We'll Cross the Line Together

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We'll Cross the Line Together

by mid_engine_911

Summary

Twelve years after he revealed the truth that would change his and his friends' lives forever, Sunny now finds himself in the cockpit of a Porsche 919 Hybrid. With the help of his team and friends, he must learn to truly accept himself beyond his results and self-criticism, all while undergoing the trials and tribulations of endurance racing. Outside the cockpit, an unexpected reunion encourages him to confront his unspoken feelings.

Back in Faraway Town, Aubrey has now built a life of her own and made peace with the mistakes of her past. However, she still holds on to Sunny and her unspoken feelings for him. As she closely follows his career in secret with pride and admiration, she must also learn to handle the fear of losing him to the dangers of his profession. Unbeknownst to them, they have been holding on to each other for years, and they must now find the strength to let those feelings resurface so that they can rekindle their friendship and perhaps turn it into something more.

Notes

Expansions of the abbreviations from the story

FIA: Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (International Automobile Federation)
ACO: Automobile Club de l'Ouest (Automobile Club of the West)
GTE-Pro: Grand Touring Endurance - Professional
GTE-Am: Grand Touring Endurance - Amateur
LMP1: Le Mans Prototype 1
LMP2: Le Mans Prototype 2

Note: The championship that Sunny races in is a multi-class series, meaning that cars that are drastically different from each other race on the same track but aren't necessarily competing with each other; however, each car will still have an overall position. For example, a GTE-Pro car is only really competing with other GTE-Pro cars. The classes ranked from fastest to slowest are: LMP1, LMP2, GTE-Pro, GTE-Am. The GTE-Am and Pro cars are almost identical, except that the Am cars are 1 year older than the Pro cars and have drivers of a lower rating than the Pro class.

Chapter 1: Words Unspoken

“Le Mans keeps us young…”

Saturday, 13 June 2015

Le Mans, France

Race start: **3:00 p.m.**, French time

6:02 p.m.

As Sunny crossed the line to start his 53rd lap, the French skies slowly opened, and the rain fell gently, pattering on the roof and windshield of his car. As it did, memories of a rainy day back in Faraway crept into his mind. He remembered Aubrey and Kel bickering (as they always did) over their favourite colours and how his ears turned red when Basil teased him about his crush on Aubrey. Amidst it all, he remembered the sound of the rain gently falling on his umbrella. It was a memory that he cherished, but with over twenty hours of racing ahead of him, razor-sharp focus was required. Unbeknownst to Sunny, a prayer from halfway across the world would carry him through this great endeavour.

7:43 p.m., Le Mans

1:43 p.m., Faraway Town, Virginia, USA

It was a clear afternoon back in Faraway Town and Aubrey was in its church, knelt before the altar. The stillness of the church allowed her a peaceful moment to send a prayer across the Atlantic Ocean.

“O Lord, I thank You for all that You have done for me, and all those dear to me. I thank You for the strength You've given me. My Lord, I pray that You keep him safe out there; I pray that You bless him with lots of happiness and success; I pray that You may forgive him for his sins, and I pray that You may forgive me for all the wrong I've done to him, and to many others. Amen.”

She rose to her feet and sat in one of the pews. As she sat there, she took out a picture from her pocket. It was a group photo that the whole gang had taken at the airport on the day that Sunny left for Germany. Like every other photo of the sort, it was stuck in Basil's photo album. However, unbeknownst to her friends, she secretly made copies of that and a few other photos to keep for herself, thanks to digital cameras. Chief among them were photos where Sunny was present. She looked at the photo from her pocket with a great sense of longing and melancholy. God forbid any of her friends catch her doing that; she'd be hearing about it for weeks if they ever did.

Sunny struggled with a malfunction that compromised the hybrid system within the first few laps of his stint. The issue was caused by a minor software glitch which forced the system into a shutdown as a failsafe. This left Sunny with no electric power and forced him to rely solely on his combustion engine, dropping the car's total power output substantially. He became prey to the cars behind which took full advantage of his misfortune and by the end of the lap he dropped down to tenth place from the pole position he and his teammate, Neel had initially qualified in. Thankfully, he was able to recover two positions after fixing the issue via a system reset. At the end of lap 86, he was due for a pit stop and to hand over the car to his other teammate, Marc. The three drivers shared the #18 Porsche 919 Hybrid for the 2015 season of the World Endurance Championship. Despite the team's troubled start, hopes for securing the coveted podium sweep were very much alive, but they couldn't afford to rest on their laurels.

