1867 Quid Pro Quo

There were a few moments of silence after Morgan's remark. Wake of Ruin studied her intently, then scoffed.

"You can't be serious…"

The slight smile lingered on Morgan's face for a bit, then disappeared without a trace. The hint of levity was also gone from her eyes, leaving behind only cold intensity. Suddenly, the entire chamber felt drowned in a sense of eerie sharpness, as if every edge and surface here suddenly come to possess a keen edge.

A few of the mundane members of the government elite paled.

Morgan sighed deeply.

"Why can't I be serious? If anything, it seems to me that you are the one who is failing to comprehend the reality of your situation, venerable Saint Cor."

She slowly looked at the faces of the high administrators of the government and said, her voice devoid of any amusement:

"The House of Night has been consumed by Song. Their Citadels are conquered, their rulers are dead, and the corpses of their Saints are being worn like suits by a deranged monster. That is what fate has in store for those who foolishly hope to cling to a pretence of neutrality in the war between my house and the Queen of Worms."

She smiled darkly and added in a voice as calm as it was sharp:

"You must have already asked yourself this question… what happens to us now that Ki Song has shown her willingness to stop at nothing to win this war? The House of Night had refused to take a side, and in the end, the choice was made for them. Do you really think that the same won't happen to you? What makes you confident that you won't be next to be destroyed by her?"

Wake of Ruin lingered with the answer, as if unsure what to say. His expression was dark.

Morgan shook her head with contempt.

"Those who can't keep up with the current of time will be drowned by it. You are already a step behind, and you already don't have a choice. Your neutrality is a thing of the past — now, it is hypocrisy at best, and incompetence at worst. The Great Clans might have started the war, but that doesn't mean that others can escape it. The fate of humanity will be decided by who claims victory in Godgrave, and that means your fates, too. At the end of the day, the only thing you can decide is which side to submit to."

The old man glared at her. The corner of his mouth twitched, and he spat angrily:

 "And whose fault is…"

However, a calm voice interrupted him.

Soul Reaper Jet, who had remained silent all that time, finally spoke.

"There's no point in assigning blame, Saint Cor. "

Morgan looked at the chillingly beautiful woman.

Jet was cold and composed, with icy blue eyes and short raven-black hair. Her reputation was more than a little bit sinister, but it was also formidable. Above else, she was known for her ruthless competence.

Morgan did not know Soul Reaper well, but they had fought side by side in the Battle of the Black Skull and later in the Nightmare Desert. She had a good impression of the government Saint.

Jet was... sensible.

As if to echo her thoughts, the icy woman shifted her gaze to Morgan and said lazily:

"Your choice of words is a bit jarring, Lady Morgan. You say that we must submit to someone… I prefer to see it as having to support someone, though. After all, it is the Sovereigns who find themselves in need of our strength, not the other way around."

Soul Reaper smiled coldly and asked:

"So, why should we choose to support Valor instead of Song? After all… the odds seem to be against the Sword Domain, at the moment."

Morgan reciprocated the smile.

'Sensible, indeed.'

It was almost as if Jet had expected this to happen. Maybe she had — it wasn't hard to guess what Valor's next step would be.

"Because Ki Song is an abominable existence — a hungry beast that should never have been allowed to be born. You know what her Aspect is, and what her kingdom might become. She doesn't care whether she rules the living or the dead… so, do you really trust her to keep humanity alive?"

Soul Reaper Jet stared at her silently for a while, then leaned back and chuckled.

"What an ironic thing to say to me, of all people. Thank you, Lady Morgan. I appreciate your sense of humor. Now, can we hear the real reason?"

Morgan smiled.

"It feels nice to be appreciated. Sure. First of all… three of you were in a Nightmare with the person who is marching on Bastion right now. You know what he is capable of, and that he is not burdened by matters of morality, compassion, or human decency. There are millions of people living in Bastion — I can defend the castle, but I can't protect the city beyond alone. Saint Athena, you've spent the last four years living there. Are you really comfortable sitting back and doing nothing while that person has been set free in the Sword Domain? Are the rest of you?"

Raised by Wolves gave her a dark stare, but said nothing.

The leaders of the government were silent, as well, their expressions weary.

Only Soul Reaper did not seem concerned.

"It is a bit funny to hear a member of Clan Valor lecture us about morality and compassion, but fine. That is indeed a viable reason, albeit a rather weak one. What else?"

Morgan shrugged and looked at Saint Thane, the Dream Merchant — the flamboyant Transcendent of ambiguous inclinations who sat next to the Chancellor, visibly anxious.

"Well, venerable Saint Thane here helped us hide the departure of the Ivory Island from Bastion before. Considering that, Clan Song might have already assumed that the government is allying itself with the Sword Domain… who's to say that they aren't preparing measures to punish you all for that perceived sleight as we speak? Since you are already under threat of being punished for the crime you did not commit, you might as well go ahead and commit it."

Saint Thane's heavily mascaraed and painted eyes widened.

"That… you, you forced me! You had leverage because of the assassination incident!"

 Morgan shrugged nonchalantly.

"The fact of the matter is that it did happen, and those Song sisters are quite vindictive."

 Sparing the indignant Saint a smile, she looked back to Soul Reaper Jet and added in a serious tone:

"The most important reason, though… is that I have something that you desperately need."

Soul Reaper raised an eyebrow.

"Oh?"

Morgan nodded.

She remained silent for a few moments, and the smiled.

"...I have the remnants of the House of Night."

Instantly, there was dead silence in the chamber.

Her expression did not change.

"They are all in my care, including a considerable number of surviving Ascended. You should have been panicking about that just before I arrived, more than anything else. Don't you need them the most to guide naval convoys across the ocean? Without the Nightwalkers, the infrastructure of the waking world will suffer irreparable damage. And I am the one who controls them now."

Morgan looked at Soul Reaper, then at the Saint Cor, and finally at the Chancellor.

"Considering the nature of my enemy, I don't have much use for them. Sending them to fight that man will only make him stronger. But… I do need powerful Transcendent warriors to help me defend my father's Domain."

There was a long stretch of silence. Morgan remained motionless, her body relaxed. Her expression did not betray any emotion.

Eventually, the Chancellor let out a heavy sigh.

"With how many Awakened have been taken away by the war, the situation in the waking world is dire as it is. Someone has to defend the population centers against the opening Gates and lead our troops. So… three. Three of the government Saints will lend you their support, Lady Morgan. No more."

She studied him for a moment, then nodded with grace and decorum.

"Pleasure doing business with you, Chancellor. Time is of the essence, so forgive me if I don't linger to attend the formalities. I'll be taking those three Saints immediately."

The man stared at her darkly for a bit.

"...The pleasure is all mine, Lady Morgan."

Neutrality, indeed, was a myth.

If it had not been before, it was now.