2095 King and Jester  
  
Not long after the battle with Condemnation, the King of Swords was sitting on the vast stump of an ancient tree, surrounded by the dim twilight of the Hollows. The trunk of the tree was laying nearby, splintered and shredded by countless cuts, vile juices seeping out of it onto the scarlet moss.  
  
The trunk was hollow on the inside, and half-digested remains of dead Nightmare Creatures could be seen through the gaping holes in the bloodred wood.  
  
Anvil was cleaning his sword with an aloof expression on his regal face.  
  
Soon enough, there was the sound of footsteps, and Jest of Dagonet approached him from the direction of the temporary camp established by the six Saints. The dapper old man seemed undisturbed by the predatory rustle of the ancient jungle, leaning slightly on his cane.  
  
He had disappeared for most of the battle against the Condemnation, only returning after it was slain. The Saints naturally had questions about where Jest had vanished to in the chaos, to which he simply produced several Supreme soul shards and unleashed a barrage of questionable jokes.  
  
It seemed that he had been pulled into a buried structure by one of the Asuras, and was beset by several Great Nightmare Creatures there, unable to escape and almost drowning in lava once the ruins were destroyed.  
  
Now, several hours later, the King and his retinue had left the desolate battlefield behind and entered the scarlet jungle once more, moving west for some time before making camp.  
  
The old man stopped a few steps away from the Sovereign and looked at him with a curious expression.  
  
"A new sword?"  
  
Anvil nodded silently.  
  
"It's Condemnation."  
  
Saint Jest clicked his tongue and studied the dreadful blade for a few moments. Then, he shuddered and quickly shook his head.  
  
"I presume the kids did not see?"  
  
The King of Swords glanced at him, then shrugged.  
  
"By the time they came to their senses, I had already turned it into a Memory."  
  
The old man nodded.  
  
"Good, good… well, what do I care? It's not like I am your butler. That would be that bore, Sebastian. If he's still alive."  
  
Anvil finally looked away from the sword and gazed at Jest coldly.  
  
After a few moments of silence, he asked in an indifferent tone:  
  
"How was your outing?"  
  
Saint Jest grinned.  
  
"Well, it could have been worse. I did manage to reach the Nameless Temple during the commotion… sadly, I failed to get a good look."  
  
The King of Swords raised an eyebrow, prompting the old man to cough in embarrassment.  
  
"That kid, Shadow… I guess he was wary of me from the very start. I tried the Hollows approach at first, but that pretty Echo of his — or whatever that onyx lass is — was there waiting for me, hiding in the shadows. Goodness gracious, such a sight. Anyway, that thing is more or less created to be my nemesis... it's completely immune to mind attacks. So, I did not attack and climbed to the surface instead."  
  
He sighed.  
  
"But there was… something… guarding the Nameless Temple above ground, as well. I could not see it, and I could not sense it. But it was there. So, I took a cursory glance and retreated."  
  
Anvil frowned, lingered for a few moments, and then continued to clean the dreadful sword.  
  
After a while, he asked evenly:  
  
"And?"  
  
Saint Jest shrugged.  
  
"He is definitely hiding something. But what? That, I could not say."  
  
He hesitated for a heartbeat, and then grinned.  
  
"I mean… that much was already obvious, I guess! You know, considering the creepy mask."  
  
Anvil glanced at him with no amusement in his steely grey eyes.  
  
"That mask is a Divine Memory of the Seventh Tier. When, one of them is, at least."  
  
Saint Jest shrugged.  
  
"Good for him. Well, anyway… I am pretty sure that he is not working for that Song girl. I am also convinced that he has nothing to do with the… third one. Whatever he is hiding, it only has to do with Immortal Flame's grandkid."  
  
A hint of displeasure found its way into Anvil's eyes.  
  
He studied the sharp blade of the sword, remained silent for a while, and then asked in a distant tone:  
  
"Who do you think is the more dangerous of them?"  
  
The old man laughed.   
  
"The most dangerous? Personally, I think the third one is the most dangerous."  
  
The King looked at him with a hint of curiosity.   
  
"Song of the Fallen? Why?"  
  
Saint Jest smiled.   
  
"It's the quiet ones that are always the problem. And our blind beauty, Cassia, is so quiet that it's often hard to remember that she's there. Creeps me out, to be honest."  
  
Anvil smiled faintly, then nodded.   
  
The old man's expression changed subtly.   
  
"Why? What do you want to do?"  
  
The King of Swords shrugged.  
  
"Nothing. Who says that I want to do anything?"  
  
Saint Jest chuckled nervously.  
  
"Yes, well… good. Doing something while we are in the key stage of the war would be unwise."  
  
Anvil dismissed the dreadful sword and rose to his feet, looking west. There, the dome of the Hollows was sloping down, falling toward the ground. It was the boundary of the Breastbone Hollow, with a great dark fissure opening a path into the First Rib.  
  
He shook his head.  
  
"You don't have to worry."  
  
With that, he turned around and headed toward the camp where the six Saints were preparing food.  
  
Saint Jest looked at his back.  
  
A few moments later, he said quietly:  
  
"I am not worried. It's just… you're breaking my damn heart."  
  
Anvil smiled slightly and answered without ever turning his head:  
  
"Stop pretending like you have a heart, old man. You're the one who taught me how to be heartless."  
  
Jest sighed, then shook his head and followed.  
  
"Respect your elders, brat... I mean, my king. In any case, I have the right to be sentimental in my advanced age, don't I? I won't be around for much longer, you know... so, how about you cut me some slack..."  
  
Anvil answered indifferently:  
  
"You're a Saint. Your lifespan is not even comparable to that of a mundane human, so stop pretending to be frail."  
  
Jest chuckled.  
  
"That's true, too... no, but why are you calling me an old man, then? I'm basically in my prime! How dare you!"  
  
The King did not respond.