Porsche had entered three cars for the 2015 24 Hours of Le Mans, those being #17, #18 and #19. Car #17 was leading the race trailed by #19 in fifth place and #18 in eighth place. They had an impressive lineup across all three cars ranging from former Formula One driver Mark Webber to then-current Formula One driver Nico Hülkenberg and overall Le Mans winner, Timo Bernhard. Nico shared car #19 with Earl Bamber and Nick Tandy while Timo Bernhard shared car #17 with Brendon Hartley and Mark Webber.

The résumé of the #18 trio was just as impressive:

Neel Jani

- 3rd place in 2011 Le Mans Series (not to be confused with the 24 Hours of Le Mans)
- 2014 6 Hours of São Paulo winner
- 3rd place in the 2014 FIA World Endurance Championship Drivers' Championship

Marc Lieb

- 2× 24 Hours of Le Mans GT2 class winner
- 2013 24 Hours of Le Mans GTE-Pro class winner
- 4× 24 Hours of Nürburgring overall winner
- 2003 24 Hours of Spa overall winner

Sunny Suzuki

- 2013 24 Hours of Le Mans GTE-Pro class winner (alongside Marc)
- 2008 IMSA GT3 Cup Challenge Drivers' Champion
- Carrera Cup Germany 2010 runner-up

Sunny was one of the younger drivers in his team and had also started his racing career later than all of his teammates. Regardless of his late start, he had an impressive track record over the last ten years in which he built his career.

8:13 p.m.

In the pit box, the team quickly got to work on refuelling and fitting rain tyres on the car to prepare for the rain which became progressively heavier. Sunny leapt out of the car and Neel took over. Sunny decided to take a nap since he would need the rest for his night stint. In the interim, Neel made up an extra position after the first hour of his stint, which placed them in seventh.

9:32 p.m.

By lap 112, the rain had subsided, but the track was still drenched, so Porsche's race engineers immediately got to work on determining when the track would be dry enough for them to switch back to slick tyres.

10:23 p.m.

As Neel's 120th lap came to an end, he pulled into the pits for fuel and a driver change. Marc climbed in and drove off once the lollipop man signalled him to go, narrowly avoiding another exiting car. Porsche's engineers realised that their tyres lasted a few laps longer than those of their opponents, an advantage they planned to capitalise on all the way to the finish.

10:47 p.m.

Unfortunately, Porsche's woes wouldn't stop at a malfunctioning hybrid system. Marc locked the wheels under braking on the approach to a corner and skidded straight into a wall, lightly hitting it head-on. Thankfully, the damage was limited to the front nose assembly only. He limped the slightly damaged 919 back to the pits to replace the front nose assembly. The repair would cost the team over a minute, essentially undoing some of the progress they made thus far.

11:39 p.m.

At the end of lap 139, Marc pulled into the pits for a driver change. Sunny climbed back into the cockpit as they refueled the car. The track was still drying, but it was still not yet safe for slicks. With another driver and a new set of tyres, the charge for 6th place began.

Hundreds of thousands of people flocked to Le Mans every year to get a piece of the action. They supported various teams and drivers, and many of them were eager to express their support for Sunny as well. However, the grandeur of massive crowds paled in comparison to his fan club of four, reserved only for his most loyal fans.

11:51 p.m., Le Mans

5:51 p.m., Faraway Town

Back in Faraway, Basil and Aubrey were making their way to Hero and Kel's house to watch Sunny's big race live on TV. On their way there, they spotted a group of children playing an improvised game of baseball. As they stopped to watch, Aubrey glanced at the bat in a boy's hands. The sight of it made her recoil slightly, reminding her of the trouble she had caused for

those undeserving and of how she and her hooligans would ultimately pay the price for their cruelty at the hands of Kel and Sunny. Basil, being ever so attentive, noticed her unease.

“Are you alright, Aubrey?”

She was as silent as the grave.

“Uh, Aubrey?”

“Oh, uh, sorry. Just zoned out a little.”

“Is something wrong?”

“Oh, no, no, no. Let's, uh… Let's just keep walking. Hey look, we're almost there!”

Aubrey's tactics of secrecy always worked when there was an exit plan, but with nowhere to run, her facade crumbled. Basil put two and two together and came to understand what troubled her. True to his empathetic nature, he decided not to push it any further.

