1365 The Sound of His Wings

Sunny was flying through the crimson sky above Fallen Grace. His black feathers were moving slightly in the wind, and his wings rose and fell with a relaxed cadence. His flight was somewhat awkward... but he did not plummet to the ground, at least, like the previous time.

He had, of course, assumed the form of a crow.

After mastering the fourth step of Shadow Dance, learning a new form had become much easier for him. So, he had spent the last two weeks doing just that — teaching himself how to become a crow. Sunny was already confident on land and had the sea serpent form to protect himself in the water. Only the skies were left unconquered.

Granted, he was not going to win a battle as a small bird... but he had to start somewhere.

The idea of trying to assume the form of Jet's Echo had entered his mind when he was resting after a long and tedious bout of weaving. Yes, Sunny had plenty of essence and more than enough soul shards to accomplish his goal, but even his patience was not limitless. He needed to take a break from time to time and distract himself from the rote process of creating rudimentary Memories.

During one such break, the persistent crow visited him once again to caw about how Jet was stuck. Staring at it, Sunny remembered that he had not yet made use of his improved ability to shadow various creatures better. The desire to fly across the vast sky stirred in his heart.

Who said that only Kai was allowed to zip around in the air?

So, that was exactly what he had done. Staring at the talkative bird, he tried to teach himself its form.

Which... ended up being just as hard to achieve as turning himself into a giant sea serpent.

The body of the crow itself was much smaller and simpler. The problem was that Crow Crow was an Echo, and thus not truly alive. So, Sunny met an unexpected obstacle... Shadow Dance was not that effective against things that weren't alive.

In hindsight, he should have known that it would be like that. Thinking back to how he created the form of the onyx serpent, and even further into the past, to the days of learning battle styles from his adversaries, Sunny realized that there were two components to Shadow Dance.

One was purely physical, the other was much deeper and more fundamental, concerning the essence of a being.

Its mind, its spirit, its very soul.

Echoes did not really possess any of these things, so he was left stumped for a while.

In the end, though, Sunny still managed to turn himself into a copy of the crow. It had just taken him much more time and effort than he would have expected... and he did not stop having trouble with the new form after mastering it.

Possessing the body of a bird was one thing, but actually moving like a bird was an entirely different issue. Since Sunny had never flown without the help of enchantments before, he had to learn everything from scratch.

The first time he turned into a crow, he proceeded to fall on his beak after the simplest hop... a few dozen times in a row, all under the perplexed gaze of the befuddled Echo.

Nevertheless, he was flying right now. It was a rather exhilarating feeling.

It was so exhilarating, in fact, that Sunny opened his beak and cawed:

"Fly! Fly!"

Then, he got embarrassed and almost lost control of his wings.

'Now... why the hell did I say it twice?'

Shaking his head slightly, Sunny looked at the dry dock where the Chain Breaker stood, being repaired by a large number of craftsmen, and cautiously descended toward it.

He did not fall... until the last second.

Jet's Echo landed with natural ease and hopped a couple of times in excitement, but Sunny gracelessly sprawled on the cobblestones after rolling a couple of times.

'Ouch. There's still room for improvement.'

Sighing internally, he let the form of the crow dissolve into a formless shadow, then emerged from it as his human self.

Being a human felt cumbersome and boring.

...But he was also slightly shocked by the ferocious strength hiding in his slender, pale body.

'Damn. I've only been a crow for a minute...'

Looking around, Sunny tried to find the shadow in which Nightmare was hiding. He did not notice his steed immediately, but he did notice a familiar old man staring at him with an open mouth.

"L—lord Sunless?"

Sunny sighed internally.

"Oh. Hey there, Cronos."

The elderly teenager had been following them around when they toured the city, full of endless curiosity. He was a nice kid... no matter how hard it was to call a man who looked as old as Professor Obel a kid... but if there was one thing Sunny had an allergy to, it was curious people. So, he felt uncomfortable around the wrinkly Riverborn youth.

"Did... did you turn into a bird?"

Sunny stared at Cronos for a moment, then shrugged.

"Yes. In a manner of speaking, I did."

The old man stared at him with amazement.

"Ah, I see! It's like that time you turned into the river serpent! Is that your Aspect Ability?"

Sunny took a deep breath.

'Questions, questions...'

He had to remind himself how sad the kid's situation was. Not even because Cronos had turned into an old man before becoming an adult, but because he was starved for excitement and interesting things. His whole life was limited to a city that would have been considered tiny in the waking world — and, worse than that, that city was the last one there was, with not even news of distant events ever reaching it.

Of course he was endlessly excited by the two unexpected visitors.

Sunny remained silent for a moment.

"To be precise, it's the result of combining all my Aspect Abilities to create a... a kind of battle art."

Cronos nodded a couple of times, showing that he understood, and said thoughtfully:

"Oh... I have no idea what you mean, Lord Sunless..."

Then, he smiled.

"Are you here to check on your ship?"

The crow Echo looked at the young man with disdain and flapped its wings impatiently.

"Horse! Horse!"

Sunny nodded.

"No... I'm here to feed my horse."