2258 Regicide  
Far away, the colossal vessel of the Queen crumbled, its flesh burned away by the furious mass of white flames. The river of blood that had been contained within it boiled as it escaped. A billowing, scorching cloud of crimson vapor obscured the world, and in that haze, the flames condensed to form a beautiful figure.  
She seemed to be woven out of pure radiance, her silhouette both vague and blinding.  
Her incandescent sword fell without mercy, parting the river of blood.  
A sound that resembled both the murmur of a vast sea and an agonized groan rolled over the fractured battlefield. Hundreds of puppets were severed, and countless more turned to ash.  
Nephis pursued her enemy, her sword and her will relentless.  
An enemy like her was a fearsome obstacle for the Queen. After all, the Queen held authority over blood and decay, while Nephis possessed no blood in her Transcendent form, and could resist decay with her flames. Her soul was still susceptible to the insidious influence of Ki Song's Aspect, but thanks to the Blessing, her power only grew in proportion to how badly her soul was damaged.  
That is why Nephis had chosen to fight Ki Song, the stronger of the two Sovereigns, while relying on Sunny to face Anvil.  
That was why she was winning.  
She was going to kill the Queen soon.  
'How… strange.'  
Even focused entirely on the battle, Nephis found herself distracted by the reality of what was transpiring.  
She had spent most of her life waiting for this moment. Waiting for revenge. From the moment the Immortal Flame clan fell into neglect and obscurity until now, she always knew that she would kill the traitors who had ruined her family one day.  
Her hatred of the Sovereigns did not originate from one source, from one fateful injustice. Instead, it was born from a thousand unforgivable grievances that she had endured growing up.The hideous trauma of the violence perpetrated against her as a child… the deaths of the loyal servants who had chosen to remain with the falling clan despite the danger… the subtle look of defeat and despair that appeared on her grandmother's stoic face from time to time, when she thought that no one was watching.  
All of this and more. So much more.  
That was why Nephis had expected to feel a storm of emotions when the day of her vеngeance finally came. An unbearably bitter, but indescribable sweet feeling of bloodthirsty glee… a fury beyond anything she could ever imagine...  
But now that her goal was so close, she found herself feeling surprisingly little.  
It was partially — mostly, perhaps — because her feelings had been burned away by the cleansing ruthlessness of her Flaw. But it was also because killing the Sovereigns had never really been her true goal.  
The Sovereigns, odious as they had become, were merely a symptom of the larger curse that plagued the world.  
The world itself was the problem.  
The children who died in the throes of the First Nightmare. The adults who grew up to become callous and heartless, twisted by the fear of falling asleep. The Nightmare Gates that opened near parks and schools, the frenzied monster that roamed the streets looking for prey.  
The incalculable loss and sorrow that countless people felt every day...  
The Nightmare Spell.  
The Sovereigns might have killed her father and obliterated her clan, but it was the Nightmare Spell that had created the Sovereigns. It was also the Nightmare Spell that had taken her mother and grandfather away along with an entire continent.  
That was what Nephis had once believed, at least. Now, she wasn't even sure if the Nightmare Spell was the cause, or merely another symptom.  
In any case, disposing of the Sovereigns was just a stepping stone to reaching her true goal. She was not a trembling child to whom the three Supremes were like unfathomable monsters anymore…  
She had outgrown them.Still… Nepis had hoped to feel something, at least. If not for her own sake, then at least for her father's.  
But reality was cruel.  
Just like Nephis was cruel.  
As her searing sword cut the river of blood, annihilating some of it, the number of puppets continued to dwindle.  
Until there was none left.  
And then, the moment she was wary of came…  
Far away, in the midst of the great unified army, Cassie staggered and screamed. Then, her flesh started to blacken, as if it was being burned from the inside… Nephis could not see it, of course, because of the distance separating them, but she could feel her friend's desire for relief from the terrible agony through the connection they shared due to her Domain.  
As Cassie burned, her crumbling body was enveloped by a beautiful white radiance and healed.  
...Only to be burned again the next time Nephis brought her sword down on the dwindling river of blood.  
And as her delicate body was destroyed and rebuilt, a tiny drop of the Queen's blood coursing through her veins, mixed with her own, was annihilated — a tiny drop, but not all of it by far.  
