

Chapter Two

Separation

iv

The blondish beauty lay there in her hospital bed with Oslo standing over her in terror. Her parents were distraught, and his parents felt helpless as they sit scattered in that dim hospital room. Oslo couldn't remember how he ended up here or where they were; All he could picture is a totaled SUV and two unconscious teenagers. Staring over at her parents seeing the grief they were in, he never felt more useless in his life.

He recalls a voice, "*...a coma, induced by trauma to the brain. We have no way to tell of when your child will be able to wake again...*" it echoes through his mind like a fading memory.

Oslo steps back and sits in a cushioned chair behind him, however, it doesn't feel cushioned at all; it's as if he sat on a boulder. Regardless of this discomfort, he remains stunned, fixated on nothing but her. He feels nauseous and tired—holding onto the small thread of energy he has left—He feels more and more ill the longer he stares. His bones rattle and his blood curdles. His neck feels a creaking bend and his eyes tingle like they've lost all blood flow to them. As the hours go by, he refuses to doze off, but as the sun begins to set and lights up the room golden, he cannot refuse his body any longer. His head stoops low and his body slops over in that hard, rocky chair.

A voice echoes again, *'I'm... so sorry. Visiting hours are over, we'll be here to welcome you back in the morning.'*

He wakes in a jolt, shuffling his feet on the ground until he's able to push himself upright in the chair. He looks around the dark unlit room and sees no presence but the moon's gaze that lingers over Ocea, lying in the hospital bed.

'They left me.'

He collects himself and slowly stands, gripping the arms of the chair. He approaches Ocea's side and brushes her hand gently. He makes no remarks, realizing he could be in trouble for being here after dark. Yet, he'd rather beg forgiveness as he refuses to leave the room.

'Wait—where are we?' He quickly shuffles over to the window. *'Charlotte, I'm back home.'* He lets out a sigh of comfort and sits back in that horrid chair while looking back out the window. Something looked funny about the city from where he was. It felt *shorter* than usual. He didn't pay much more mind to it as he felt very tired. He turned to give Ocea one last look before he lay on the floor, colder but more comforting than the chair, to go to sleep.

He wakes a few hours later to the sunrise slipping through the window. The light shines through the shades and stretches along the far side of the room. He tiredly, but quickly, lifts himself off the floor ensuring no one were to walk in on him lying there. He walks back over to the bedside and gazes at the sleeping beauty. He takes a deep and sobering breath as he stares into his reality. Her breathing is steady. She looks at peace. He smiles, backing away to stare out the window again. Nothing appears new from this view. The city is still asleep. He wanders, staring down at the empty streets and highways. He hears a loud **Bang** from the hallway and turns around startled only to see no one there. The hall lights remain off. He rubs his eyes and yawns, walking towards the door to see what the noise could've been. He grips the handle of the door. *'It's nothing. I'm sure it's nothing.'* He turns back, walking to Ocea's side again. He looks down at her gentle skin as the sun continues to rise and reflect off it. Her long and dainty hands rested at her sides so elegantly with her sharp nails and beat-up polish. Her cracked lips peel as her mouth hangs open and tubes traverse around her face and cheekbones.

"There's nothing I can do for you now. But I promise *we will never be separated again.*" He says with no intention of romanticism, but loyalty.

"It's just like before isn't it? It was my fault the first time." He chokes up, "And it's just as much my fault this time."

He kneels down, leaning his head against the arm of the bed, holding back his weeping as tears pass by.

BANG He hears from the hall again, causing him to jump, wiping his tears as fast as he could. He stares through the slit of the window in the door expecting someone to walk up or pass by, but no one ever does. He walks towards the door robotically, gripping the handle calmly. He peers through the window again, but still can't see

anyone. *'Must be some pipes or something.'* he thinks to himself. His hand slides off the cold knob of the door and rests back at his side. He reluctantly turns, walking back to the window, staring out at the city again. The highway is now packed with bumper-to-bumper traffic getting into the city, with the sun raised high above the horizon. Oslo reaches for his pocket figuring he should call his parents to see what's going on, but can't find his phone. He turns around quickly gazing at the floor. He drops to his knees, putting his hands to the ground as he leans down to look under the bed. He flips his head in the other direction to look under the chair but sees no sign of his phone anywhere. *'Great.'*

BANG BANG The sound is closer than before, he jumps up to his feet in a defensive position ready to dropkick anything, but the window in the door remains empty. This time, he doesn't dare step forward to unveil what's in that hallway but steps closely to Ocea.