Hero had switched to channel 281, where the race was being broadcast live. Shortly after, Aubrey and Basil arrived. The gang gathered on the couch and watched, eagerly waiting for Sunny's black Porsche 919 Hybrid to come into view.

“What was this race called again?” Kel asked.

“It's called the 24 Hours of Le Mans, meathead. We've been watching him for years now; how could you still not remember?”

“Of course you'd remember; you know EVERYTHING about Sunny, don't you?” Kel said with a smirk on his face.

“Shut up!” She shouted as she blushed and turned away.

“Haha, your face is as red as a tomato”

“Oh, go to hell!”

“God, will you two quit it already?” Hero said in exasperation, halting their bickering on the spot. Many things had changed over the course of sixteen years; the need for Hero's mediation between Kel and Aubrey was not one of them. He'd gotten so good at it that he may as well make some money from it, but anyone who knew Hero also knew that he would never do such a thing.

“I guess some things never change”, Basil chimed in.

As everyone cast their eyes on the TV, the camera panned to the start/finish straight, and amidst the spray kicked up by other cars, Sunny's 919 Hybrid came into view.

“That's him, there he is!” Aubrey shouted with glee, her eyes filled with child-like wonder.

“That's a man on a mission right there”, said Hero.

“Yeah, no kidding, look at him go!” Kel replied with amazement.

Sunday, 14 June 2015

12:05 a.m

Porsche’s data forecast that the track would be dry by around lap 150 and so they would switch to slicks then if feedback was positive.

“So, data shows slick tyres might be the best option currently.”

“Track still feels a bit slick. Still some standing water.”

“Copy.”

As his stint wore on, fatigue began to creep in. During the remainder of his stint, Sunny got to watch some incredible battles between the GTE cars as he lapped them. The spectacle made him reminisce about his time in the GTE category and how he won the class at Le Mans in 2013. He also missed the glorious sound of the 911 RSR he used to race not so long ago.

12:51 a.m.

“Update on track status.”

“There’s a good dry line now. Lock pit window for end of lap 158.”

“Copy.”

At the end of lap 158, Sunny made a pit stop to hand over the reins to Marc and to change to slick tyres. Sunny climbed out of the cockpit and Marc took his place. He would, however, face a half an hour safety car period a few minutes into his stint, caused by an incident between an LMP2 and a GTE-Am car.

After his debriefing and a meal, Sunny retreated to his room behind the paddock to shower and get massaged. He desperately needed some quiet time away from the action since Neel and Marc would take care of things for the next few hours. This would give Sunny a small window to get some much-needed sleep.

1:43 a.m.

Sunny's phone rang.

“Really? At this ungodly hour?”

His irritation would turn into a sheepish smile when he read the name on the screen: “Aubrey.”

“Hey Sunny, how are you? How's the race going?” She nervously asked.

“Hey Aubrey, I'm alright; the race is going great. We had a bit of a rough start because of some technical issues, but all is good now.”

“Oh, I'm really sorry. I'm sure you'll be able to make it back up. I believe in you!”

Sunny felt his ears turning red. If there was one thing that Sunny could rely on for an extra push, it was Aubrey's encouragement.

“Will you be back in the car again soon?”

“Not for another few hours at least. Marc should be in the car by now, so Neel and I are just resting.”

“How long have you been driving?”

“Well, I drove for around two hours in the afternoon and, like, another hour just now. So basically about three hours total so far.”

“Oh wow, that is a long time. I imagine that it’s quite intense now that you're in a faster car. I hope you're eating well and getting rest in between; it’s very important that you do. Or should I come there and make sure for myself?”

“Oh, I'm uh… I'm alright, Aubrey; you don't need to worry, really. You know how long it took me to get here. Marc, Neel and I trained very hard to make sure we were prepared. Although I am still facing some physical challenges, the doctors say my bone density still needs a while to get up to par, but my muscle mass and density seem to be right where they need to be.”

“I know, Sunny, I just worry about you a lot. Promise me you'll take care of yourself, and be careful over there, alright?”

In that instant, a memory from days bygone came rushing back to his mind.

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“A-Anyway, I just want you to know… that I still care about you and stuff.”

“...”

“I’ve been thinking about this since I saw you, but I think you’re looking a little pale… and kind of thin, too. After you move, promise me you’ll go outside more often, okay?”

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Sunny held her words dear from that day forward. One could say that they, along with the physical demands of motorsport served as his driving force to be as physically fit as he is today.

