2179 Star of Ruin  
  
It did not take long to describe what had happened to Cassie. The battle with Jest, the many revelations gained from his memories, and her decision to surrender herself to the Song Domain...  
  
As Nephis contemplated silently, Sunny leaned on the parapet and looked down at the siege camp of the Sword Army.  
  
He was suddenly in a wistful mood.  
  
Looking at the distant soldiers from above, Sunny could not help but think about their hopes and dreams. So many lives had been thrown at the walls of the Greater Crossing Stronghold, and so many of those lives had been lost — both on the side of the besieging army and on the side of the besieged.  
  
The soldiers of the Sword Domain were desperate to conquer the impregnable fortress, and the soldiers of the Song Army had defended it with the same measure of resolve and desperation.  
  
But in the end, it would never be taken in battle.  
  
Instead, the Lesser Crossing would fall to a cunning maneuver, and the defenders of the Greater Crossing would be ordered to retreat. How bitter would they feel, having to abandon the walls that they had defended with their lives?  
  
And how bittersweet would it be for the soldiers of the Sword Army, to take over the fortress where so many of their brothers and sisters had died without having to shed a single drop of theirs?  
  
Wouldn't all of them be overcome by a terrible sense of futility?  
  
Looking at the battered walls of the great fortress, Sunny smiled crookedly.  
  
'...It's almost as if war is a senseless affair.'  
  
Nephis sighed and leaned on the parapet by his side.  
  
After a few moments of silence, she said evenly:  
  
"I worry about Cassie. She has an... infuriating habit of taking too much upon herself. She will suffer at the hands of the Queen."  
  
Sunny was brought back from his thoughts and lowered his head.  
  
Nephis was right. Cassie would not have gone to the Song side without a good reason, and she seemed to be confident that her safety would not be compromised there — after all, there had been other options to choose from even if she couldn't return to the Sword Army camp.  
  
She could have sought shelter in the Nameless Shelter, for example. Shе could have even killed Jest, returning without him to try and deceive the King.  
  
But even if she was confident that the Queen would not kill her, that did not mean that she would be welcomed with open arms. Clan Song would definitely distrust and scrutinize her... even torture her, perhaps.  
  
A shadow fell over Sunny's face.  
  
"Cassie... knows how to endure suffering. In any case, Ki Song will not have a lot of time to spend on interrogating her."  
  
Even if Cassie was taken to the main camp of the Song Army and held hostage there when it was besieged, the Queen would have her hands too full to pay attention to a turncoat Saint.  
  
Sunny turned his head and studied Nephis:  
  
"...I am more worried about you."  
  
She rаised an eyebrow.  
  
"Me? Why would you worry about me?"  
  
He let out a resigned sigh and shook his head.  
  
"Talk about infuriating habits..."  
  
Nephis chuckled lightly. Then, however, her smile dimmed.  
  
Looking back to the siege camp, she asked in a reserved tone:  
  
"Are you worried about me confronting the Sovereigns?"  
  
Sunny nodded slowly.  
  
A little later, he asked with a hint of curiosity in his voice:  
  
"Will you?"  
  
She looked into the distance silently.  
  
Eventually, she said:  
  
"I've been waiting to exact my revenge on them for a long time, you know."  
  
Sunny nodded again.  
  
"I know."  
  
She smiled faintly.  
  
"I won't ask how you know if you don't ask me what I'll do."  
  
The question hung between them for a while. The question itself was burdensome enough, but the answer would be so heavy as to send the Ivory Island crashing from the sky.  
  
What would Nephis do?  
  
Would she give up her defiant resolve to depose the Sovereigns, or would she kill them even if it meant dooming millions of people to their deaths?  
  
Nephis herself did not seem to know the answer, yet.  
  
But Sunny knew.  
  
She was Changing Star, after all... the Star of Ruin. The herald of ruinous change.  
  
There was a reason why she had been given such a True Name.  
  
It was her fate.  
  
And, unlike Sunny... Nephis was still the prisoner of her fate.  
  
So, he had no doubt what she would choose, even if she herself was still hesitating.  
  
It would be just like the Bright Castle, which had been drenched in blood and then burned to the ground according to her will… her will to lead those who survived to salvation from the tyranny of the Nightmare Spell.  
  
He could almost see it...  
  
The Sovereigns would fall, and hundreds of millions of mundane people in the Dream Realm would suddenly become carriers of the Spell, falling asleep on the streets of Bastion, Ravenheart, and every other human city to face the First Nightmare.  
  
Countless lives would be lost, but from the ruins, millions of Awakened warriors would rise, as well.  
  
The world would be changed in an instant... just in time to witness the destruction of Earth and its assimilation into the Dream Realm, as well as the bloody chaos that would follow.  
  
The remaining population of the waking world would face a harrowing culling — but that culling would not be as ultimate and final as it would have been without a staggering vanguard of a hundred million Awakened waiting to meet them on the other side.  
  
The floodgates of Corruption would open, and the profane gods of the Dream Realm would leave their dens at the smell of human souls. The last human civilization would make its glorious last stand against the tide of nightmares.  
  
And above it all...  
  
Changing Star would shine like a radiant beacon, ruling over humanity and leading it into battle.  
  
Sunny looked down.  
  
'Well. Something like that.'  
  
The future practically wrote itself.