1943 Raven Queen

Cassie released her Transformation, and Sunny was finally freed from the torrent of alien memories.

He exhaled slowly and looked away, staring into the distance with an absent expression.

Witnessing human memories was not at all like reading a book or watching a recording — they were often vague and disjointed, sometimes withered and shallow, sometimes fresh and intensely vivid. It was hard to make sense of them, and it was even harder to fathom their every nuance.

Sunny was still reeling from receiving such a great amount of information in such a short amount of time.

What was more... he was still reeling from witnessing the life of Master Orum.

It was such a strange thing. The old man was a complete stranger to him, and yet, Sunny felt so close to him. How could he not, after experiencing what Cassie had gleaned?

It was because of this unearned closeness that Sunny felt shaken by Orum's death at the hands of the King of Swords.

As if he had lost an old friend.

He sighed and looked down, considering Master Orum's long life and bitter death.

It felt wrong, for a member of the First Generation to die so ingloriously, hidden from everyone's sight in a small stone cell... by another human's hand. The old man had witnessed so much, had fought so hard, and had survived so many dreadful ordeals. He had lived through the darkest days of humanity and saw a new world being built on the ruins of the old one.

And yet, his storied life had come to such a grievous end.

At least he had been at peace, in those last moments. He had perished loyal his principles, finally at ease for having repaid the debt to his long-lost friend.

That did not really do anything to assuage the bitterness Sunny felt... but it was at least something.

Orum had cared deeply about Ravenheart and her daughter, after all.

'Ki Song.'

Sunny wondered if the Queen of Worms cared about the old man, in turn. Would his death sadden her, like it had saddened him? Or was the shy little girl Orum had met once, a long time ago, completely gone?

Replaced by a Supreme being whose heart and mind were closer to those of a deity than those of a human, and therefore devoid of humanity...

Sunny did not know.

His thoughts drifted to Ki Song herself.

Cassie had not been wrong — they learned a lot about the Sovereigns, and Ki Song in particular, from Master Orum's memories.

Her roots, her scars... the details of her Aspect, the formative experiences that had made her who she was today. Of course, there was plenty Sunny did not know about the Queen of Song, since there were vast swathes of her life that Orum had not been privy to. But he knew enough to infer many things.

In fact, there was almost too much for him to mull over.

He did not even know where to start.

'First... her character.'

Queen Song was without a doubt an entirely different being from the person Little Ki had been. Time changed people, and so did impactful events... and she had experienced plenty of those. More than most people ever would.

If even the world itself had been fundamentally altered by the things Ki Song had lived through and made happen, how could she have remained the same? And that was not even accounting for the inevitable changes that walking the Path of Ascension caused.

Both Sunny and Cassie were examples of how deeply people transformed as a result of attaining higher Ranks. The way they lived, thought, and perceived the world was quite different from mundane humans. Ki Song, meanwhile, had walked down the Path of Ascension much further than they had... than any human of the waking world had, except for the other two Sovereigns.

...And yet, some things about a person never changed.

'If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.'

Was that not what Nephis had told him once, in the depths of the Third Nightmare?

Sunny would not go as far as to say that he knew Ki Song now, but he knew her a fair bit.

She had been born in the year of the Nightmare Spell's descent. Her mother had been a benevolent, but solitary Awakened warrior. Ravenheart spent most of her time in the Dream Realm, so Ki Song must have felt lonely, growing up near her quietly humming sleeping pod.

And yet, she had loved her mother fiercely. She had also felt proud of her, because her mother was one of the most powerful Awakened in the world... but not the most powerful.

It did not escape Sunny's attention how neglected young Ki Song had felt in the company of the true aristocrats like Anvil and Smile of Heaven. It must have been an awkward position for a child to be in — to come from a family that was prominent enough to be included in the gatherings of the nascent Legacy Clans, but not prominent enough to garner much respect or attention from them.

Especially considering her talent, which was in no way inferior to those who were seen as her betters.

And then, there was Ravenheart's tragic death, and the ruthless retribution young Ki Song had delivered to those who had stood by and done nothing while her mother was dying.

It was funny... Orum had been terrified by her callous disregard for the sanctity of human life and her cruel ruthlessness, but Sunny did not see anything wrong with it. Sure, Ki Song did not only kill those directly responsible for stealing her inheritance, but also every bystander who had failed to help Ravenheart...

However, Sunny was not at all certain that he would have been any more merciful if someone's cowardice contributed to Rain's death. In fact, he would have probably been much more ruthless.

That just went to show that the new generations were indeed different from those born before the Nightmare Spell... for better or for worse.

In any case, although Orum's memories did not show what had happened after the massacre in the Jade Palace, Sunny already knew a lot, and could deduce the rest.

In the span of several years, Ki Song had elevated the status of her Citadel to one of the most populous human strongholds in the East. She slowly expanded her sphere of influence, clearing routes through the Dream Realm to connect various Citadels to each other, and became the cornerstone of human forces there, just like Warden of Valor and Bastion were in the West.

At some point, she joined Broken Sword's cohort and challenged the Second Nightmare, becoming a Master and earning wide renown. Following that, Ki Song defeated the Corrupted Terror ruling the estuary of the River of Tears, opening the path to the Stormsea and strengthening the ties between the East and the West.

Thus helping all Awakened deepen their roots in the inhospitable soil of the Dream Realm.

While Anvil was waging war against the Dark Forest and leading human conquest of new territories in the north, she was busy working on developing the basin of the River of Tears and strengthening human position there. That helped Clan Song soar to the pinnacle of prominence.

...And at some point during those years, she had also found and claimed the divine lineage of Beast God.