2189 Conspiracy  
  
Cassie inhaled slowly.  
  
There were no Awakened in the Realm of War God... and therefore, it had been the last to be infected by the Nightmare Spell.  
  
That proved that Nightmare Gates and Awakened were somehow connected, all by itself.  
  
The question was, which came first? Hаd the Nightmares reached Earth, causing the Spell to descend and cause people to Awaken, or had the Spell infected Earth, bringing Nightmares in its wake?  
  
Then again, if one was to believe late Professor Obel and his research, it was one and the same — because ripples caused by these vents spread outward in time, affecting both the past and the future.  
  
She frowned.  
  
"I don't see what any of this has to do with Broken Sword, though."  
  
Ki Song smiled from her throne.  
  
"You don't? Then think about it... Earth, the Realm of War God, is supposed to be a perfectly mundane world. Its laws prevent people from unsealing their Aspects, Awakening, and wielding sorcery. Now, what happens when the Nightmare Spell penetrates its borders and pushes humans onto the Path of Ascension?"  
  
Cassie looked at her with a stunned expression.  
  
"The laws... start to repel them?"  
  
The Queen chuckled.  
  
"Correct! Ah, it is a pleasure to converse with someone so sharp. Yes — the higher you climb on the path to divinity, the more you are repelled by the laws governing our realm. It feels like the world itself is rejecting you. You might not have felt it yet as a Saint, since you exist halfway betweеn the Dream Realm and Earth... at least not clearly. But once one becomes a Supreme, the force of rejection turns palpable. It is very difficult for us to return to the waking world, and every second we spend there is an arduous struggle against the laws that want to push us back out. The only reason we can return at all is that we possess the Will."  
  
She paused for a moment, a wistful expression appearing on her breathtakingly beautiful face.  
  
"That is why I spent years separated from my daughters, only able to see them in their dreams... things are better now that they have climbed the Ranks, of course, but I still have regrets. That is also why Nightmare Creatures of higher Ranks are restrained in their movements on Earth, and have not destroyed it entirely yet. Things are already this bad for us Supremes, you see. A Sacred existence, though... well, nobody knows for sure. But it is almost certain that a Sacred human won't be able to set foot on Earth at all."  
  
Ki Song tilted her head a little.  
  
"We were the strongest champions of humanity, all those years ago... Broken Sword, Anvil, the Dreamspawn, and I. I did not want to abandon the waking world and leave those living in it defenseless, especially not in the aftermath of what had happened in America, and Anvil was of the same mind. But Broken Sword had a different opinion. He was so insistent, so driven... impossible to dissuade. His unwillingness to slow down widenеd the fracture that had appeared bеtween us when Smile of Heaven died, turning it into a divide."  
  
She smiled somberly.  
  
"So, you see, there were many reasons. A difference of opinion on how to protect our world best. The fear of causing a ripple that would accelerate its destruction if we went too far. The silent resentment Anvil harbored against Broken  
  
Sword, the absence of Smile of Heaven, who used to be the heart of our cohort. Oh, and of course... the most important reason of all. The most decisive one, as well as one that could have hardly been fixed unless Broken Sword died."  
  
Cassie already knew what it was, having learned the truth from Jest's memories. She looked at the Queen silently.  
  
The dead youths laughed.  
  
"...One might say that it was fate."  
  
Cassie frowned.  
  
"I don't believе in fate that much."  
  
The Queen smiled.  
  
"An amusing thing to hear, from the lips of an oracle."  
  
Cassie matched her amused smile with a dark one of her own.  
  
It is because I am familiar with fate so well that I don't put much faith in it."  
  
She hesitated for a few moments, then asked:  
  
"So, what was the decisive reason?"  
  
Ki Song commanded her puppets to chuckle, then leaned forward slightly and looked at her.  
  
Her beautiful smile widened a little.  
  
"...Why don't you ask Anvil?"  
  
Cassie gritted her teeth, cursing inwardly.  
  
"I obviously can't. Anymore."  
  
The Queen studied her for a while, amusement slowly draining from her eyes. Her smile dimmed, replaced by a cold and ruthless expression.  
  
She leaned back and let out a sigh.  
  
"Can't you? Or are you here doing his bidding? Well, we shall see."  
  
Ki Song remained silent for a while. Eventually, the dead girl spoke again:  
  
"It happened immediately after we conquered the Third Nightmare, although I suspect that Anvil had been harboring his plan for much longer. Perhaps he decided to kill Broken Sword not long after America, even. Who knows that man's heart? He made a deal with the Dreamspawn first, drawing him to his side. Then, the two of them came to me."  
  
His alluring lips twisted into a faint smile.  
  
"I guess I was given a choice, albeit a dubious one. By then, Broken Sword had become... frighteningly powerful. Enough so that Anvil was not confident that he would be able to defeat him even with the Dreamspawn's help. He was just being meticulous, though — in truth, odds were overwhelmingly in their favor, especially since they had the element of surprise on their side. Betrayal always favors the traitors, after all."  
  
She looked at Cassie with a wry glint in her eyes.  
  
"If I refused to join their plot, and they succeeded in killing Broken Sword, I would have been next... actually, they would have tried to kill me first to eliminate any possibility that I would warn him. I did not deceive myself into thinking that Anvil would spare me on account of our shared past."  
  
Ki Song chuckled, seemingly amused by her own memories.  
  
"I was always a bit of an outsider among the members of the cohort, you see. Anvil, Smile of Heaven, and Broken Sword had always been together — they had been a team from all the way back at the Academy. The darlings of the prominent Legacy clans. But I was a person of much more humble origins, and so, they only extended a hand to me once I had proven my worth."