As for Aubrey, she was well aware of the dangers of motorsport, but having seen it first-hand shook her to the core. It was back in 2013, and only a few laps into that year's 24 Hours of Le Mans when she saw a car veer off the track at the exit of Tertre Rouge (a right-hand corner). It violently slammed into the barrier on the far left-hand side of the track before rebounding off it and rolling back towards the middle of the road. It was a harsh impact for sure, but she had seen worse in her time keeping up with Sunny's career, and so she assumed that the driver would be fine. Initially, a sense of relief washed over her since it wasn't Sunny who crashed, but relief would soon turn to dread once she realised that no one had stepped out of the wreckage that used to be an Aston Martin Vantage. The camera panned away from the scene, so she'd never know the aftermath of the incident until three hours later, when her fears would come to fruition as the commentators spoke.

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"We have some very grim news indeed to bring you from the circuit. The organisers have issued a statement, and I'll read it directly to you…"

"At 15h09 the No.95 Aston Martin Vantage GTE, driven by Allan Simonsen of Denmark, exited the track at high speed at the Tertre Rouge corner on his fourth lap of the race.

The driver was immediately attended on the scene by the doctors from the Automobile Club de l'Ouest's Medical Service.

In a serious condition, Allan Simonsen was transferred immediately to the Circuit Medical Centre where he died soon after due to his injuries.

Allan Simonsen's family has been informed immediately by David Richards, Principal of the Aston Martin Racing team.

Allan Simonsen, an experienced driver aged 34, had taken part in seven 24 Heures du Mans.

His team mates in the No.95 car were his fellow countrymen, Christoffer Nygaard and Kristian Poulsen.

The Automobile Club de l'Ouest wishes to express its great sadness following this incident, and extends its deepest condolences to the family and those close to Allan Simonsen.

The Automobile Club de l'Ouest will make no further statement while the exact reasons for the accident are still being wholly determined.
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Ends.”

As the statement ended, Aubrey's blood ran cold. That incident was a stark reminder of the dangers of motorsport. She realised that such a tragedy can befall anyone, from someone as experienced as Allan to a complete rookie. It could happen to anyone… It could happen to… Sunny. Just entertaining that thought was enough to overwhelm her with a paralysing sense of fear and anxiety. What would she do if Sunny was in that car? That was a question she hoped that she'd never have to answer. However, with Sunny now piloting a car nearly twice as powerful as the Aston Martin, the question felt ever more pertinent.

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He assured her that he would take the utmost care of himself and then went on to explain every other safety measure taken by him, Porsche and even the governing bodies (FIA and ACO). Unfortunately, his lecture did little to ease her worries. However, as concerned as she was, she had to accept the fact that this was the reality of the sport and if someone like Sunny had to explain as much as he did, she had good reason to believe that he was honest since he wasn't one to speak more than was necessary.

“How are you managing with your eye?”

“It is a bit difficult, but the engineers here have been very accommodating to me. They adjusted the focal length of the camera for my rear-view mirror and reprogrammed my blind spot indicators so that I'm more aware of what's around me. The best part is that the whole car reprogrammes itself to make these changes whenever I have to drive, so that way the other guys aren't compromised either.”

Aubrey didn't quite understand what he had just said to her, nor could she comprehend how intelligent the race cars of the modern era were. Nevertheless, she was happy and relieved to hear that Sunny was managing well and was being taken care of. He was taken care of so well; in fact, one could say he was essentially adopted by Porsche at this point, given that he had spent his whole racing career driving them, from club racing to the GT3 Cup Challenge and then on to the GTE amateur and professional classes. He would then serve as a test driver for the 919 project in during its development in 2013, along with racing full-time in GTE-Pro that year.

“That's great to hear, Sunny. I know I may not say this often, but I'm really proud of you; we all are.”

Affection radiated from her voice, which never failed to fill Sunny with that same sense of warmth he felt around her when they were children, a sense of warmth that they both yearned for, unbeknownst to each other and their friends.

“YO SUNNYYY!” His ears rang as he heard Kel shouting over the phone.
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“Really, Kel, could you be any louder?”

Aubrey was clearly not a fan of his enthusiasm.

“What? God forbid a man be excited to speak to his friend.”

“No one is forbidding anything, Kel! All I'm asking is that you stop being an obnoxious reta-”

“Aubrey…”, Sunny said sternly, cutting her off.

