1910 Rivergate

Rivergate, the Citadel of Clan Dagonet, was built on a wide river. It cut across it like a great wall —or rather, a series of walls, descending from tall cliffs like steps meant for a giant.

It was both a dam and a lock. The highest wall held back the powerful current. Each step below it was separated by a vast chamber with towering gates, which could be filled with or drained of water with the help of ancient enchantments.

A ship traveling to or from the Stormsea could descend from the cliffs or scale them due to the ancient system of locks, never leaving the river. At the same time, nothing could swim further upstream without destroying the Citadel — and even then, the assailant would have to crawl out of the water and travel by land with the locks destroyed.

There was almost a kilometer of vertical distance between the highest point of Rivergate and its lowest point. Each descending wall was incredibly tall and thick, built of monolithic stone, with battlements constructed on top of it. Fearsome siege weapons stood on the battlements — some of them enchanted with ancient sorcery, some built by the forgemasters of Clan Valor.

Hundreds of Awakened crowded the walls, led by a dozen Masters.

Seven Saints were standing on the highest of the fortress walls, looking down with somber expressions.

They were Morgan, the Princess of War, and six champions whose help she had enlisted... or coerced.

At this point, there was little difference.

Three of the six Saints had belonged to the House of Night once — Saint Naeve, Saint Bloodwave, and Saint Aether.

The other three were with the government — Nightsinger, War Beast, and Soul Reaper Jet.

At that moment, Naeve was talking to War Beast — Saint Athena, Raised by Wolves.

"...So you encountered that fiend before?"

She gave him a long look, then smiled wryly.

"We even killed him before."

Naeve turned to a startlingly beautiful man with auburn hair and mesmerizing green eyes, a stunned expression on his face.

"Saint Nightingale, is this true?"

Saint Kai shifted uncomfortably.

"Not exactly. What we killed was not that fiend — rather, it was a Corrupted version of his Transcendent self conjured by the Nightmare. Even then, none of us three dare claim any credit. He was eradicated by Lady Changing Star."

He sighed.

"Still. We know more about what he's capable of than anyone else. That should be of some help."

Naeve looked down, then cast a dark gaze south.

"...At least we know that he can be killed, then."

Less than a day had passed since Mordret of... of Nowhere, really, had landed on the shore of the Sword Domain. The six Saints Morgan had recruited barely had any time to talk while being brought to Rivergate by her.

The journey from Bastion to here had been swift due to the fact that there were three Transcendent champions of the House of Night with them. Morgan herself had not said much to them, spending most of the journey thinking about her task with a dark expression on her face.

She had, however, given each of the Six Saints an amulet in the shape of an anvil pierced by a sword — all except Nightingale, who already possessed one.

Her expression had been solemn while entrusting her companions with the steel charms.

At the moment, there are only seven of these in existence. Now, six of them are here — I spoiled quite a few relationships to take them away from the previois owners. So, treasure them well. Never part with the amulet, and don't allow that man to take it away from you. Unless you want to become one of his vessels."

Saint Naeve studied the amulet with a mournful expression. After a while, he asked:

"...Don't you have one for yourself, Lady Morgan?"

She shook her head.

"The seventh... had been lost in Antarctica and never recovered. My uncle wore it. Of course, Clan Valor possesses other means of defense against that man, but none are quite as easily transportable. In any case, don't worry. I'll be fine."

Hearing her words, Soul Reaper raised an eyebrow.

"Oh? How so?"

Morgan answered her with a sharp smile.

"Well, if he does enter my soul... I'll just have to kill him there, won't I? Like my dear sister did, in the Nightmare."

She had been preparing to fight her brother again for four years. Morgan doubted that he would actually dare challenge her to a soul duel, but if he did... both of them would not survive the battle, this time.

Morgan almost hoped that he would.

In fact, the amulets were a bad solution to their predicament. That was because, from everything her family had learned about that man, the only way to kill him was to destroy his true reflection during a soul duel... even that had only been learned from Changing Star's report on the events of her Third Nightmare.

So, by donning the amulets, her champions were rejecting the only method of defeating the enemy.

But little could be done about that. Leaving them defenseless was too great of a risk — she absolutely could not allow her brother to take more Saints, because he would be able to conquer more Citadels by wearing their bodies.

And losing more Citadels to the Song Domain was not an option.

She sighed.

"How long before he comes?"

It was Saint Bloodwave, with his deep voice, who had asked the question.

Morgan lingered for a moment.

"He had already come. He's just hiding and observing us, for the time being."

Her words seemed to unsettle the six Saints — or rather, five of them. Soul Reaper remained relaxed and aloof, leaning on her ghostly war scythe as she lazily studied the ancient walls of Rivergate.

Raised by Wolves shifted from one leg to another, and then looked at Morgan with a smile.

"You know what they usually do in such situations in heroic novels, don't you?"

Morgan couldn't help but admit... that she was continuously perplexed by that woman.

She blinked a couple of times, trying to remember if she had even read a heroic novel in her life.

Surely not.

"Can't say that I do, Saint Athena."

The tall woman — beautiful as a statue of the goddess of war that had come alive — grinned.

"Well, the resourceful type of hero always blows up a dam and drowns an army of ten thousand men, achieving an impossible victory and proving their strategic genius. You're the strategist, so... we aren't going to blow up Rivergate, are we? Oh, and call me Effie."

Morgan stared at her for a few moments, then slowly shook her head.

"No, we are not going to blow up Rivergate. Why would I try drowning an enemy whose vessels are all Saints from the House of Night? That doesn't make any sense."

Raised by Wolves... Effie... nodded knowingly.

"A good decision. You really are a genius!"