2138 Cleaning House  
  
Cassie had lost the ability to perceive the future, so her suspicion was not based on any kind of prophetic vision. However, she was quite confident that the old man had resolved to end her life today.  
  
That was because even without knowing the future, and with her memory of past visions in disarray, she still retained her analytic mind and the ability to come to conclusions based on deductive reasoning.  
  
She also had a lot of unknowing spies supplying her with information, and therefore knew far more than she was supposed to.  
  
Take the current situation, for example…  
  
Nephis had joined the Great Clan Valor to destroy it from within, and spent many years enduring the hostility of its elders. Outwardly, nothing hinted at her deep hatred of the Sovereigns. Nothing revealed that she knew who had conspired to eliminate her father, and who sent countless assassins to kill her as a child.   
  
She seemed like a willful, but faultlessly loyal daughter of a Legacy clan who selflessly served her adoptive family despite not being treated that well by it.   
  
The King of Sword had no evidence to suspect her of contemplating treason.  
  
However…  
  
Anvil was no fool. He knew perfectly well whose daughter Nephis was, and what role he had played in the downfall of her family. Therefore, he would treat her with suspicion no matteг what Nephis did or failed to do.  
  
He would also know that if she was going to betray him, she would do so during the final days of the war. Because, reasonably, the only way to betray a Sovereign was to help another Supreme destroy them.  
  
And people tended to adhere to reason… even if the subject of their suspicion was someone entirely unreasonable.  
  
So, Cassie had anticipated the possibility that the enemy would move against them as the resolution of the war drew near.  
  
Then came the order to depart on the scouting mission in the dеpths of the First Rib Hollow — the furthest and most remote part of the war theater.  
  
It was already strange that the King of Sword had isolated Nephis from Cassie and the Lord of Shadows by sending them both away from the Greater Crossing. It was even stranger that Cassie had been assigned to the frontline.  
  
Now, she was separated from Sunny, as well.  
  
That string of unlikely events was too improbable to be a mere coincidence. Added to everything she had learned from her marks…  
  
Cassie had become convinced that she was seen as a hindrance.  
  
The most damning evidence was the identity of the two Saints who accompanied her on the mission.  
  
One was the niece of a recently executed traitor.  
  
The other was the King's executioner and hidden blade.  
  
There was something strange about it all, however. If Anvil really wanted to get rid of her, he would not have needed such a convoluted scheme. He had a thousand ways to make Cassie disappear without raising suspicion… if he even deemed it necessary to avoid suspicion, to begin with.  
  
However, he had not. Which made Cassie believe that this scouting mission was Jest's own initiative. Which meant that she was the only one in danger, while Nephis and Sunny were still safe.  
  
The way Jet behaved confirmed her suspicions, as well.  
  
He was very subtle about it — in fact, he was almost flawlessly inconspicuous. The old man even seemed to have taken her Aspect into consideration, never betraying his true intentions even when no one was looking at him.  
  
However, there was a small detail of his behavior that he had overlooked… a habit that all seasoned Awakened shared, and adhered to instinctively.  
  
In the Dream Realm, where untold horrors dwelled, truly dangerous beings could sense when someone was gazing at them. Therefore, Awakened never looked at dangerous prey directly before the moment of attack.  
  
Similarly, while seeing the world through Jest's eyes, Cassie noticed that he always kept her in the periphery of his vision, but never stared directly at her back.  
  
Then, there was Helie.  
  
One would assume that if Jest truly wanted to kill Cassie, he would have arranged for the two of them to go on a mission alone, to eliminate her without witnesses.  
  
But that assumption was only reasonable if one did not know the details of Jest's Aspect… which very few people in the world did, to be fair.  
  
But all Cassie had to do to learn the truth was face him once.  
  
Saint Jest… was an insidious being.  
  
His Dormant Ability could be either extremely powerful or completely useless, depеnding on the circumstances — he could intensify the emotions of a target, making them burn much hotter in their chest. Joy, mirth, affection, satisfaction… fear, hatred, sorrow, anger. All those and more were within his power to enhance.   
  
His Awakened Ability was more obviously practical, allowing Jest to provoke anyone, or anything, into attacking him due to suffocating wrath. It was a powerful Ability that manipulated one's mind. It also benefitted greatly from his Dormant power… but it only truly shined when there was someone else there to take advantage of the enemy blindly attacking the wily old man.  
  
However, it was Jest's Ascended Ability that made him so insidious.  
  
His Ascended Ability… allowed the old man to switch the subject of a target's emotion.  
  
In other words, he could provoke the feeling of uncontrollable fury directed at himself, and then transfer that fury to someone else — thus manipulating his victim into attacking anyone he wanted. At the same time, he could transfer the feelings of affection or protectiveness that comrades and companions naturally felt toward each other to himself, thus making them want to defend him.  
  
So, while Saint Jest was undoubtedly powerful and insidiously lethal, having slaughtered countless powerful foes throughout his long and bloody life, his Aspect   
worked best when there were at least two enemies facing him.  
  
 Which was why he had brought Helie, whose loyalty was under scrutiny, on this mission as well.  
  
To use her as a tool against Cassie, and get rid of them both to clean the house.  
  
Taking another step, Cassie tripped on a protruding root and almost fell.  
  
Righting herself, she sighed deeply.  
  
No, truly… he disliked the jungle so much.  
  
She detested it.  
  
Did she really need to keep enduring this vile place just to be killed?  
  
Shaking her head, Cassie suddenly stopped and turned her head slightly, as if looking at the old man over her shoulder.  
  
Then, she asked in a calm tone:  
  
"Tell me, Saint Jest… is this far enough?"