2140 Terrible Offer  
  
Helie remained silent for a few moments, then asked in an incredulous tone:  
  
"What, that's it?"  
  
Raising her xiphos to scratch her forehead with its sharp tip, the beautiful Saint shook her head in bewilderment.  
  
"You lured us into an ambush without the order from the King, and your only reason for doing that is that, according to you, Lady Cassia… smells like a snake? Do you have any proof that she is planning to betray the Sword Domain? Any witnesses? Anything at all?"  
  
The old man chuckled.  
  
"Orum must have told you who I am, and what I do… no? It is true that the three of us are here because I acted on my own. However, you should know that in my line of work, the King allows me quite a bit of leeway and discretion."  
  
Saint Helie shook her head.  
  
"Still…"  
  
But before she could continue, Cassie suddenly interrupted her.  
  
"Actually, it's true."  
  
Both Jest and Helie looked at her in surprise, prompting Cassie to smile.  
  
She shrugged with a nonchalant expression.  
  
"Saint Jest is right. I have, indeed, been planning to betray the Sword Domain. More than that, I have been planning to kill the King and replace him. I have been very busy planning this treachery, in fact. So much so that my plans are very close to fruition."  
  
The old man looked at her with wide eyes and let out a disbelieving laugh.  
  
"Wow! What a… flagrant display of duplicity. Have you no shame, lass? And why are you confessing all of a sudden?"  
  
Cassie's smile remained unperturbed.  
  
Turning her head, she addressed Saint Helie in a calm tone:  
  
"So, Saint Heliе… why don't you switch sides and help me kill this old fool, instead? Or you can listen to him and try killing me. The latter will mean… that you might have to listen to his jokes until the daу you die, of course."  
  
The beautiful Saint blinked, while Jest exploded with laughter.  
  
"Hey, hey! My jokes are top-notch! Why are you threatening her with something so wonderful?"  
  
Then, noticing Helie's expression, he raised an eyebrow.  
  
"Hold on,Helie… you aren't considering her offer seriously, are you?"  
  
But she simply kept silent, looking between him and Cassie with a ponderous expression.  
  
Eventually, she asked:  
  
"Not that it's remotely possible… but who are you going to place on the throne instead of Anvil? Actually, don't say it. I guess the answer is obvious, in hindsight."  
  
Jest stared at her in bewilderment.  
  
"You can't be serious. Really? Is this about that old fool, Orum? Listen… I liked him as much as the next guy, but Orum had made his own choice. No one forced him to betray Valor."  
  
All warmth drained from Helie's gaze, and she looked at the old man darkly.  
  
"No one forced Valor to execute him, either. How much harm could he have done after being discovered? Considering all thаt he has done for the Clan Valor and humanity at large, you could have let him live."  
  
Jest scoffed.  
  
"Goodness gracious, so filial. Fine then! Let's say that you really cared about your uncle Orum, but aren't your dismay a bit misplaced? Sure, it was the King's sword that ended his life… but it was this girl Cassia here who had callously interrogated him and sealed his fate! Both sides are complicit in his death, so why are you treating her better than me?"  
  
Saint Helie stared at her sword for a few moments, then glanced at him with a dark smile.  
  
"Maybe it's because of that last argument. You know, about not having to listen to your jokes anymore. That is an objective benefit, at least."  
  
Jet's jaw hung open.  
  
"What? What… is this nonsense? Are you really siding with the seer and her friend from the Immortal Flame? What can she even do? What can she promise you? The only thing she's capable of is shifting the odds in Ki Song's favor, and do you really think that the Queen of Worms is any better?"  
  
He looked at Cassie.  
  
"Go on, try to promise her assurances with a straight face. That'll be a hoot."  
  
Cassie did not look away from the old man, but addressed the Saint who was standing behind her:  
  
"I can't promise any assurances.However, if you decide to help me…"  
  
Before he could finish however, Helie said calmly:  
  
"Okay. Let's do it."  
  
Both Cassie and Jest were given a pause.  
  
She had hoped that Helie would agree, of course — actually, she knew that Helie would agree due to hearing these exact words a few moments before due to her Awakened Ability.  
  
But still. Should Helie not have considered her choice more thoroughly?  
  
Jest coughed.  
  
"Well, that's… whatever, I guess. It doesn't really change what will happen next that much. But I must admit that I am curious… why?"  
  
Saint Helie massaged her shoulder, as if preparing for battle, and then answered evenly:  
  
"I guess it's because I believe in Changing Star."  
  
The old man stared at her incredulously.  
  
"You believe in Changing Star?"  
  
The beautiful Saint nodded.  
  
"To be honest, these days it feels like the world has gone mad, and she's the only one who is still sane. I'm not the only one who feels that way, either. Honestly, both of your offers are terrible, so I'll choose the one that at least lets me hope that everything will be alright, somehow."  
  
Then, she smiled.  
  
"Oh… and I also don't want to end up fighting the Lord of Shadows. That guy creeps me out."  
  
Cassie remained silent for a moment, even if she very much wanted to retort…  
  
'But she's the maddest of them all!'  
  
Which was a virtue, of course, considering the world they were living in.  
  
Still, if Helie was inspired to feel hope, she was not going to take that away from her.  
  
Unsheathing the Quiet Dancer, Cassie turned her head to face Saint Jest and slowly raised an arm.  
  
"Let us not waste time, then. Any last words?"  
  
The old man looked at her somberly.  
  
Then, he grinned.  
  
"What do you call a blind girl who walked into a bar?"  
  
Cassie grasped her blindfold and pulled it down, revealing her beautiful blue eyes.  
  
Saint Jest took a step forward, his grin turning dark and sinister.  
  
"...An ambulance!"  
  
With that, everything exploded into madness.