2079 Fragments of War (16)

Morgan observed the battle with an impassive expression. Her gaze was cold, and her heart remained calm, untouched by the awe and terror of the calamitous confrontation. It was not as if she had not seen this battle transpire before… everything that was happening had already happened, and even if there were minor divergences along the way, the ending was always the same.

A crushing defeat.

It was funny…

Battles as great and destructive as this one had been unheard of in the past, but now, the dreadful sight of it all was so familiar as to almost seem boring.

Similarly, Morgan had rarely tasted defeat before. But now, its flavor never seemed to leave her.

It was all a grand game, of course. Morgan lost to Mordret every day, but in doing so, she was reaching her goals while denying his ambition. So, victory was a question of perspective.

The war in Godgrave had been raging for many months now, but Bastion was still held firmly by the Great Clan Valor.

Who was being defeated? Who was winning?

Perhaps Morgan and her brother were in a stalemate.

…She was tired, though. Her companions started these identical days anew, but Morgan remembered each and every one. For her, these past months had been one dire, devastating, never-ending battle. One that seemed hopeless, at that. Its outcome was unclear, and after a while, even its cause was starting to seem vague.

It was highly likely that not even people on the frontlines of Godgrave had experienced such intense warfare. There was a pace and cadence to a war, after all. Terrible battles were followed by long periods of relative peace while the battered armies regrouped and prepared for the next clash. But here in true Bastion, there was no lull to the violence. It was constant and incessant.

The most furious battlefield of the Great Domain War was hidden out of sight and shrouded in mystery, with only two people experiencing its terror.

No wonder Morgan was tired.

She wondered if her brother was tired, too…

If he was, he did not show it.

Today's battle was nearing a conclusion. The Nightmare Creatures had long been eliminated, and so were many of his Transvendent vessels.

Saint Aether was dead. Naeve and Bloodwave were either dead or dying, too. Raised by Wolves was almost done tearing Typhaon apart, rivers of blood flowing from harrowing wounds on her flawless body. The gargantuan corpse of Knossos lay on the ruins of the drowned city, and somewhere beneath it, Nightingale was struggling to free his draconic body from under the rubble.

Soul Reaper was desperately trying to preserve her soul essence while fighting the few remaining Night Saints.

The ruins of the castle were in a sorry state, the very mountains on which they stood practically split apart by a titanic blow.

'He'll snow himself soon.'

And just as Morgan expected, her brother finally revealed his original body, landing easily on a fragment of a crumbled wall a dozen meters away from her.

Sparing Morgan a pleasant smile, he bowed politely.

"Ah, dear sister. How wonderful it is to see you again."

She just studied him somberly.

No… no, that bastard was not tired at all. If anything, he seemed to be having the time of his life.

Instead of answering, Morgan simply raised her sword.

Mordret chuckled.

"I am not going to lie, this is quite a predicament. I often dreamed about killing the members of my despicable family slowly, but this… this has been a bit too slow even for my taste."

He raised his own sword and glanced at its sharp blade with a faint smile.

"Not that carving you up day after day has not been enjoyable, dear sister."

Morgan smiled darkly.

"...Same here."

Mordret laughed.

"Still, aren't you a bit ashamed of yourself? It would have been all over for you a long time ago if not for the fact that Soul Reaper Jet happened to possess that neat Memory of hers, after all. Sheer luck does not exactly constitute merit, does it?"

Morgan shrugged indifferently.

"The Memory is simply a convenient opportunity. Knowing how to grasp an opportunity is a merit, too. Knowing how to create opportunities is another… you talk as if it wasn't me who recruited Soul Reaper, to begin with. In any case, I would have found another way if there was no Memory."

She had indeed harbored a few plans before Soul Reaper Jet revealed the hourglass Memory, albeit none would have been quite as effective.

Mordret looked at her with a smile.

"So, what then? Are we going to continue this charade indefinitely, dear sister? Ah… I would really hate for something as wonderful as watching you bleed to grow old."

Morgan smiled darkly.

"You are always welcome to enter my soul and challenge me to a duel there. That is the only way you will be able to kill me before I can activate the enchantment."

The best plan was to stall her brother long enough for the war to resolve itself. The second-best plan was to force him into challenging her to a soul duel.

No matter which option he chose, she won. Every outcome seemed to be in her favor.

…Why was it, then, that Morgan felt uneasy? Mordret had to be weaving some kind of scheme. Was there something she was missing?

He shook his head nonchalantly.

"I'd rather not. I have plenty of time to waste here, anyway."

Morgan's dark smile dimmed, and she looked at him coldly.

Then, she said:

"That's just it, though. I don't think you do."

Mordret raised an eyebrow.

"Oh? Are you hoping that our father can kill Ki Song swiftly? I am not convinced. So, I am willing to risk it."

She tilted her head a little and studied him for a few moments.

Then, another smile illuminated her pale face — this one faint, but sincere.

"But what if Ki Song kills our father swiftly? While you are stuck here, unable to do it yourself?"

For the first time in a while, her brother's mask of benevolent decorum cracked briefly, revealing the hideous face of hateful madness beneath.

His grin evaporated, replaced by inhuman coldness.

Mordret took a step forward and raised his sword.

"You should not say such terrible things, sister. Your sound unfilial."

Morgan grinned.

"Go die, bastard."

With that, she lunged forward.

They clashed again, like they did every day. The fury of their confrontation shook the broken mountain.

In a weird way, it was almost enjoyable. Morgan did not often receive an opportunity to cross swords with someone who was close to her in skill. But for these past few months, she could express her sword freely and without restraint. She remembered being thrilled for the first few times… each instance was a battle where her very survival was at stake, as well.

And her brother, loathsome as he might have been, was still a descendant of War. His skill was fearsome, so it would have been hard to gain so much precious experience anywhere else.

It was just that she had to experience harrowing pain, watch her body be mutilated, and taste the bitterness of defeat every time.

Just like this time.

It was so... burdensome.

Soon enough, Morgan was broken and bleeding. Her sword had collapsed into a whirlwind of scarlet sparks, and her gaze started to blur.

She was hurt quite terribly.

Drowning in her own blood, Morgan reached within and activated the enchantment of the mystical hourglass once again.

Her bloodied lips twisted into a smile.

"See you… next time."

Mordret, who was in a slightly better shape, was looking at the deep cracks leading to the depths of the shattered mountains with a thoughtful expression.

His eyes glistened strangely.

"Yes… see you next time, sister."

The world seemed to dissolve into nothingness.

A few moments later, Morgan found herself tending to a pot of fragrant stew.

She closed her eyes tiredly.

'Damn it all.'