2399 Bound  
  
Sunny did not know whether the Puppeteer had told him the truth or woven intricate lies, shaping them to suit the mind of its prey. Perhaps it was both, with fragments of truth mixed in between deceit to make it all sound so much more believable and tantalizing.  
One thing was certain, though. Sunny had not believed even for a heartbeat that the Puppeteer was above the malevolent madness all Nightmare Creatures seemed to suffer from.  
  
Maybe nightmare creatures were indeed driven mad by the Call of the Flame, just like Awakened struggled to maintain their sanity when exposed to the Call of Nightmare.  
  
Perhaps the enormous black moth was indeed adept at suppressing its malice, somewhat.  
  
But not because it was truly free from the rabid compulsion to destroy and devour anyone and anything not twisted by the Void. Rather, it was merely to lure its victims into a false sense of security - just like the Puppeteer had attempted to lure Sunny. It had always intended to consume Sunny - at best. At worst, its intention was to turn him into a puppet, infect him with Corruption, and make him its thrall.  
  
If so, Sunny was not inclined to believe the rest of what the giant moth had told him either. But still, still. What if the rest of it was indeed true? What if some of it was? What if the world as Sunny knew it - the existence itself - was nothing but a furnace where all of them were doomed to burn? If the purpose of all living things was merely to be fuel? The universe was a cage built to contain the Void. But weren't all of them caged within it, as well? It was such a dreadful thought.  
  
Sunny felt that there was something wrong with that line of thinking.  
  
Even if the Puppeteer had offered him some version of the truth, though, it had to have omitted something, changing the context and twisting the meaning of everything. But Sunny. Was not sure. He could not be sure, because the seeds of doubt had already been planted into his mind.  
'Damnation!' Even after realizing what was happening, Sunny could not do anything.  
  
All he could do was kill the Puppeteer before these seeds sprouted into something that could not be contained. Luckily, the wasted time did not only benefit the eerie moth. With every minute that passed, Sunnу was growing stronger - the Evening Star burned in the dark depths of the Underworld Armament, bestowing him with ferocious power. Of course, it was hungrily consuming his essence and willpower, as well, But that was a trade he was willing to make.  
  
Sunny had been lulled by the conversation with the Puppeteer, but now, he shook that enthrallment off.  
And when he did, he felt a chill run down his spine, realizing that passing time was not the only thing he had been overlooking. In truth, Sunny had failed to notice quite a few things, as well.  
  
Come to thinκ of it, he had been behaving peculiarly from the second his foot landed on the slope of the Snow Castle. Starting a conversation despite knowing better, humoring the Puppeteer's suspiciously convenient claims, failing to pay attention to anything about his surroundings - except for the billowing strands of black silk.  
  
Most of all. Forgetting that Kai and Slayer existed at all. 'W - what? How did I?' Why had Sunny not even thought to question what his companions were doing while he conversed with the Cursed Tyrant? 'Curses!'  
  
Sunny hastily glanced around, casting his shadow sense out at the same time. His eyes widened, and fear grasped his heart with icy claws. Kai was hundreds of metres away. What looked like Kai, at least, in his Transcendent form. A giant figure was buried under a slithering mass of black silk, straining desperately to tear itself free. Sunny could hear the muffled cries of a dragon as the great beast tore at the silk, midnight scales glinting through the gaps between the dark strands. Slayer was nowhere to be seen, as if swallowed by the billowing mass of black silk entirely. The Puppeteer was still perchеd atop the mountain, motionless, looming above them like an eerie insectile deity.  
  
Most disturbing of all. Was the fact that, without Sunny ever realizing it, impossibly thin strings had wrapped themselves around his limbs, penetrating his body, and reaching into his very soul.  
  
Sunny shuddered. 'Oh.'  
  
Throwing a murderous gaze up, at the still figure of the colossal black moth, Sunny lunged forward. He tried, at least. But the black strings held him in place, controlling him like a marionette.  
"Argh!" A hint of panic flooded his mind like a dreadful wave. Suppressing it fiercely, Sunny strained against the invisible strings, feeling them tremble and give. His Will cut at them like a blade, severing a few.  
  
But more took their place, piercing Sunny's flesh, soul, and spirit. These strings were both tangible and intangible. They restrained him physically, but much more perilously, they restrained him mentally as well. His mind was infected by doubt, and the Puppeteer used that doubt to control him. When Sunny wanted to lunge forward, the strings strangled his determination to do just that - and so, he stayed in place, unable to force himself into commanding his body to move.  
  
'You. vile. thing!' Sunny growled and purged his mind, throwing it into the state of battle clarity. At the same time, he steeled his resolve and wrapped himself in an armor forged out of pure Will. He rebuilt his consciousness around an indomitable axis. His killing intent. His cold, scathing, overwhelming desire to visit death and destruction upon the Puppeteer. To tear that vile moth apart. Innumerable strings of black silk snapped.  
  
But. even more surrounded him, binding him like a suffocating cocoon. Or a chrysalis, perhaps. Sunny let out a stifled scream, falling to his knees. The strings cut into his skin, drawing drops of crimson blood. 'Kill it. I must.'  
  
Kill it.  
  
Kill it.  
  
He had to! Kill! Grinning wickedly, Sunny commanded his blood to flow back into the thin cuts left on his body and released his physical form. His body turned into a mаss of formless darkness. But he failed to escape the stranglehold of the Puppeteer's strings, still, since they bound the shadows just as easily as the bound flesh.  
  
The vast shadow struggled and strained, enveloped by the web of black silk. Bound, trapped. Unable to escape. Some distance away, no glimpses of the magnificent dragon could be seen through the billowing mass of glistening strands anymore, and no sound of him could be heard. Kai's figure was buried entirely under a dark hill of silk.  
  
Most of the sun was hidden behind the horizon, and the fiery splendor of radiant sunset was slowly turning into the dim twilight of dusk.