1791 Queenmaker

Sunny and Cassle were seated across from each other, enjoying tea and refreshments. The courtyard was peaceful, and the leaves rustled quietly above them. Other than that, there were no other sounds.

The scene would have been picturesque if not for the fact the world was shrouded in absolute darkness. Neither of them had any need for light, and that, too, was a reason why having Cassie here felt comfortable to Sunny.

Dirty deeds were meant to be done under the cover of darkness. And although them having tea in a friendly atmosphere seemed innocent enough, in truth, it was a meeting between two people who conspired to usurp the world in a mayhem of violence. There was hardly a dirtier and more treasonous intent than a bloody rebellion.

Today, they were going to reveal their cards to each other. Without knowing what each of them was scheming, it would be impossible to form a meaningful cooperation.

Cassie was going to relay all the information to Nephis, of course.

She sighed.

"Fundamentally, there are two tasks that need to be accomplished. One is to eliminate the Sovereigns, The other is to usurp their thrones, Needless to say, both are hard to achieve.”

She sipped her tea and took a bite from a soft pastry.

"You should know by now some of the work that has gone into ensuring the former. Ultimately, Nephis is responsible for warfare and conquest. My role in ensuring the downfall of the Sovereigns is limited - for now, I have been mainly focused on elevating her renown in the hearts of the people. It's pure propaganda - I have my avenues of manipulating the public opinion, and Jet has the government sources, as well. It... has been a long road, to get where we are now."

She smiled faintly.

"Of course, we were fortunate in many regards. The decision made by the government to turn Nephis into a symbol, back when she had failed to return from the Forgotten Shore, was a stroke of luck. The reason why they made that decision the great and tragic legacy of Immortal Flame and Broken Sword - is a grim blessing, as well. Conquering the Second Nightmare as a Sleeper and being adopted by a Great Clan added momentum to her rise to glory and breathed new life into her stirring tale. And lastly, the harsh treatment she received from the elders of Valor only played into our hand, fuelling the flames of her legend,"

Cassie shook her head lightly,

"Plus, it is not that hard to embellish Neph's achievements. No, not even so..., there is no need to embellish anything. Her past feats are astonishing, and she has fought against the Nightmare Spell tirelessly for the past four years. She is always on the forefront, spilling her own blood for someone else's sake. Better yet, she has never lost a battle after becoming a Saint. The number of lives she has saved is incalculable. So It's embarrassing to admit, but my job as her spymaster is rather easy. I just have to fan the flames and help the stories of her deeds spread faster and wider."

She took another sip of tea and remained silent for a moment.

"It is to strengthen the foundation of her Domain, of course. But not only for that. If... when Nephis faces the Sovereigns in battle and vanquishes them, it is paramount that her Domain consumes theirs. There is no point otherwise. The Sword Domain, the Song Domain - when the war is over, there should only be the Immortal Flame Domain, and it must encompass all of humanity. Becoming the Human Domain. Not only because hundreds of millions of people in the Dream Realm would be thrust into the First Nightmare otherwise, but also to prepare for what comes next."

Cassie unhurriedly finished her pastry.

"There are a lot of things that must be done to achieve that. Nephis is already immensely venerated by the people, but when the time comes, she has to be acknowledged by the Saints who hold dominion over the Citadels, They must pledge their loyalty to her after Ki Song and Anvil of Valor are gone. It would be simpler to eliminate all the loyalists and raise new ones to replace them, but those loyalists are also the foundation of humanity's strength. So, we have to proceed with a surgical decapitation strike instead of a thorough culling. Then, we must get every Legacy Clan to bow before the new queen."

Her expression darkened a little.

"There are already more than a few Saints who share a bond with Nephis. Like Sky Tide of the White Feather clan, who had been mistreated by Valor, and whose life we saved during the Battle of the Black Skull. There are others, as well, who have been helped by her in recent years. The government will follow Jet, and we even have a few connections in the Song Domain. However... there is still a lot of work to be done, on that front. If there is a saving grace to all that, it's that the weight of an individual in the era of the Nightmare Spell is infinitely greater than it had ever been before. Because one person can indeed be more powerful than an army. If Nephis is the only Supreme left standing, then many people would feel compelled to submit, simply because resisting her would be a tall task."

She closed her eyes for a moment, a tired expression on her face.

"Still, there has to be a neat story to create a veil of legitimacy, And that..., that is much harder to manifest out of thin air. As things are going, the assassination attempt on Nephis would be used as the reason for the war-so, in a way, the war will start from her. If we want everyone to accept her ending it, then we must position her as the voice of those who are opposed to the war from the very start. That way, when she betrays her adoptive clan and eliminates both Sovereigns, we can present it as a courageous person making a reluctant choice to stop two warmongering tyrants, not a murderous opportunist who wants to become a tyrant herself. A peacemaker, not a usurper"

Her tea was growing cold.

"That is it, in broad strokes. Now, for the details... where do I even start?"

After that, Cassie went into a detailed explanation of all the schemes she was weaving behind the scenes, every resource at Neph's disposal, every connection, every clandestine preparation, every strategy and tactic they had developed for the eventual battle against the Sovereigns.

She spoke for quite some time, to say the least. The scope of it all was nothing short of daunting... so much so that Sunny doubted which one of them had seven bodies, for a moment.

The work had started a long time ago - pretty much immediately after the Forgotten Shore. However, it had only truly ramped out in the last four years, It seemed like neither Cassie nor Nephis had rested even for a minute after becoming Saints.

And yet, it still didn't seem enough.

How could it be, if their goal was so ambitious? Not only did they want to bring down the current rulers of the world, but also to put the crown on Neph's head.

After a while, Cassie grew quiet. By then, one of the avatars had replaced the tea kettle several times, as well as delivered more refreshments.

Sunny sighed, then shook his head slightly.

"I understand that the actual battle with the Sovereigns is not your responsibility, Cassie. Nephis is in charge of that. However... I still think that you are treating the act of killing them too lightly. Your preparations are insufficient. Your approach is too reliant on simply willing victory into existence. Sure, that is exactly what Nephis is known for... but, still. There is a huge hole in the plan."

He lingered for a few moments, then smiled darkly.

"...Luckily, I am here to fill it.”