"Hello?" He firmly shouts to the door. There is no response. His eyes are fixated, not allowing them to move until he hears it again. He stands at the bedside for what feels like hours. **BANG BANG BANG** His head jolts back behind him, as he no longer heard it from the hall, but from the window. Suddenly his phone rings, it was in his left hand this whole time. His temptation to smack himself in the forehead is strong but persists to stare at the window where the sound came from. He quickly peaks at his phone to see where the call is coming from. *'Dad. I need to answer it.'* He starts to cry, though he doesn't understand why. Just as he reaches his thumb across the screen to answer, he feels a grip on his right wrist from behind. He turns to see Ocea, still out cold, has grabbed onto him.

"Ocea?" He trembles.

"Ocea!" He yells like he's drowning, or about to, when heat radiates over his skin; like the steam of boiling water is clinging to his wrist. A red glow glares from Ocea's hand and the light of the sky from the window behind him is ever-changing, night to day, night to day, as if the Earth's rotating at a greater speed than ever before.

'Ossy'... He hears her voice, not coming from her lips, but in his head.

"Ocea?" He beckons to her call.

His feet feel heavy and immobile like he's welded to the ground beneath him. His stomach feels twisted and upside down. The glow emitting from Ocea's hand grows deeper and deeper red by the second, and the heat becomes unbearable until his vision is so fixated on her that his vision is spinning uncontrollably. Her eyes remain shut, yet he feels he's looking deep within her soul. His phone is still ringing as his grip is lost and he drops it to the ground. Just when he thinks he can't take this any longer, that his body is about to implode, the world around him stops. Completely still, time is frozen.

'Save me... One last time... I need you Ossy. Don't leave me.'

Colors of darkness and light fly around Oslo. The shadows around him form a beast that soars high above him. All he can see is utter brightness, and the dark spot in the sky flying closer to him at great speed. He looks into the eyes of the beast. Haunting. Evil. Yet, it calls to him with desire. Oslo lifts his feet off the ground, floating towards the creature as it fans its wings out to devour him. When suddenly, a blinding light consumes his vision, and seeing nothing but white and a glimmer of red around his eyesight, he feels weightless. His body is transported, suctioned across galaxies, like it's been sent to another dimension.

"Ocea!" He calls continuously out to the void.

"Ocea!" His chest feels empty of air as he starts to heave.

"Ocea!!!"

His body spins, propelling in the great white Ether. It feels like it's raining, a sharp and cold rain, with no visual proof of anything falling to his skin. **BANG BANG BANG** The knocking is louder than ever. **BANG BANG BANG** It's at the precipice of his eardrums, ready to cave them in at the next renouncing BANG!..

But it never occurs. The spinning stops. Oslo's surrounding slowly fades from bright white to dark. Flashing in his eyesight, a grey goo, and deep maroon rushing through it. Memories fly by him. He rubs his eyes and yawns, dreadfully tired, he looks harder and harder in front of him, trying to focus on one bit of grey goo at a time. To his defeat, the goo travels at a very high speed.

When suddenly,

"Ossy..." A voice echoes.

He yells to her, "Ocea!"

“Don’t leave me. Don’t leave me here alone.” Her voice echoes.

“I’m not going to!”—“ He gasps for air, “Where are you!?” He looks upward, where he hears her voice coming from.

“Follow my voice Oslo. Follow my voice and you will find me.”

“How do I get to you?” He shouts into the void. “I can’t move!”

“Let me help you.”

Just then the world around him started to form, and the words she was speaking came into existence. She was shaping the world around him to guide him along the path to find her. She described the world in many colors and in many songs. The elegance of her voice traveled through the abyss and created something out of nothing. Oslo was sublime. Never before had he seen a creation made from nothing. ‘Where... Am I?’ He begged the question when suddenly flashes of Ocea’s hand on his wrist consumed his vision. He’s consumed by the weightless sensation of his very soul leaving his body as the grey goo surrounds his very spirit. It all dawned on him at that moment in an all-encompassing burst of emotion— he realized,

Ocea’s Dreaming.

This dream was nothing like he's had. This dream was filled with color and hope, and he's a part of it. Underneath him sprang dirt, rock, and patches of grass spanning for miles. Many miles away stood tall spruce trees all around him. He could see waterfalls, snow-capped mountains, desert hills, molten rocks, and what looked to be a tall and lush Jungle; All opposite each other surrounding him beyond the tree line. Oslo felt at peace knowing she was not suffering in her sleep, but dreaming beautiful dreams. But that thought was brief, as he heard her call out to him again,

“Ossy... Ossy... