1860 Turn of Fortune

There were plumes of smoke rising above NQSC.

Leaning against a dirty wall in the depths of the outskirts, Sunny looked at the towering black pillars silently. A police PTV sped by, flooding the deep darkness of the night with bright lights of the blaring siren. He hid himself deeper in the shadows and crossed his arms.

'Several locations, most of them close to the city center.'

Fires were not a rarity in NQSC, but not on that scale, and not in the affluent districts at the heart of the city.

What had happened? Was the agreement to leave the war out of the waking world broken, already?

[How far are you?]

There was a moment of silence.

[Less than a minute.]

Soon, a luxurious PTV screeched to a halt in front of him. The passenger door opened, and Cassie stepped out of the vehicle, looking a little disheveled. She remained motionless for a few moments, then turned in his direction, winced, and hurriedly smoothed her hair.

Sunny emerged from the shadows and walked over.

"What the hell is happening?"

For now, he was wearing the mask he had fashioned himself. So, it was the only opportunity to have an honest conversation with Cassie — once they reached Godgrave, he would have to don Weaver's Mask in order to keep his secrets.

"Was the compound of Clan Valor attacked? The Dream Gate relay? Storage facilities?"

She hesitated briefly, then shook her head.

"It's all the House of Night. Their strongholds across the city have gone up in flames. It's total chaos."

Sunny was surprised.

"...They were attacked?"

A deep frown creased Cassie's delicate brow.

"For now, it seems like infighting."

'What?'

It took him a moment to process the information. The members of the House of Night were fighting among each other?

Was there a schism among the leaders of the great clan? Unlike Song and Valor, which were monoliths held together by shared blood and familial bonds, the House of Night had been born from an alliance of a dozen Legacy clans — a decision dictated by the meteoric rise of the two great families, to a large extent.

So, he could entertain the idea of internal strife resulting in an open conflict during these trying times.

However, something did not smell right…

Sunny had a few ideas about who could have been behind the whole mess, but he was not certain.

Cassie sent the PTV away and then faced him. Her expression was a little strange.

"There are… defectors."

He raised an eyebrow behind the mask.

"Where are they defecting to?"

The blind seer seemed troubled.

"Several prominent figures of the House of Night appeared at the gates of Clan Valor's stronghold here, in NQSC. Bloodied and with their family members in tow. They are… asking for an asylum."

Now that was simply bizarre.

Sunny felt troubled, as well.

"Where are they now?"

Cassie offered him her hand.

"They are passing through the Dream Gate. The king will negotiate with them — or interrogate them, depending on the situation — personally. Everyone worth anything were summoned back to the camp. The situation might turn more dire than we had anticipated."

He sighed, then took her hand and dismissed [Definitely Not Me].

Before summoning Weaver's Mask, he looked at Cassie somberly and said:

"Let's go see what all the noise is about, then."

Soon, he was standing on the emerald grass of the Ivory Island.

Sunny could see that the camp was much more lively than it should have been.

The Sword Army had already ventured to carve a path south, with countless Awakened soldiers, Masters, and Saints leaving the safety of the fortified stronghold.

The progress was slow, but methodical and steady.

If the cloud veil did not break and the jungle was not incinerated, Saint Tyris would part the clouds herself. Blinding sunlight would flood the bone plain and turn the crimson growth — as well as those abominations that were not fast enough to escape into the Hollows — to ash.

Then, after the Cloudveil repaired itself, the army would advance.

They would clash with the regrowing jungle and the Nightmare Creatures being born in its scarlet depths, pushing toward the fissures in the bone that served as the source of the dreadful infestation. The battles were punishing, dire, and often prolonged — but with champions like Nephis and Summer Knight spearheading the offensive, the Sword Army was slowly gaining ground.

Once they reached a fissures and cut the roots of the jungle in the area, its remnants would be burned, and a fortress would be constructed around the fissure. A containment detachment would be left to garrison the fortress, tasked with preventing the jungle from extending its tendrils to the surface again.

By now, there was a disorderly chain of a dozen of these fortresses and numerous smaller forts extending west, almost all the way to the point where the collarbone and the breastbone connected.

Considering the current state of the main camp, though, most of the Saints leading the expedition force had been recalled ahead of the scheduled rotation.

Sunny did not know what exactly happened in NQSC… but he was quite confident that the fortune of the Sword Army was about to turn for the worst.

'Those Song sisters have been acting too calm, indeed.'

Shaking his head, he followed Cassie toward the Valor Keep — which was the name given to the central stronghold of the camp by the soldiers.

The two of them entered under its heavy roof and were immediately guided to a spacious chamber where many Saints had already gathered, all wearing somber expressions on their faces.

"Lady Cassia, have you received any news? What exactly happened"

Cassie smiled briefly at the dashing Rivalen of Aegis Rose and shook her head apologetically.

"I am on my way to see the King. There will be more clarity soon."

A Knight of Valor arrived, then hurriedly led Cassie and Sunny deeper into the stronghold.

Soon, they entered a smaller chamber. There were only a few people inside — all of them among the strongest and most important champions of the Sword Army.

The King of Swords himself was sitting on an unadorned chair that had been carved out of stone, wearing a cold expression. Morgan was standing behind him, her usual air of polite amusement gone. Nephis was leaning against a wall, her white armor smeared with ash.

Sunny spared her a brief glance, then looked away.

There were three other Saints of the Sword Army in the chamber — Sky Tide, Summer Knight, and Sir Jest of Dagonet.

There was one more person, as well.

A handsome man was kneeling in front of the stone throne, his sunken face marked by pain and fatigue. His presence possessed a mystifying depth to it, as if most of him was hidden from sight.

His dark armor, crafted from the skin of some dreadful leviathan, was severely damaged and bloodied.

The man had his head lowered, so Sunny could not see his eyes. However, his black hair, strangely enough, had slight accents of dark blue.

Sunny's expression changed as he recognized his former friend and comrade, Saint Naeve of the House of Night.

Cassie, meanwhile, bowed deeply.

"I brought him, Your Majesty."

Anvil spared her a glance and nodded.

"Just in time."

With that, he shifted his gaze to the Nightwalker, remained silent for a few moments, and then asked in a cold, heavy tone:

"So, Saint Naeve. I've brought you and your people here, just as you requested. Now, I think, it's time that you give me an explanation. There are reports that the armada of the House of Night is on the move. Night Garden itself has set sail. So, tell me... what, exactly, are your elders scheming?"

Naeve shivered slightly and lingered for a while, as if gathering courage.

Eventually, he took a deep breath, straightened, and looked the King of Swords straight in the eyes.

When he spoke, his voice sounded firm:

"You are mistaken, Supreme Anvil. My elders are not scheming anything. In fact… they are dead."

Naeve paused for a moment, and then added hoarsely:

"They have all been… turned. The House of Night is no more."