2434 The Terrible Price of Saving the World  
  
Aiko had not been bluffing when she said that she had no use for a weapon. She was neither a warrior nor had any ambition of becoming one, but that did not mean that she was harmless.  
  
After all, she was also a former member of the Dreamer Army. She had survived the Forgotten Shore, and it was not by accident.  
'What, did you think that running a gambling den in the damn Bright Castle was a laidback occupation?'  
  
It certainly hadn't.  
  
The Memory Aiko had summoned was a communication mirror the members of the Shadow Clan used when on missions. It allowed them to talk to each other remotely, or listen in on conversations if the mirror was hidden in some dark place in advance. Not that there weren't better ways of eavesdropping on people.  
  
Of course, Aiko did not really need the mirror to get in touch with Effie and inform her of the dire situation they were in - Cassie would already know, which meant that Effie had already been informed. It was a little creepy, to know that Cassie could be watching her at any given moment - but in rare cases like this one, it was also comforting.  
  
If anything, Aiko could feel honored that she was a high-priority mark among many people the blind seer was using as hеr eyes. In any case, Aiko needed the silver mirror for a different reason. Apart from allowing those who possessed them to communicate, the mirrors were also able to reflect what was in front of them over a distance. The other person just needed to have a matching Memory, which Effie did.  
  
Aiko's boss had woven that particular enchantment in a moment of petty vindictiveness, mumbling something about "stealing that bastard's tricks" in an unhinged tone. She had an inkling of who the aforementioned bastard was, and sometimes wondered what the poor man had done to get on her boss's naughty list. It had to be something major, considering that dropping a Cursed Demon on his head did not seem to have satisfied Sunny.  
  
What mattered at the moment, though, was that Aiko could use the mirror to reflect her surroundings to Effie. In other words, what she wanted to relay was not a warning that they were in trouble. It was targeting data.  
  
Countless kilometers away, at the top of the great castle, Raised by Wolves had turned north and summoned her spear. Then, she took careful aim, and tossed it into the sky with a low roar.  
  
A hurricane rose, ripping the flags hoisted above the keep to shreds and making people cower. While Aiko was talking to the vessel of the Skinwalker, the spear was ripping up the sky. It crossed the distance a mundane human would have needed days to cross on foot in less than a minute. By the time it arrived, Aiko had already covered Little Ling's eyes with a hand.  
  
It was not out of fear of the Skinwalker. Rather, it was because a little boy had no business seeing what would happen next.  
  
As something thundered above them, the vessel of the Great Terror glanced up. That was the last thing it ever did.  
  
When the spear fell from the sky, striking the former Caravan Master with flawless precision, it did not simply pierce his body. Instead, his body was simply pulverized, turning into a cloud of fine crimson haze.  
  
The spear pierced the cobblestones next, causing a small earthquake to rattle the bazaar and sending a deep fracture running fгom the point where its tip struck the ground to the great wagons of the battered caravan. One of them tilted when its armored wheel exploded into a storm of splinters, and then toppled with a deafening groan. The walls of the little church Quentin had mentioned cracked.  
  
Far away, above the lake, rapid figures were already leaping from the emerald meadows of the Ivory Island - those were the Fire Keepers, rushing to the city gates. Of course, Effie was probably going to arrive much sooner.  
  
There was no telling if this vessel of the Skinwalker was the only one that had avoided detection, after all. Any member of the caravan could be a disguised Nightmare Creature.  
  
No. Actually, the Skinwalker had accidentally revealed its ability to dodge the sorcery that had been keeping it out of human Citadels so far, which meant that anyone in Bastion could be a vessel. Anyone in any of the human cities in the Dream Realm could, in fact.  
  
So, every human city was going to undergo a period of instability. Martial law would have to be enforced until a new form of sorcery was developed. Then, the cities had to be swept, and any vessel discovered as a result would have to be eliminated.  
  
All because Aiko had decided to take Ling Ling on a little adventure.  
  
And although she did not know it yet, in the coming weeks, several hidden Skinwalker infestations would indeed be discovered in remote Citadels of the eastern reaches of the Dream Realm. Luckily, they would be eradicated before the malignant Terror could really grow, thus preventing a terrible calamity. Aiko might not have stumbled into saving the world, but what she had done was not that far off from such a feat.  
  
'Damn it. I just wanted to have fun on my day off.'  
  
She glanced down in dejection. Then, her eyes widened in horror.  
  
"Oh, no!"  
  
Her breathtaking shoes! Some of the pulverized Skinwalker vessel had splattered on them!  
  
They were ruined.  
  
"Damnation!"  
  
It was a terrible loss.  
  
Still unable to see anything because his eyes were covered, Little Ling stirred:  
  
"Huh? What's a damnation, Auntie?"  
  
She bit her lip, then said in a teary tone:  
  
"What? N - nothing! Forget you heard anything!"  
  
Little Ling grew quiet for a moment, then shifted, trying to get out of her embrace.  
  
"Is damnation one of those bad words? It is, isn't it?"  
  
Aiko paled.  
  
"I said forget it, wolfie! You didn't hear anything!"  
  
He dropped his shoulder.  
  
"Alright, Auntie. I already forgot it."  
  
As she pulled him away toward the carriage and gave Quentin a poignant look, Little Ling sighed and added:  
  
"I really can't remember. Damnation! My memory has gone bad."