2195 Dollhouse  
  
The Queen remained silent for a few moments, looking into the distance.  
  
Cassie could not really imagine what was going on in her head. It had to be hard to be a general who had been driven into a hopeless situation. The Song Army was already at a great disadvantage, driven back to the western part of the Collarbone Plain and besieged.  
  
The only hope of salvaging the situation and restoring a semblance of balance to the war was to hold out long enough for Revel to conquer the Citadel in the spine of the dead god... and for Mordret to take Bastion.  
  
But now, even that hope had been shattered.  
  
If Ki Song was troubled, though, she did not show it.  
  
Instead, she lowered her gaze and peered at Cassie.  
  
"Well, well. The secret you told me is indeed valuable, young Cassia."  
  
The dead boy fell silent. His counterpart, meanwhile, spoke in a clear voice:  
  
"You have my gratitude. It is time for you to depart, though... go and rest, for a little while. Seishan, please stay."  
  
Cassie wondered briefly if she would really be allowed to walk out the throne room on her own two feet without being escorted by Seishan. That... would be problematic, actually, since her Aspect was suppressed. Was she supposed to bump into the walls of the Song keep blindly until shе found a place to rest?  
  
A few moments later, though, her hesitation was dispelled in the most disturbing way. Her body moved on its own, rising from its knees and performing an elegant bow. Her mouth moved on its own, as well, and words she had not meant to say left her lips:  
  
"Thank you, Your Majesty."  
  
Then, her body turned around and headed away from the throne with graceful, confident steps. The tenuous connection she had established to Seishan's senses was cut, and she was left in the darkness.  
  
Cassie was blind once again... but her body behaved as if it could see. It left the throne room and walked somewhere calmly, taking turns when needed and using her hands to open doors. She did not know where the body was headed, and could only memorize the number of turns and count the steps in her mind out of habit.  
  
As Cassie walked, she escaped from the horror of not being able to control her own body into thinking about the many mysteries that had been solved today, and the many secrets that had been revealed to her by the Queen.  
  
'It is all starting to take shape.'  
  
So what had she learned?  
  
First of all, many of the fragmented and unreliable pieces of information they had collected from dubious sources were now confirmed. The grand plan of the Sovereigns, the purpose of suppressing the emergence of independent Saints, the reason why the Supremes had seemingly abandoned the waking world...  
  
One of the more interesting things she had learned was the reason why the Sovereigns had chosen to hide their existence and rule from the shadows. Cassie had assumed that it was simply due to... to the general shadiness of the Great Clans. Honestly, she had never thought about it deeply.  
  
But as it turned out, it was a premeditated measure to prevent Asterion from growing too powerful instead. Ki Song had not explained what powers the third Sovereign possessed, and how his Domain spread. However, Cassie was able to surmise that it had something to do with people simply knowing about his existence — and especially knowing his name.  
  
There was the tidbit about the special nature of War God's Realm, as well. And... the startling truth of what was hidden on the moon.  
  
But while quite curious, these pieces of information were not important at the moment.  
  
What was important was the story of Broken Sword's death, the reasons why he had been killed, аnd the background of the downfall of the Immortal Flame clan.  
  
If for no other reason than a personal one.  
  
'I will have to tell Neph.'  
  
Ki Song did not mention the final straw that had pushed Anvil on the path of no return, but Cassie already learned it from Jest. How would Nephis react? Something like that... did not excuse the vile actions of the Sovereigns. But it did put them into an entirely new perspective.  
  
And that perspective was one of the most important cornerstones of Neph's entire being.  
  
Cassie sighed... or rather, tried to. However, her body was still moving on its own, indifferent to her commands.  
  
Soon enough, the coldness of the Queen's residence receded, and Cassie felt the heat of Godgrave on her skin again. She was surrounded by the sounds of the army camp again. She could smell life again.  
  
It seemed that she was standing in front of the gates of the keep, waiting for something.  
  
Her cheek was still throbbing with pain, and her mind was on fire, feverishly going over all the stark revelations she had received.  
  
But most of all...  
  
Cassie was genuinely surprised.  
  
'I wasn't even tortured.'  
  
She exhaled slowly.  
  
Well, the day was still young... and there were more such days in front of her, as well.  
  
Now that her audience with the Queen had come to an end, Ki Song seemed tо have released the strings binding Cassie's body like a marionette, somewhat — enough to cut her some slack, at least.  
  
She was still in that dizzying state of not being entirely in control of her own body. In fact, she was barely able to move — just enough to change her posture, but not enough to take a step.  
  
Her Aspect, too, remained almost entirely sealed.  
  
Cassie remained motionless for a few moments, then shook her head subtly.  
  
There was no way of knowing if Sunny was somewhere near, but she believed that he was. In fact, he had most likely been keeping an eye on her from the moment she entered the Greater Crossing Stronghold... just not in the chambers of the Queen.  
  
If so, she had to prevent him from trying to contact her. Now that Cassie had become a partial puppet, approaching her was tantamount to revealing his presence to Ki Song.  
  
So, she hoped that he had seen and understood her signal.  
  
Sunny was both observant and smart. He would know that it was dangerous to contact her, and stay away.  
  
Still...  
  
Even unable to see or hear him, Cassie was glad to know that she was not truly alone.