The Queen spoke to her then:  
"Don't you feel pity for your friend?"  
Did she?  
Nephis wasn't sure that she did. That she was capable of feeling anything, anymore.  
But then…  
Finally, an emotion came.  
It was not fury, not bloodlust, and not the dark glee of being close to exacting her vengeance.  
Instead, it was… compassion.  
It was concern and worry for her friend.  
It was also relief of being able to feel anything at all.  
Nephis did not seem to have lost all of her humanity, in the end...  
Perhaps her efforts to ground herself in human things and passion had not been in vain, after all.  
'I'm sorry, Cassie…'  
Descending upon the Queen in a storm of flame, Nephis continued to cause her friend indescribable pain and heal her.  
"Can you feel it, Queen Song? Your daughters have turned their backs on you. Your callousness has drivеn even them away, and now, they are a part of my Domain."  
It wasn't all of them, just yet. But Seishan was the key. With her choosing her sisters over her mother, Moonveil had followed… Beastmaster, as well. The rest would fall behind their eldest sister, too.  
Boiling and seething, the greatly diminished river of blood rippled and coalesced into a human figure. Ki Song looked at Nephis, a pale smile illuminating her beautiful face.  
"Are you saying this to shake my resolve?"  
Nephis shook her head.  
"I just want to see if you care about them at all."  
The Blessing lashed out once again, scorching the ancient bone and forcing Ki Song to retreat.  
"Beastmaster was barely alive when I healed her. Moonveil was dying… she would have been dead by now, if not for me. Their mother led them to their deaths, while their enemy saved them. Isn't that ironic? Even as we speak, my flames are permeating them, granting them power. However…"  
Her voice grew cold.  
"My flames can both create and destroy. Now that they are a part of my Domain… do you think I can burn them to ash, instead? Shall we see?"  
The smile on Ki Song's face turned brittle.  
"Are you threatening to kill my daughters, Nephis?"  
Instead of answering, Nephis lunged forward and pierced her with the incandescent blade of the Blessing.  
Far away, a terrible wound opened on Cassie's chest, and she fell to her knees, her flesh being burned and blackened, then mended by the white flames.  
Nephis felt a new emotion…  
It was anguish.  
This battle of theirs was going to end soon.  
She said calmly:  
"No… I am promising to keep them alive. Аs long as you don't retreat from this battlefield until one of us is dead."  
The Queen had to have other puppets hidden in secretive places. Even if Kai had managed to destroy those that had been left in Ravenheart, there would have been more elsewhere. And since any of them could serve as Ki Song's primary vessel, the only way to kill her was to make sure that she chose to fight to her death.  
The only weakness the Queen had was her daughters.Her love for them, no matter how twisted, was her flaw.  
And Nephis was not above using that flaw to destroy her.  
Ki Song raised a hand and grasped the scorching blade of the Blessing, looking at the beautiful spirit of light in front of her with her eerie dead eyes.  
"Do you think you can kill me here, Nephis?"  
Nephis channeled her flames through the Blessing, knowing that Cassie was screaming somewhere far away.  
"Did you think that you could kill my father?"  
As Ki Song pulled her closer and thrust her pale hand into the incinerating radiance of Neph's Transcendent form, shredding her soul with her Will, Nephis asked evenly:  
"Did you think that you could destroy the Immortal Flame clan?"  
The two of them stood still, ravaging each other.  
"Did you think that the end justified the means? That all your sins would be forgiven, as long as you had won?"  
There was one more emotion, now…  
A strange, childish sense of hurt and resentment.  
"Then why didn't you win?! If only you had won… then I wouldn't have to… I wouldn't be suffering all this pain because of you!"  
Somewhere far away, the last of the Queen's blood evaporated from Cassie's veins. The blind seer curled on the ground, shuddering, tears streaming down her blackened face.  
Moments later, the soft radiance erased the terrible burns, restoring her exquisite beauty.  
But the echoes of pain in her eyes remained.  
Ki Song slowly shook her head, her smile slowly crumbling.  
"You don't even know… what you are unleashing, child…"  
And then…  
She burned.  
She burned and burned, disappearing into the merciless flames.  
But until the very end, she did not retreat.  
That was how Ki Song, the Raven Queen, died.