“Sorry…”, she replied guiltily as Kel silently mocked her.

She decided that it was best to let it slide, however angry she may have been. Besides, she paid good money for those anger management classes. It was only light-hearted teasing from Kel anyway.

“Anyway, why don't you say hi to everyone real quick? I know you really need some rest now, so we won't keep you too long.”

“Sure, pass the phone to them.”

“Yo Sunny! How've you been, bro? How's the race coming along?”

Kel always pounced on the chance to speak to Sunny, and this time was no exception. With Sunny spending more and more time overseas and Kel getting more occupied with basketball, opportunities to catch up with his old friend became increasingly rare.

“Hey Kel, I've been alright. Things have been hectic here. As for the race, we had some issues earlier which cost us some positions, but we made a few back up. Oh, and Aubrey told me a while back about the championship you guys won. Congratulations, man; you earned it!”

“Thanks, bro. The support I had from you guys means everything; I couldn't have done it without you all. Also, I'm sorry about what happened earlier in the race, but I'm relieved to hear that you're clawing your way back up. Make sure you show them who's the boss! But before you do that, get some rest first, man. I can't imagine driving that long is very easy. From one athlete to another, take your rest seriously, bro. Bye for now, man; we'll be cheering you on from here!”

“Thank you, Kel, it means a lot. I'll make sure to get enough rest. I'm gonna need it anyway. Take care, man.”

“Anytime bro, just hold on for Hero real quick.”

“Hey Sunny, how are you? How's the race going so far? I heard about the rough start; sorry, man.”

“Hey Hero, I'm alright, just exhausted after all that driving. Yeah, those issues were quite unexpected, but we managed to fix them without having to stop, which I'm very thankful for.

We also made up a few positions, so I'm quite happy about that."

"That's great to hear. Anyway, I don't want to keep you too long. I can see that you're rather exhausted. Take care of yourself out there. Just remember you've got a very happy house cheering you on back here. Oh, just hold on for Basil real quick."

"Hi Sunny! How are you? I heard about what happened earlier in the race. I'm really sorry, but I'm really happy that you're climbing back up!"

"Hey Basil, I'm rather exhausted after all that driving, but other than that I'm ok. How are you doing?"

"I'm doing alright, Sunny. It's really good to speak to you again; you've been outside the country for so long. It's been years since we actually saw you in person."

"Yeah, it has, huh? I didn't even realise; things have been so hectic here, but I'll come visit you guys as soon as I can, I promise

"We'll all be looking forward to that day. Oh, and how are you managing with your eye? I'm just really concerned… You know, if only I- I wish- I'm really sorry, Sunny."

Even after 12 years, Basil's actions on that fateful night at his house plagued his conscience, even if his friends had clearly forgiven him.

"Basil, please don't blame yourself for what happened. It was a mistake. I know you would never do such a thing intentionally, and besides, I have long since forgiven you. If it makes you feel any better, I would sacrifice my eye all over again if it meant saving you. You know, ever since we've confessed the truth to everyone, you've stood firm and tall, and I'm really proud of you for that. You should be proud of yourself too."

"Thank you, Sunny, it means a lot. I will do my best."

"Anytime, man. Please take care of yourself. As for me, I need some sleep. I'll speak to you guys soon. Oh, just pass the phone to Aubrey for me, please."

As Aubrey took her phone back from Basil, she retreated to a more secluded spot in the house to talk to Sunny again.

"Sunny?"

"Hey, I'm gonna hit the hay for now. I'll talk to you soon, alright?"

"Ok, please rest well."

"Goodnight, Aubrey."

"Goodnight, Sunny. I- Uh, never mind."

"Huh? What is it?"

“It's nothing, don't worry about it, just, please take care of yourself.”

“Alright then, bye, Aubrey.”

“Bye, Sunny.”

As he cut the call and lay down on his bed, he couldn't help but wonder what it was that Aubrey wanted to say, but his exhaustion soon got the better of him, and soon, he was out cold.

Sunny drifted ever so slowly into the realm of dreams, and when he eventually settled, he awoke in a familiar white room.

“Not this again.”

However, there was something different about whitespace this time around, and it wasn't just the absence of Omori. Behind the door, which usually led him to headspace, shone a brilliant white light.

“Well, there's nothing else here.”

As he opened the door, the light nearly blinding him, he was able to make out 2 large curtains billowing in the wind with a huge window behind them, along with a staircase leading up to it. The whole scene looked familiar, too familiar.

