny wanted to be direct, he could very well be as direct as he wanted.

Morgan seemed amused by his question.

She glanced at Nephis, then said in a pleasant tone:

"I can answer, but if you share what I say with anyone else, there'll be blood."

It didn't even sound like a treat, just like a fact.

Sunny did not bleed easily, so he was not Impressed. He stared at Morgan, waiting, but Nephis answered instead of her:

"It is indeed exceedingly Important to claim a Citadel in Godgrave. The side that manages to win the race will be able to unleash the power of its Sovereign upon the enemy first. There's no need to describe how meaningful such an event can be. But... even without the Nameless Temple, Valor possesses a vital advantage in that regard."

Sunny scowled behind the mask, not liking where it was headed.

Nephis took a sip of wine and continued calmly.

"That advantage... is me. And my Ivory Tower. The only Citadel among those conquered by humanity that can move.

He stared at her somberly.

After a few moments of cold silence, Sunny asked:

"Are you insane?"

Nephis smiled.

"I feel like I've been asked that before."

Sunny shook his head.

"You are planning to move the Ivory Tower into the skies above Godgrave? Do you have a death wish and fancy turning into ash?"

She lingered for a moment, then shrugged.

"I'll try to land it before that happens. In any case, you wanted to keep your Citadel, Lord Shadow, and that was the price. Now, you can have the Nameless Temple, while the Sword Domain has a chance of gaining a foothold in Godgrave.”

Morgan chuckled.

"My little sister is correct. Needless to say, Song must not know the details of our plans, I'll trust in your discretion, Lord Bhadow,

Bunny remained silent for a while, considering the Implications.

‘These damned fools...'

Bo she had agreed to this... for him?

Was it Neph's idea to bargain on his behalf, or Cassie's? Why were they being so reckless?

He was going to need to rethink a few things. The presence of the Ivory Tower in Godgrave seemed very improbable, given the region's lethal nature, so he had not seriously considered the possibility,

'Clan Song seems to be in for a very unpleasant surprise.’

Sunny contemplated silently,

He wanted to say something, but at the moment, the tranquil atmosphere of the underground chamber was suddenly broken by a grating, echoing ringing sound. The sound came from two directions, impossible to ignore.

Sunny frowned, recognizing it.

'Really? Now?’

Across the table from him, Morgan paused for a moment, then reached elegantly into the inner pocket of her suit jacket and pulled out a slick communicator. At the same time, Nephis unbuttoned her waistcoat and produced hers.

The two of them studied the screens in silence. After a few moments, Nephis showed her communicator to Sunny.

The Lord of Shadows had abandoned the waking world to dwell in the Dream Realm, so he naturally did not have one.

Sunny looked down, already knowing what he would see.

There, on the screen, an emergency notification was blinking urgently:

EMERGENCY ALERT

EMERGENCY ALERT

GATE ACTIVITY DETECTED IN YOUR PROXIMITY

ETA: ~37 minutes

EVACUATE IMMEDIATELY!

‘Thirty-seven minutes...'

The Obel Scale had become much more reliable after the conclusion of the Chain of Nightmares, but it had never quite managed to return to its past stability. Thirty-seven minutes was much more time than the citizens had received back when a Gate opened near Rain's school, but still far from a stellar result.

Nephis pressed on the notification, and a map opened on the screen, denoting the impact zone. After another tap, a further message showed up:

ATTENTION ALL AWAKENED

REQUEST IMMEDIATE ACTION

Gate Category: 2 (61% probability), 3 (34% probability), HIGHER (undefined).

Strike Force ETA: 14 minutes, 44 seconds.

He let out a small sigh.

This time, at least, the government forces would arrive far in advance of the Nightmare Gate's descent. The disaster would be contained, and civilians would have plenty of time to evacuate.

Then, Sunny glanced at Morgan with suspicion.

...Had she known that this would happen?

Logically, she could not have. But then again, all of it was a little too convenient. Choosing such a public location for their meeting was premeditated, without a doubt - Morgan clearly wanted to send Song a message that the Lord of Shadows was taking Valor's side.

Was there a better way to announce it than to be seen clearing a Gate side by side with him?

Not to mention that it was a good opportunity to gauge his strength.

Sensing his gaze, Morgan looked up from the screen and smiled helplessly.

"Ah, how bothersome. Do not worry, Lord Shadow... we can stay here until the turmoil ends. The restaurant is outfitted with top-notch defenses, and employs Awakened guards,"

She leaned back and then added in a relaxed tone:

"Or, you know... we can respond to the summons and help the government contain the Gate. You are my guest today, so you decide."

Sunny stared at her coldly, feeling like he was being played.

Before he could answer, though, Nephis wiped her lips with a napkin and stood up.

She hid her communicator, buttoned up her waistcoat, and glanced at Morgan calmly.

"I'll go."

Morgan laughed.

"My little sister is an example to us all, as always. Well, in that case, I'll go too."

Sunny sighed and threw a regretful look at all the food on the table.

Should he secretly leave a shadow behind and make it steal all these delicacies once they leave?

Abandoning that thought, he pushed back his chair and stood up, as well.

His voice remained indifferent:

"...Then let's go.”