1912 Self-Reflection

It wasn't easy to evacuate an entire city in the span of a day, even if it was many times smaller

than Bastion. Luckily, Morgan had Nightingale with her — with his commanding voice, everything went smoothly and swiftly.

The warriors defending the fortress were reluctant to leave their post, but they did not dare to disobey her. The members of the Dagonet clan were even more reluctant to abandon their Citadel without a battle, but Morgan persuaded them without too much trouble. They were mostly non-combatants, anyway — the true strength of the clan was far north, fighting in Godgrave.

The rest knew that they would be of no real help in the clash against the banished prince of Valor.

By the time the sun started to roll toward the horizon, Rivergate had grown eerily quiet. Now, only the seven Saints remained in the ancient fortress, calmly preparing for battle. The Saints from the House of Night were grim and full of murderous desire for vengeance... the three government Saints were strangely nonchalant.

Or maybe not so strangely. Two of them were the survivors of the Forgotten Shore, after all, while the third was Soul Reaper Jet — Morgan wasn't even sure if it was possible for them to lose composure.

'Like Nephis.'

Morgan briefly contemplated destroying the Gateway of Rivergate, but then discarded that idea. It would not mean much for the war, anyway — not in the long run, at least. The infrastructure of the Sword Domain would suffer greatly, though, and it would be hard to rebuild after the war was over.

If there would be anyone left to rebuild, that was.

"Death! Death!"

Morgan stared at the annoying crow that seemed to always follow Soul Reaper around with displeasure.

She scowled slightly.

"What are you saying, stupid bird?"

The crow stared back at her, then fluttered its wings in the air.

"Bird! Bird!"

Morgan sighed and shook her head. What was she doing talking to an Echo?

Finally, their preparations were complete. She threw one last glance at the river, which shone beautifully in the radiance of a blazing sunset, and took a canteen of water off her belt.

Opening the lid, Morgan took a sip of water, then poured the rest on the paved surface of the rampart.

For a moment, she could see her reflection in the puddle, surrounded by the reflections of the six Saints.

Then, her reflection smiled.

And spoke.

"...It has been awhile, my dear sister."

None of the Saints reeled back, but those of them from the House of Night visibly paled... even Saint Aether, who used to the ideal of composure and decorum in the past, seemed unnerved.

Morgan nodded somberly, not paying the young man any attention.

"Indeed. The last time I saw you... was it when you failed to kill me and ran away to save your sorry skin? And right after giving the big speech about how uncompromising your desire to see me dead was, no less. That must have been quite embarrassing for you."

Her reflection laughed.

"Ah... what a sweet memory! You floundering in the dirt, too weak to stand up... I truly cherish it a lot."

Morgan gritted her teeth, the familiar feeling of shame cutting her like a blade.

Mordret had taught her what shame was, as well.

Her reflection, meanwhile, pretended to look around.

"I see you've evacuated the town. How very unlike you, my dear sister. I would have rather expected you to string every man and woman living there on the fortress walls, to serve as padding. That would be more in line with our family's style, wouldn't it?"

The reflection smiled pleasantly.

"...Of course, nothing is stopping me from going after the boats first, and then returning here to finish you off."

Morgan met his smile with one of her own.

"Funny you should mention boats. Tell me, did you crash the Night Garden into the shore because of some devious plan, or simply because you couldn't properly control it?"

At that moment, Soul Reaper sighed.

"Are you really just going to trade insults?"

Morgan's reflection shifted its gaze to the three government Saints. Its smile suddenly brightened.

"Saint Jet, Saint Kai, Saint Athena... it warms my heart to see you again, my old comrades. Naeve, Bloodwave, and Aether too. I cherish the memories of conquering Nightmares and battling the Stormsea side by side with you all, as well."

Saint Naeve stared at the reflection coldly, then uttered through gritted teeth:

"You vile creature..."

The reflection remained silent for a few moments, its smile slowly draining away. Eventually, it stared at them with an eerie, inhuman expression.

Seeing her own face wearing it was a little disturbing, even for Morgan.

The reflection spoke once again, this time not bothering to put on a human mask:

"I am going to say it once. The six of you... have nothing to do with this. This is between me and the Great Clan Valor — a family affair, if you will. So, I'll give you a chance to escape. Surrender the fortress and leave. Then, I will spare your lives."

Saint Naeve looked at the reflection darkly.

"It is indeed a family affair. Our family, which you slaughtered!"

Soul Reaper Jet, meanwhile, just shrugged nonchalantly.

"It would be really inconvenient for me if you conquer Bastion. So... sorry. We'll stay."

Her crow chose that solemn moment to caw loudly:

"Sorry! Sorry!"

Morgan glanced at the stupid bird, shook her head, and looked back at her reflection.

"It must be getting really crowded in your head, huh? Did you really think they would take you up on that offer?"

The reflection remained motionless for a few moments, then suddenly smiled.

"Not really. But I had to ask for the sake of politeness. Not that that is out of the way..."

Its smile turned bleak and eerie.

"...Prepare to die, I guess. Ah, I have really waited for this moment for a long, long time."

A moment later, the wall under their feet trembled slightly.

And at the same time, the water of the river far downstream churned, revealing several gargantuan shapes.

Morgan looked at the sunset and took a long, deep breath.

Scarlet sparks danced around her head, forming into a black helmet.

"Prepare for battle."

And just like that, the battle for Rivergate began.