1754 I Hurt, Therefore I Am

Sunny remembered the first time he went all the way to the northern boundary of the Chained Isles vividly. Back then, it had taken Cassie and him around a month to reach the Night Temple from the Sanctuary of Noctis.

The Southern Island was further away from the Hollow Mountains than the Sanctuary - and yet, Sunny made the journey in under a week. Even then, it had only taken him that long because he was taking his sweet time.

He did not need to traverse the heavenly chains to get from one island to the other anymore instead, he simply turned into a crow and flew north, landing from time to time to rest or take a look at something peculiar.

The Crushing was of no issue because he could escape it at any time with Shadow Step. The Nightmare Creatures of the Chained Isles were too weak to pose a serious threat to him, at least as long as he stayed alert. Most simply fled, frightened by his dark presence.

Strangely enough, Sunny felt that he was more at home in the Dream Realm than he was in the waking world. It was as though being a Transcendent finally made him suited to exist in this land of beauty and dread.

Soon, he saw a black line on the northern horizon. The line grew darker and taller as he ventured further north, until he finally could make out the jagged peaks of the Hollow Mountains.

The great mountain chain pierced the sky like the fangs of a giant dragon... at least that was how Sunny always perceived it before. Now, however, he knew that they were simply a scar left on the surface of the world by the fall of a Void Creature that had been killed here at the dawn of time.

True darkness was born from the blood of that abyssal being, which had seeped into the broken earth.

Having beheld the draconian peaks, Sunny lowered his gaze and looked down.

The Northern Island had been destroyed in the battle between Sky Tide and Saint Cormac, so the chasm separating the Chained Isles from the Hollow Mountains was wider than before. Across the dark abyss of the Sky Below, the mountains rose steeply into the distant sky, white mist rolling down their slopes.

It flowed into the abyss like a wall of clouds, disappearing into the darkness.

Sunny exhaled slowly.

He was standing on the edge of an island, with the broken chain that had once connected it to the Northern Island rattling quietly far below, Far away, on the other side of the chasm, the great anchor chain that had once connected the Chained Isles to the Hollow Mountains was hidden by mist.

He was not alone.

Saint, Serpent, Nightmare, and Fiend were standing around him. Gloomy, creepy, haughty, naughty, and crazy shadows lay on the ground, as well. Only the happy shadow was missing, busy with its own mission.

Sunny exhaled slowly, then looked at his retinue.

He remained silent for a while, then said with a pale smile:

"The smart way of doing this would be to send one of you into the mist first. To see how it goes."

None of them showed any reaction... except for Fiend, who tried to hide behind Saint without drawing attention. Sadly, with his current size, hiding behind Saint was not as effective as it had been before.

Sunny grinned.

"...Luckily for you, no one has ever accused me of being smart."

He had been complimented on his wit from time to time, but never in an accusatory tone. So, the statement was technically true.

Shaking his head, Sunny commanded the shadows to wrap themselves around his body. Then, he dismissed the Shadows and faced the abyssal chasm once more,

‘What a bother...'

He had already tried to extend his shadow sense into the mist to breach the chasm with Shadow Step, but couldn't sense a single shadow on the other side. In fact, he couldn't sense anything. It was as if... nothing existed beyond the veil of mist.

Perhaps quite literally.

'Here we go.'

Sunny dissolved into the shadows, then emerged from them in the form of a crow. Flapping his wings, he cawed loudly and flew toward the Hollow Mountains.

He left the rattling of chains behind and glided on the winds above the bottomless abyss of the Sky Below. The white wall of flowing mist drew closer and closer, and as it did, Sunny's heart beat faster and faster.

'What if I really just... disappear?'

Would it be that bad? After all, he was all but erased from existence, already. Ending up being swallowed by nothing only seemed fitting.

'What the hell... of course, it's bad!'

Sunny was not going to disappear. He still wanted to live... in fact, he wanted to live more than ever before.

That was a strange quirk of his personality. The less reason there was for him to live, the more he wanted to survive, out of nothing but pure spite. Now that the world had truly and utterly rejected him, Sunny had to stay alive, no matter the cost.

Letting out another caw, Sunny plunged into the white mist.

Immediately, he felt..., strange.

‘Ah…’

What... what was that feeling?

Sunny couldn't quite describe it. However, it was debilitating enough to make him fall from the sky.

He crashed into the cold rock, rolling down the slope in a mess of limbs. The Crow Shell had collapsed, and he was back to his human body. The rocks bit into his skin painfully, but Sunny did not, and could not, pay it any attention.

'What... the hell... is this...'

It was... it was.... It was like a mind attack, but also completely different. At the same time, it was like a soul attack, but did not bring him any pain. It was also like a physical attack, but ir did not harm his body.

The best way Sunny could describe it was that, suddenly, he felt as if he was dreaming. Or rather, had been dreaming all along.

As if he was nothing but a fleeting dream, and all his life had been one long, meaningless nightmare. And, therefore...

That none of it was real, and none of him was real either.

His sense of self was slowly dissolving under the numb indifference of that obvious realization, as if he was being pulled into a state of senselessness.

Sunny had never existed, and would never exist.

He…

He…

He did not exist.

As soon as he acknowledged that fact, his soul started to dim.

His body started to lose strength, as well.

His thoughts turned slower.

‘That is right.’

Sunny smiled faintly.

'Come from nothing. Return to nothing.’

He could sense the mist flowing around him.

Through him.

Was his body turning transparent? If so... that was alright. That was how it should be.

Only...

'If I don't exist, if there is no me... then why does it hurt to have never existed so much?’

He had experienced being erased from existence once, already. That pain would have been meaningless if he had never existed, in the first place... so, the mere fact that it had hurt him so badly was a contraction.

If he was nobody, then he would have felt nothing. But he felt something, and therefore, he had to be somebody.

Pain bloomed in his heart like a flower.

And with it, his Transcendent soul ignited with the beautiful radiance of divine flame.

Tenacious blood ran through his body, filling it with strength.

His mind was aflame with desire.

Desire to exist.

'I hurt, therefore I am... wait, what? What kind of nonsense am I spouting?!'

Sunny groaned and concentrated all of his formidable mind on a single thought:

"I am!"

He was not nothing.

He was not nobody.

He was Sunless, formerly known or rather, unknown - as Lost from Light. He was the Devil of Antarctica. He had been the Mad Prince once, but he was not anymore. He was even Lord Mongrel, even if he wished otherwise.

He was... Sunny.

It took all his focus to keep that thought from dissolving into the mist.

Once he managed to prove his own existence, the pressure of nothingness did not disappear, and the pull of non-existence did not lessen. Sunny had to keep concentrating on the fact that he had been, was, and would be without reprieve. If he let go of that fervent thought even for a few moments, both his soul and body would probably turn into flowing mist.

"Dam... damnation…”

Grimacing, he slowly rose from the cold stone and stared into the white nothingness that surrounded him with a grim expression.

'Ah. How insidious.’

This... was not going to be easy.

Mumbling quiet curses, Sunny dusted himself off and looked around.

He could not see anything, and the mist was dampening his senses. So, he didn't even know which direction he was supposed to go.

However, it wasn't hard to determine where the north was.

All he had to do was pay attention to the ground.

The ground under his feet was sloping in a certain direction... going down meant returning to the Chained Isles, going up meant venturing deeper into the Hollow Mountains.

He rubbed his face, sighed, and started climbing the slope.