2024 Regrettable Miscalculation

In the command tent of the Seventh Legion, the air was heavy with the smell of blood, ash, and smoke.

Five of the seven Transcendent princesses of Song were gathered there. The healers of the Song Army had already treated their wounds, but their clothes were still bearing the traces of the recent battle.

Seishan had suffered more than the other four, having been burned terribly by the incandescent white flames. But she was also the calmest, having already changed from the charred rags of her previous garment into a clean dress.

The mood in the tent was somber and dark.

Eventually, it was Beastmaster who broke the silence. Nursing her head, she asked quietly:

"How are the rest of our sisters?"

Although Ki Song had seven Transcendent daughters, there were more girls she had adopted. It was just that not all of them had become Saints.

Most had been left in the Song Domain to manage it in the absence of the most powerful members of the royal clan, but some were here in Godgrave, scattered across the seven royal legions.

Seishan answered after a short pause:

"Our sisters are fine… they are not easily killed."

Beastmaster let out a sigh of relief, then winced and asked in a subdued tone:

"What about mother, then?"

Seishan lingered for a moment.

"She will lead the farewell ritual for the fallen soldiers and see as after that. I doubt that it will be a long conversation... the army will have to start the retreat soon."

A heavy silence settled in the tent once more.

Eventually, Silent Stalker shifted slightly and threw a questioning look at her sisters.

Seishan smiled darkly.

"Yes. We have… miscalculated, indeed."

Beastmaster shook her head.

"There was no miscalculation. We just didn't have the correct information."

With that, she glanced at Death Singer bitterly.

The lovely oracle stared back with an aggrieved expression.

"What? I warned you! I told you that we're all going to die!"

The tantalizing enchantress remained silent for a few moments,then let out a soft chuckle.

"...That you did. In any case, the things we learned from my thralls in the Sword Army, and from Revel, were not entirely true. The Lord of Shadows is far more than we expected."

Seishan let out a sigh and nodded.

"It seems that he is like the other two — a bearer of a Divine Aspect."

Lonesome Howl cursed.

"Damn it all... the plan was for our vassals to destroy his Echoes, then help us deal with that man — before all of us moved on to assist you against Changing Star. Instead, they are dead, and we've been brutalized by not one, but two of these monsters. Gods… how is Morgan even still alive? I feel like I've been run over by a PTV."

Of course, a PTV would have been utterly destroyed if it collided with Lonesome Howl. Additionally…

Her voice sounded gruff and boisterous, but her sisters could sense an unfamiliar note of turmoil and upheaval in its pleasant sound.

Seishan sighed.

"It is unfortunate that we made a mistake in evaluating the power of the Lord of Shadows. He is no less of a threat than Changing Star is… more of a threat, perhaps. The morale of our soldiers was already low because of his raids on the supply caravans. Now, they'll be jumping at every shadow."

Beastmaster let out a joyless chuckle.

"...Can you blame them?"

She shook her head, then added somberly:

"That Ability of his took me by surprise. It is some form of duplication… his Dormant Ability, perhaps? Quantitative Abilities are often tied to one's Rank, after all. Howl and others witnessed four copies — that would coincide with the Transcendent Rank. But then one of his other Abilities would not make sense. Is he using a powerful Memory or a Legacy Relic in place, perhaps?"

The others seemed unsure.

Beastmaster lingered for a while, then shook her head.

"It's useless to guess, isn't it? If his truly is a Divine Aspect, then we shouldn't try to apply common logic to him. Besides, that is not even the most important question.The most important question is… why did he leave us alive?"

Lonesome Howl looked down, her expression growing dark.

"...He seemed to be reluctant to anger mother."

Hearing that, Seishan scoffed.

"Does that man look like someone who would be scared of incurring a Sovereign's wrath? If he was, he wouldn't have joined the war at all. There are plenty of Death Zones in the Dream Realm where he could have fled to, and we already know that he is more than capable of making one his home. More than that, he also spared Ceres, Siord, and the Saint of Sorrow."

She shook her head.

"No… he spared you because Nephis ordered him to hold back. Just like she had done with the soldiers guarding the supply caravans."

The rest of Ki Song's daughters looked at her with a hint of surprise.

Eventually, Beastmaster asked:

"...Why did she order him to hold back, then? And why did she hold back herself?"

Seishan's expression turned pensive.

She remained silent for a while, then sighed.

"I do not know. Her mercy and benevolence are just an act, though — of that, I am sure. There is hardly a less merciful and benevolent person in both worlds than Nephis of the Immortal Flame clan."

Seishan hesitated for a moment.

"Not that I hold it against her, of course. In fact, she's quite admirable. Nephis... is scheming something, but what? I can't figure it out."

Her exquisitely beautiful face seemed troubled.

Lonesome Howl sneered.

"Aren't you giving her too much credit, sister? She is already as high as any of us can be, and there is nothing left for her to earn. What can she ever scheme for? Before, I could have imagined a twisted scenario where she wanted to prove herself and become… I don't know, daddy's favorite. But with Morgan falling out of favor, even that is already beside the point."

She leaned back and crossed her arms.

"Your judgment is always clouded when it comes to those years, Shan. Sure,that girl achieved something outstanding on the Forgotten Shore — assembling an army of loyal followers, killing an invincible tyrant, and taking his throne… then getting most of her army obliterated to win an unwinnable battle. But that was in the past."

As she was speaking, Seishan's expression changed subtly.

Lonesome Howl did not notice, but Beastmaster did.

She smiled.

"Wait… you don't think?"

Seishan lingered for a few moments, then slowly shook her head.

"No… of course not. Yes, Nephis and the Lord of Shadows are immensely powerful, but even they stand no chance against a Supreme. They would know it better than us, too. Unless she conquers the Fourth Nightmare, it would be pointless to even think about disloyalty — and Anvil won't allow her to challenge a Seed."

So, thinking in that direction was a fool's errand.

And yet…

Seishan remembered Gunlaug's golden armor.

And how impenetrable it had seemed.

Her brow furrowed a little, and she gave Beastmaster a complicated look.

The beautiful enchantress smiled.

"What? Are you regretting dissuading me from killing her in Antarctica now?"

Seishan did not answer immediately.

Eventually, she said:

"I'd probably be a Skinwalker vessel now if you did."

Beastmaster sighed.

"True. Then I'll express my gratitude to her the next time we meet..."