Sunny slowly made his way to the window, but what he saw next stopped him right in his tracks. From behind the curtains emerged an angelic figure with long black hair and a beautiful long white dress. The figure called out to him in a familiar and comforting voice.

“Hello again, little brother, or should I call you big brother now?”

“Mari… Mari, I… I missed you so much. It's so good to see you again.”

“I missed you so much, little brother. You seem troubled; is there something you want to talk about?”

“It's been so long, Mari, but it’s still so hard, you know? I just wish you were still here with us. Things would be so much easier.”

Mari walked over to Sunny and hugged him tightly, a warm embrace he had not felt for more than fifteen years. Sunny clung to her, fully letting himself feel the comfort only his big sister could provide.

“Oh, Sunny, I know it’s been really hard on all of you, but I’m so proud of you all. You guys have gone through so much, yet you all still came out standing firm and tall. You know, after everything that happened that day, I spent a long time wondering if you'd forgive me for my part in it.”

Absolutely dumbfounded by what he just heard, he had to inquire further.

“Wait, I don't understand.”

“I pushed you too far and too hard, Sunny. I was so obsessed with things being perfect that I never stopped to consider how you felt about things. I wore you down, but I was too selfish to see it at the time. I'm so sorry, Sunny. Will you forgive me?”

“Mari… I will always forgive you. How could I not? I would forgive you a thousand times over if I could.”

“Thank you, Sunny. You're the best little brother I could have asked for. You know, you have always stayed true to your namesake, and we have all seen so much in you that you don't see in yourself, so much so that sometimes I wish you were my big brother. You've grown into such an amazing young man now, Sunny; it's enough to make a big sister cry.”

Sunny stood before her, smiling from ear to ear with tears pouring down his face. He had longed to hear his sister's voice again, to know that she was proud of him and now his wish was fulfilled.

“Thank you, Mari, you're the best. Thank you for everything; I won't let you down.”

“Sunny, there's something else I want to talk to you about.”

“What is it?”

“You haven't told her yet, have you?”

“Mari, who are you talking about?”

“Oh, Sunny, who else would I be talking about?” she teased.

Only one name came to Sunny's mind: “Aubrey.”

“She's quite fond of you, you know?”

“Is she? Even if she was, it's been so long, I doubt she'd ever-”

Mari stopped him right there.

“Sunny, I understand your fear. How do you think Hero and I started dating? You really think he made the first move? Besides, there's a lot more to her than meets the eye”, she said with a chuckle.

“What makes you so certain?”

“Well, let's just say I paid her a visit a while back. I know you two had a turbulent past after all that happened when I left. Despite everything, she's a good person, Sunny. Although, I did give her a mouthful for her past behaviour.”

“I see…”

“I know that you have a special place in your heart for her, so please don't hide it. I know you have it in you. It's not too late, little brother.”

Sunny had to pause for a moment to process what his sister had revealed to him. Could it really be? Then again, big sister Mari would never guide him in the wrong direction.

“I won't, Mari. Thank you again for everything. I don't know how I could ever repay you.”

“Oh, don't be silly, you'll never have to repay your big sister.”

She turned toward the window and back to her little brother.

“Well, it seems I have to bid you farewell now, Sunny.”

He lunged at Mari for one last hug. She took him in with open arms, ensuring her little brother felt all the warmth and love she could give him. They separated and stood before each other. They then made their way to the window from which Mari had emerged, stopping just in front of the staircase which led up to the window itself. Mari walked up the stairs, and just as she got to the top, she turned around to face her dear little brother.

“Goodbye, little brother.”

“Goodbye, Mari”, he said as he tried to hold back the next onslaught of tears.

Just then, Mari was engulfed in a blinding light, and by the time it faded, the window and curtains, along with Mari, were gone. Before him sat a flower where the staircase once was, a white egret orchid. Sunny was all too familiar with its meaning, but he found great comfort knowing that his sister wasn't too far away. He reached out and touched the flower, and slowly awoke from his slumber.

His reunion may have felt brief, but he had slept for an hour. He showered and consumed a nutrient gel that his dietician had tailored to his nutritional needs. It tasted a little better than dirt, but four years of malnutrition had really done a number on his gut health, so it was essential that he ate it. He slipped into his race suit, grabbed his helmet and HANS device (head and neck support) and headed back to the garage.

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