1562 Leaving Without Saying Goodbye

The ketch flew on the currents of the Great River, circling the ice wasteland. Sunny did not have the enchanted staff to summon the wind, and he had not been able to master the sorcery of Names, like Nephis. But he had the Crown of Twilight, and with it, the water itself responded to him.

So, Sunny made the river itself push the ketch forward. A strong gale blew from the future, as well, and as soon as he skirted the desolate land, it filled the sails. His vessel gained speed as it rushed into the past.

Leaving Verge... and his friends... behind.

There was a storm of emotions in Sunny's heart. Hope, excitement, anticipation...

But also guilt, fear, and shame.

What would Nephis and the other members of the cohort think when they came back and found out that he had abandoned them? How would Cassie explain his absence?

Would they be angry, shaken, and resentful of him? Would they feel betrayed?

They had the right to feel that way. He had abandoned them on the eve of a perilous battle, leaving to pursue a selfish goal. Was there a more obvious betrayal than that? Imagining the faces of his friends when they learned of his departure, Sunny felt his heart ache.

He broke the promise he had made after Ananke's death. He broke the promise he had given to Wind Flower, as well. And even the promise he had given himself. That made his heart ache, too.

But... it didn't matter.

Even though he was in pain because of what he had done, he would have done it again. The reward that the Estuary promised... the freedom to live like he wanted to live, released from the suffocating hold fate had on him, was worth it.

It was worth it a hundred times over.

Removing the Shadow Bond alone was.

Sure, Sunny did not know how exactly his wish for freedom would be

fulfilled in the Estuary. Perhaps someone like Mordret would call out his True Name, turning him into a slave once again.

That was alright. Sunny felt confident in his ability to kill an enemy who would become his master. It was being bonded to someone he loved, and thus could not eliminate, that was the problem. Being a slave to fate.

'Freedom, freedom...'

The word tasted sweet on his tongue.

And so, Sunny abandoned Nephis... and Cassie, and Kai, and Jet, and Effie with her newborn child. Praying for their safety, he sped away from Verge, toward the dawn of time.

He had to hurry.

The city of the Seekers lay as close to the Source as they had managed to build it, but there was still a considerable distance between the icy wasteland and the mist. More than that, this part of the Great River was possibly the most dangerous there was — just like the harrowing reaches of the far future, the dawn of time was where the most powerful abominations in the Tomb of Ariel prowled.

And even if he reached the Source, it would take Sunny some time to find the entrance to the Estuary. It would take time to reach its very heart, as well.

He had to accomplish it before the First Seeker was destroyed, and the Nightmare collapsed.

How long would it take for Nephis to conquer Verge? Knowing her, it wouldn't be long.

Steering the ketch, Sunny gritted his teeth.

'One day to return from the scouting mission — two, at most. One day to guide the cohort to Verge. They would remain there for a day or two, evaluating the situation inside the city. Then... then, the battle itself. Even if they have to fight through a legion of the Defiled to reach the First Seeker, it won't take long.'

Nephis had seven fully saturated cores, after all. She wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice six of them to obliterate Verge. Mordret was not far away from forming the Monster Core, which would allow him to create a Reflection — once that happened, his growth would accelerate exponentially,

quickly turning him into a unstoppable fiend once again.

Effie, Jet, and Kai were a force to be reckoned with, as well.

It would have been different if Nephis did not possess an incorruptible soul — after all, even the Serpent King and his army had failed to take Verge — but since she did possess it, the Nightmare would be over soon.

It was a matter of days.

So, there was no time to waste.

The ketch sailed downstream, carried by the winds and currents. The Great River glowed with iridescent light, the world suffused with darkness. The silence was only broken by the sound of waves and the infuriating voice of the Sin of Solace, who seethed with hatred and whispered poison into Sunny's ear.

Sunny refused to answer, though.

In fact, after saying goodbye to Cassie, he had not made a single sound.

His eyes were aimed at the horizon, and his face was frozen with cold determination.

Soon, the seven suns rose from beneath the water. The darkness was banished, and the sky turned bright again. He let out an inaudible sigh, as the image of the countless slumbering butterflies disappeared from his mind.

As it was dawn, Sunny used the opportunity and summoned the shell of the onyx serpent. Hiding the ketch in his maw, he rushed forward as fast as he could — and the speed granted to him by the body of the sea serpent in the water was nothing short of stunning.

Keeping such an enormous shell manifested burned through a lot of essence, but the Crown of Twilight was supplying him with a nearly endless reserve of it. More than that, even the essence he had expended to accelerate the current was replenished.

The period of dawn did not last long, and the sky soon turned azure. But Sunny had covered a great distance in that short period of time.

Spitting the ketch on the water, he dismissed the shell and landed on the deck again, grabbing the steering oar.

His solitary journey continued...

He was moving downstream, further and further into the dawn of time. Approaching the point where time had not existed yet — the Source. And the Estuary hidden in its mist.