2187 Seeds of War  
  
Cassie held her breath, stunned and intrigued by the Queen's words.  
  
Smile of Heaven? What role did she have to play in the war between Valor and Song?  
  
Even Seishan seemed surprised, tilting her head slightly. It seemed that she was hearing this for the first time, too.  
  
Cassie raised an eyebrow.  
  
"Smile of Heaven? Immortal Flame's daughter?"  
  
Ki Song nodded, her expression turning a little wistful.  
  
"If you really witnessed Uncle Orie's memories, then you should know. How exceptional she was; how the world itself seemed to revolve around her. As if she was beloved by heavens — if not, then at least by the Nightmare Spell. She was the daughter of the first man to become a Master, and she was the first person to receive her True Name in the First Nightmare. Her future seemed boundless. Ah, but that was not even what was so exceptional about Smile of Heaven. What was truly amazing was how easily she could bring people together."  
  
The Queen turned to gaze at Cassie and smiled.  
  
"...Maybe that was the talent our world needed the most, and why she was so beloved by it. After all, no one survives in the Dream Realm alone. And no one can defy the Nightmare Spell alone, either."  
  
She grew silent for a few moments.  
  
"We were the no different... Broken Sword and his cohort. He might have been the deadliest among us, and Anvil might have been the most stalwart. I had my uses, as well — a perfect Utility Aspect to complement their fearsome power, and enough tenacity to survive the most dire perils. And then there was the Dreamspawn, whose cunning and insidious Aspect could solve problems that strength and courage could not. But it was Smile of Heaven who was the glue that held us all together."  
  
Cassie could not help but think about Nephis... Nephis, who could not be more different from her mother. She was the direct opposite of the lively and infectious young woman from Master Orum's memories — Nephis was awkward, withdrawn, harsh, and difficult to deal with most of the time instead.  
  
And yet, she too was like that. A glue that brought together people who would have never become companions otherwise.  
  
Like Cassie, who had been destined to die on the day of the winter solstice.  
  
She frowned.  
  
"You say it as if your cohort was destined to fall apart without Smile of Heaven. But it didn't. You still conquered the Third Nightmare together... you became Sovereigns."  
  
Ki Song chuckled.  
  
"Yes. Yes, we did. But, you see... even though Smile of Heaven was gone, we still achieved all those things because of her. It was just that we weren't held together by the woman herself anymore — instead, we were held together by her ghost."  
  
She leaned on the backrest of her throne and grew quiet for a while, as if remembering something.  
  
Eventually, the Queen spoke somberly — or rather, one of her youthful puppets did.  
  
"It was such a disaster, back then. We were steeling ourselves for the moment when the first Category Four Gate would open... but instead, a true calamity in the form of a Category Five Gate descended upon North America without any warning. Broken Sword was on an expedition in the Dream Realm at that time, so by the time the news reached him, it was already too late. Immortal Flame would not stay idle, of course, and his daughter would not stay still while people were dying either."  
  
She paused, and the other puppet continued:  
  
"So, they led the effort to stall the Nightmare Creatures while at least some of the population was evacuated. And they died."  
  
Ki Song leaned forward and made one of the puppets ask Cassie in an insidious voice:  
  
"So, what do you think happened next, Song of the Fallen? What was the true inception of this war?"  
  
Cassie hesitated.  
  
She could guess...  
  
"Was it... Anvil? He would have just lost his wife recently. Almost immediately after, Smile of Heaven died. His determination to turn his heart into a piece of cold steel was already slowly turning him inhuman, and these events would only make him break further. However, he was still capable of at least one emotion... resentment. He must have resented Broken Sword a great deal, for letting Smile of Heaven die. Because he had distanced himself from her hoping that Broken Sword would make her happy and keep her safe instead."  
  
The dead youths laughed.  
  
Once the echoes of their eerie laughter died down, Ki Song shook her head with a smile.  
  
"A keen insight. However, Anvil was not the reason..."  
  
Cassie frowned.  
  
"He... wasn't?"  
  
Ki Song shook her head.   
  
"No. Broken Sword was."  
  
Her smile dimmed, replaced by a cold and heartless expression.  
  
"Because despite all reason, the fool refused to believe that Smile of Heaven had truly died. Her ghost continued to pursue us even after the woman herself was gone. That was what kept us together, pushed us forwаrd, and allowed us to become the first human Saints."  
  
She leaned back, an expression of melancholy appearing on her breathtakingly beautiful face.  
  
"That... was also the root cause of all our failures. The seed from which this war was born."  
  
Cassie frowned, confused.  
  
"I... I don't think I understand. Neph's mom... Smile of Heaven... her soul was destroyed. She became Hollow. Why would Broken Sword believe otherwise? And why would his belief cause the war?"  
  
Ki Song studied her for a while.  
  
Then, she chuckled.  
  
"The first question is easy enough to answer. You should know at least something about Smile of Heaven's Aspect, no? Her soul could wonder about, getting into all kinds of adventures. So, despite everything, Broken Sword believed that she was simply unable to find the way back to her body. That her soul was still out there, somewhere, instead of having been destroyed."  
  
Cassie raised an eyebrow.  
  
"That would be nearly impossible. Unless..."  
  
The Queen nodded.  
  
"Yes. It could have been possible if her soul got lost anywhere except America. Even if she somehow lost the way back to her body, she would not have been stranded there — she would have been immediately destroyed. Because her soul was merely Ascended, and there were Cursed Ones devouring the continent around her. She would have been consumed, as well."  
  
She smiled faintly.  
  
"The only chance Smile of Heaven could be alive — an infinitely small chance — is if she somehow reached the Category Five Gate unscathed and used it to travel to the Category Five Seed it is connected to in the Dream Realm. Then challenged the Fifth Nightmare."  
  
Cassie's eyes widened.  
  
"You mean..."  
  
The dead girl scoffed.  
  
"Indeed. Broken Sword couldn't cope with the thought that his wife was dead, so he convinced himself that she was waiting for him to rescue her in the Nightmare. So... he became obsessed with the idea of challenging the Fifth Nightmare, as soon as possible."  
  
She fell silent, and after a while, the dead boy added in a somber tone:  
  
"And as a result, Anvil decided to kill him."