1740 No Traces

Sunny had been right - the archer was long gone by the time the arrows hit. Kai flew all the way to the edges of the city, searching for the sniper with his miraculous vision, but found no trace of them.

He did discover the sniper nest on the roof of a dormitory tower in the outskirts, close to fifty kilometers away from the Nightmare Gate.

However, there were no clues to be found there only a few footprints in the snow, and punctured concrete where the arrows had been thrust into it for ease of access.

The arrows themselves were Memories, and had either dissolved after being destroyed or disappeared after being dismissed.

There were no functional cameras in that area of the outskirts, so no records remained to identify the attacker.

The sniped, whoever it was, had disappeared like a ghost.

...By the time Kai returned, the park looked like a disturbed anthill. Nephis had insisted on healing the soldiers who had been hurt in the explosion, and there were no casualties. But an attempt on the life of one of the two princesses of Valor - or maybe even both of them was no small matter. Government forces flooded the scene, both to take care of the Gate and to investigate the scandalous event.

There was nothing they could find, of course, but doing nothing was not an option.

Sunny had accompanied Nephis as she healed the soldiers and received their gratitude, both admiration and devotion burning in their relieved eyes. Then, he followed her to the side of a medical vehicle, where Morgan was waiting for them while typing something on her communicator with a cold expression. Sid, the Fire Keeper, was walking behind them sullenly, her civilian clothes in disarray.

That was where Kai eventually found them.

The charming archer relayed his findings with a troubled look on his face.

"...we will conduct a thorough investigation on the scene, of course. But I am afraid that we won't find anything. There is no physical evidence left, and since the attacker was careful enough to eliminate these traces, they would have had means to throw off our divination experts, as well."

He looked at Nephis with guilt in his eyes.

"I am sorry. There is not a lot that the government can do."

She grimaced silently.

...Morgan, however, was more vocal. Looking at Kai with a frown, she said in a cold tone:

"NOSC is your territory, Please forgive me for being blunt, Saint Kal, but the government is allowed to exist because it is useful, maintaining order in the waking world. If members of my clan can be freely attacked on your land, with no consequences... then what use is there for the government?"

He met her sharp gaze somberly, not saying anything.

She scoffed and shook her head.

"Fine. Whatever. My little sister answered the call and hurried to prevent a Gate crisis, in her usual selfless manner, but ended up being struck by human arrows. Once the news gets out, what do you think will happen?"

Kai frowned, still having nothing to say.

However, Sunny was staring at Morgan, instead.

'She brings up an interesting point'

How had this ambush been possible, to begin with? It took a lot of time to plan an assassination, especially if the target was a Saint. However, their decision to answer the emergency alert had been made on the spur of the moment. No one could have known that Nephis would be in this park, on this day,

The only way to predict her actions would have been to know about the descent of the Gate in advance, as well as getting access to her schedule.

Had the government known about the Gate long before, but held back the information? Why would they?

The location Morgan had chosen for the meeting was too conveniently close to the emerging Gate, as well. Was it a coincidence, or had she really known what would happen?

Sunny tilted his head a little, an amusing thought surfacing in his mind.

‘...Did Valor send the sniper themselves? Why would they try to dispose of Nephis now?’

Had the ambush even been an earnest attempt to kill Nephis? Sure, a different Saint could have been killed by those arrows, but it was very doubtful that she would have been seriously harmed. But then again, very few people really knew the full extent of Neph's abilities. The party responsible for the assassination attempt could have simply misjudged how hard she was to kill.

Too many things seemed strange about this incident. One fact was undeniable, though... the entire situation smelled fishy.

Nephis finally spoke, placing a hand on Morgan's elbow.

"Morgan. That's enough."

The Princess of War gave her a long look, then shook her head.

"No matter. Even without any evidence, there are very few archers in the world who are capable of something like that. The government might not have the means, but we of Valor do. It won't be hard to find the suspect after investigating each of them. And when we do... mark my word, Saint Kai, there will be hell to pay."

He bowed, hiding his face from view.

"As you wish, Lady Morgan."

Sunny was tired of seeing his friend being bullied... by someone else... so he turned to Nephis and asked, hoping to turn the conversation in a different direction:

"How did you know that the PTV would explode?"

She glanced at him, hesitated for a few moments, then looked away with a shrug.

"You probably don't know, Lord Shadow, but there were many attempts on my life when I was younger. I have... a lot of experience with this sort of thing. It's easy to notice if a vehicle has been tampered with, if you know where to look. I always do."

Sunny stared at her silently.

'But I do know. You've told me before. I even witnessed it in your dreams.’

That was what he wanted to say.

But, of course, he didn't.

Soon, a convoy of heavily armored vehicles appeared near the entrance to the park - these ones painted in the colors of Clan Valor, not the government. Morgan looked at the convoy and put her communicator away with a heavy sigh.

Glancing at Kai, she lingered for a moment, and said with a semblance of decorum:

"I will be going, then. Please inform me immediately if there is any news about the investigation, Lord Kal."

Then, she turned to Nephis:

"Are you coming? You must be tired after healing all these people."

Nephis considered it, then shook her head.

"I'll catch up with Kai. You go. There has to be a lot of things you have to deal with."

A dark smile appeared on Morgan's face.

"Ah, yes. I do now. Are you sure, though? Who says that there won't be a secondary attack? If someone manages to kill you, father will be terribly cross with me."

Nephis raised her chin a little.

Her voice remained even when she said:

"...Is there someone who can kill me?"

Morgan remained silent for a bit, then chuckled and turned away.

"Suit yourself. Well, my sister is right. If someone manages to kill her, they would have worked really hard..."

With that, she nodded to Sunny and walked away.

"Until we meet again, Lord Shadow!"

Soon, her elegant figure disappeared from view, leaving him alone with Nephis and Kal Sunny sighed behind the mask.

'So... these two are going to catch up.’

There was no place for him at their friendly reunion.

So, it would be better for him to leave, as well.

He opened his mouth, intending to say something curt and aloof... but to his surprise, Nephis spoke first.

Giving Kai a poignant look, she turned to Sunny and asked:

"Lord Shadow... would you mind keeping us company?”