2190 Broken Sword  
  
She shook her head.  
  
"So, Anvil would not have hesitated to discard me if I refused, camaraderie and loyalty be damned. These words did not mean much to him by that point, anyway. I could have taken Broken Sword's side at the decisive moment, I suppose — together, we would have stood a good chance against the other two. But, honestly, I saw no reason to save him. After all, there was cold logic behind Anvil's decision, distasteful as it was."  
  
The Queen fell silent for a long time, then sighed heavily.  
  
Her mesmerizing gaze turned to Seishan.  
  
"What do you think, Seishan? Do you resent your mother?"  
  
The Song princess, who had been a silent witness to the conversation until then, studied her with a somber expression.  
  
Eventually, she shrugged.  
  
"Well, I'm not sure. I've been known to betray men who trusted me as well. So no, I don't resent you for that."  
  
What was left unsaid was that she did resent Ki Song for something else. It was not surprising, however... all children harbored a bit of resentment for their parents in their hearts.  
  
Seishan had more reasons to feel that way than most. After all, she had been adopted by Ki Song as a young child without having much say in the matter. She received the lineage of Beast God without being asked. She was made a carrier of the Nightmare Spell without being given a choice to refuse, and spent a harrowing decade on the Forgotten Shore as a result.  
  
And now, she was fighting her mother's war without being given a way out.  
  
Cassie was sure that there were a lot of complicated emotions in Seishan's heart.  
  
'I wonder... how come I am the only normal person around?'  
  
No, that did not sound quite right.  
  
Cassie did not lack self-awareness, so it was easy to admit that there was hardly a less nоrmal person than her in the world. However, her parents and her relationship with them were both perfectly healthy and ordinary. Everyone else seemed to compete for the best childhood trauma award, though. Morgan and Mordret, Seishan and her sisters... Nephis.  
  
Perhaps she was spending too much time around heirs of the Great Clans.  
  
'If I survive this, I should be a better auntie to Little Ling...'  
  
A pale smile found its way onto her lips, and she spoke quietly:  
  
"I know someone who would resent you more."  
  
The Queen turned away from her daughter and looked at Cassie with a hint of amusement.  
  
"Oh... I have no doubt. Little Nephie is all grown up now, isn't she? Ah... she was such a sweet child."  
  
Her smile wilted like a flower, making her breathtakingly beautiful face look cruel and cold.  
  
Ki Song regarded Cassie with dark indifference.  
  
"I missed her a lot, at the start."  
  
Cassie scoffed.  
  
"Is that why you brought the Immortal Flame clan to ruin and sent assassins to kill her?"  
  
The Queen just shrugged indifferently.  
  
"No. That was not why."  
  
She smiled coldly.  
  
"But why are you jumping ahead, Song of the Fallen? I rarely get the chance to reminisce about the past, so let's see... where was I? Ah, yes. Anvil and his disguised ultimatum. We joined hands, he and I — and the Dreamspawn, of course. We just became Saints back then, but Broken Sword was only growing more impatient. So, we challenged the Fourth Nightmare no more than a year later. In secret."  
  
Her expression grew distant, and she fell silent for a while.  
  
Eventually, a sigh escaped from her lips.  
  
"People tend to forget us these days — partially because we erased our traces from the pages of history, and partially because there are splendid talents like you two walking the world now. But back then, decades ago... we were truly fearsome. No one had ever returned from the Third Nightmare alive, but we did. It happened more than two decades after Immortal Flame changed the world by becoming a Master, and yet, only a year after becoming Saints, we were already laying siege to the Fourth Nightmare. It seemed like nothing could stop us."  
  
The dead boy scoffed.  
  
"We learned a lot about the truth of the world in the Nightmare. And we learned even more about it after coming back... and about ourselves, as well. Because that was when we killed Broken Sword — out there in the darkness of the Underworld."  
  
Cassie tilted her head, surprised.  
  
"The Underworld?"  
  
Ki Song nodded slowly.  
  
"Yes. That is where the Seed of Nightmare Broken Sword had found was located, and that was where we returned to after conquering the Nightmare. The Underworld is a terrifying place, Song of the Fallen — we did not dare to explore its dark expanse back then, entering by following the Call of Nightmare and hiding from the beings that dwell in the darkness like rats."  
  
The dead girl chuckled.  
  
"Even as Supremes, all we could do was escape... and while we were escaping, still unfamiliar with our newfound powers, the three of us used the chance to stab Broken Sword in the back. The battle was short — in truth, I think he already knew that it would be his end. Still, even with the three of us joining forces, we weren't able to bring Broken Sword down. Ah, how fearsome he was! How valiant. We broke his body, and we broke his soul. But we couldn't break his Will."  
  
Her eyes seemed to ignite, as if illuminated by the splendor of that wicked battle. Then, they dimmed, becoming clouded by melancholy.  
  
Ki Song sighed.  
  
"Still, he fell in the end. Shattered, broken, fatally wounded... he mustered what little strength he had left and fled. Deeper into the darkness, never to be seen again. That was how Broken Sword, the greatest of us, died."  
  
Cassie held her breath.  
  
"He... fled? You did not see him die? Then might he not have survived?"  
  
The Queen smiled wistfully.  
  
"Wouldn't that be interesting? But no... we killed him. I am certain of it. Because eventually, the Spell whispered of his death."  
  
Ki Song leaned forward a little and looked at Cassie with a somber expression.  
  
"So, now... we strangled the dire threat that Broken Sword's existence represented before it could doom us all. And by doing so, we also arrived at the root of all our problems."