2188 Flowers of Betrayal  
  
Cassie remained silent for a few moments, pondering the Queen's words with a frown on her face. The truth — if it was the truth — was not exactly how Jest remembered it.  
  
But what Ki Song had told her did not contradict what Jest remembered. Rather, it gave her perspective, allowing Cassie to slowly put together the whole picture.  
  
Eventually, she shook her head.  
  
"Was it not too harsh, to condemn Broken Sword simply because he hoped to save his wife? Even if that hoрe was entirely misguided."  
  
The Queen studied her coldly for a while, then sighed.  
  
"Was it? Well, maybe it was. But, you see, one has to pay a price for folly. The price is not too terrible when an ordinary person becomes misguided, but what if someone like Broken Sword loses his reason? He was the pillar of humanity, after all. So, all of humanity had to pay for his mistakes."  
  
Ki Song leaned back and pursed her alluring lips contemptuously.  
  
"Broken Sword... became truly obsessed with finding a way to bring Smilе of Heaven back. He was not entirely in his right mind, I think, completely overcome by that longing. So, he poured all his time and energy into becoming stronger, hoping to conquer the Third and Fourth Nightmares before challenging the Fifth in time. It was to such a degree that he even neglected his newborn daughter, leaving her in the care of Immortal Flame's widow."  
  
Cassie looked at her sharply.  
  
Nephis had never mentioned being neglected by her father. But then again... she did not seem to have a lot of memories of him, either. She had been four when Broken Sword died, which was far too young to lose a parent — but not too young to remember them clearly, while she only remembered him vaguely.  
  
In hindsight, it made sense. Broken Sword had become a Saint when Nephis was three — he would have spent a long time in the Nightmare, and even before that, he would have been fully engrossed in getting ready to challenge it. After all, becoming the first human Saint was not a task that could be undertaken lightly.  
  
So, how much time would he have had to spend with his daughter? How much of that time his attention would have really been on her, instead of wandering away to more important issues?  
  
Cassie sighed.  
  
"Was it such a terrible desire, to challenge the Fifth Nightmare?"  
  
The dead boy laughed.  
  
"Cheeky girl! I see you have a habit of asking questions despite already knowing the answers."  
  
The other puppet looked at her somberly.  
  
"...In and of itself, the idea of challenging the Fifth Nightmare is not terrible. However, nothing exists in a vacuum. The world is a system of intricately interconnected gears, and touching one —especially one as monumental as Apotheosis —will affect countless others. But Broken Sword did not care, lost in his obsession, and could not be reasoned with. All our attempts to bring him back to his senses failed."  
  
The Queen smiled darkly.  
  
"To conquer the Fifth Nightmare, one has to become a deity. A lesser one, but still a god. Broken Sword wanted to become a god, but did he consider the consequences? Even if he did, he remained set in his ways. However, while challenging the Fifth Nightmare was not a terrible idea in and of itself, the consequences of conquering it were."  
  
She shifted slightly and glanced at Seishan.  
  
"You listen too, Seishan. Back then, the research conducted by Dr. Obel was still new, but the data he had compiled was already convincing. There seemed to be a connection between the number and power of the Awakened and the potency of the Nightmare Gates that ravaged Earth. The more of us there were, and the more power we accumulated, the faster our world spiraled toward destruction. So, a measured approach was needed... not a reckless, hasty, blind charge Broken Sword was dead set on."  
  
Cassie looked at the Queen darkly.  
  
"...That was why you killed him? That was why you throttled the growth of humanity, limiting the number of people who were allowed to become Saints? It was all to pace the destruction of our world?"  
  
Ki Song let out a sigh.  
  
"Yes... and no. We knew that Earth would inevitably be consumed by the Dream Realm. We knew that preserving the entire population was an unrealistic goal. So, we did our best to slow down the Nightmare Spell... through any means necessary, no matter how callous... and dedicated our efforts to building and developing safe havens in the Dream Realm for those few who would survive — the Citadels. However, that was not the only reason why we killed Broken Sword... or even the main one."  
  
Cassie raised an eyebrow.  
  
"There were more?"  
  
She already knew the main reason, of course. However, she wanted Ki Song to confirm it.  
  
The Queen shrugged.  
  
"Another reason was the nature of Earth itself. Our world... is a very special place, even among the rest of the Divine Realms. War God might be dead, but the laws she set for her own Realm are still intact. She was the patron deity of humanity, after all, as well as of intellect, technology, and progress. Therefore, her Realm was always a shelter for humans, and only humans, as well as a place where logic and reason were much firmer and more reliable than anywhere else."  
  
Cassie opened her eyes widely. That was not something she had known before — so, she listened to Ki Song with strange intensity.  
  
It was funny. For someone who always complained about the crushing weight of knowledge, she had long become enamored by it. Her thirst for knowledge was almost like an addiction by now.  
  
The Queen shifted slightly on her throne.  
  
"That is why there had never really been any true sorcery on Earth — especially not since all other realms fell. No Awakened, no Aspects, no mythical creatures... just us. That is also why ours was the last realm to be infected by the Nightmare Spell, and it will be the last one to succumb."