1866 Cutting the Red Tape

NQSC was in chaos.

The damage dealt to the city by the bloodshed in the strongholds of the House of Night was minimal, even though some of the battles had briefly spilled onto the streets.

However, the blow dealt to the morale of the citizens was severe.

The news of what had truly happened was slow to spread, and this time, even the government propaganda machine was not sure how to handle the unprecedented and ominous event. Because of that, wild rumors were spreading, making already anxious people feel even less secure.

Granted, the actual truth was, in many senses, much worse than the rumors.

The streets of the city were strangely desolate. Those people who did venture outside walked with hurried steps. The public transport was enveloped by tense silence… the fires had been put out, but pillars of smoke were still rising into the sky.

In that subdued atmosphere, a procession of armored PTVs stopped in front of the government headquarters, and a young woman with strange and vivid vermilion eyes stepped out of one of them.

Usually, Morgan would have changed into an appropriate attire for an official visit, but wasting time on appearances was a luxury she did not have today. So, she was still wearing her battle armor, her red cloak moving slightly in the wind.

Her hands were encased in intricate gauntlets forged of black steel. The craftsmanship was stellar, but they were still burdensome when trying to perform finer tasks. Sadly, there was little she could do about that.

Morgan missed her molded leather gloves.

A small army of guards poured out of the armored PTVs — most of them were mundane retainers of the clan, so their presence was purely symbolic. It did look like the government compound was about to be besieged, which was the intended purpose.

Maintaining a calm and slightly haughty expression, Morgan ascended the stairs and entered the stronghold. She heard gasps and saw the government workers in the lobby react to her entrance. Some paled; others were enthralled by her Transcendent beauty. She did not spare any of them any attention and walked forward with confident steps.

A man with a bit more poise gave her a deep bow.

"Lady Morgan. Why…"

She looked at him coldly and saw the man take an involuntary step back.

"Take me to the council chamber."

He hesitated.

"But…"

Her gaze grew a little more intense, and all the blood drained from the man's face.

"T—this way, my lady…"

Her entourage remained in the lobby as she was escorted deep underground.

There were countless security checkpoints and fortified chokeholds on the way. No one dared to bar her path or slow her down, though — even if they wished, they couldn't. There would have been a complicated dance of diplomatic procedures on any other day, but today, Morgan was not in the mood.

The decision-makers of the government had mostly likely given their permission, as well.

Soon, she entered a spacious conference room. The room looked painfully ordinary, considering its purpose, but that was entirely the point. The government was aggressively utilitarian in everything it did, as if to constantly remind its members of their purpose and function.

There were a couple dozen people inside the room, gathered around a projection table — both mundane and Awakened. The government did not discriminate between the two, and its leaders were a mix of those who carried the Nightmare Spell and those who did not. In fact, the current Chancellor was a mundane man, as was the previous one.

Morgan did not pay him any attention, though. Instead, she focused on five individuals.

Wake of Ruin, Dream Merchant, Soul Reaper, Nightingale, and Raised by Wolves. The five government Saints.

The people in the conference room had been in the middle of a heated discussion just a few moments ago, but when she entered, they all fell silent, looking at her with expressions that varied from wariness to dismay.

Morgan gave them a pleasant smile, then took a chair, dragged it away from the table, sat down, and leisurely crossed her legs.

She was on their territory and outnumbered, with intense gazes boring into her like drills. And yet, it seemed as if the leaders of the government were the nervous ones — Morgan remained perfectly at ease.

"Ladies and gentlemen. It is good to see you all."

There were a few moments of tense silence, and then the Chancellor gave Wake of Ruin a brief glance. The old man — just as unpleasant as ever — looked at her and gritted his teeth.

"...What do you want, Saint Morgan?"

She met his heavy gaze with a chilling one of her own.

"Straight to business, then? It is a pleasure to see you as well, Saint Cor."

He scoffed.

"Have you come to exchange pleasantries? As you can see, we were in the middle of something."

His expression darkened, betraying a hint of barely suppressed fury.

"Thanks to you and your oh-so-great clan."

He would have been more polite, usually. But today, even someone as seasoned as Wake of Ruin seemed to be struggling with maintaining a cool head.

Morgan raised her eyebrows, as if sincerely confused.

"My clan? Surely, you are not blaming the criminal acts of those Song extremists on my family."

She shook her head in dejection.

"First, they stage an unprovoked attack on my sister… during a Gate crisis, no less. Then, they massacre the noble members of the illustrious House of Night and throw the world into chaos. It seems to me that my father and the esteemed members of my great family are the only ones who are earnestly trying to stop the villainy of these Song terrorists. And yet, I am not welcomed warmly here. Instead, I am given a cold shoulder…"

The old man gave her a dark look.

"Spare me the sarcasm, girl. I've been fighting against the Nightmare Spell from long before you were born. I watched the House of Night be established, and now, I've seen it fall. Surely, you understand what that means for the fate of humanity… ah, why do I even bother! Maybe you don't. All of you seem to have lost your minds."

He shook his head and sighed heavily, suddenly looking even older.

"...Just tell us what you want."

Morgan fluttered her eyelashes a few times, looking around the chamber with an innocent expression.

Her gaze lingered on Soul Reaper, Raised by Wolves, and Nightingale for a fraction of a second longer than it did on the rest.

Then, she smiled slightly.

"Well... you see… my father told me to go and find a few Saints…"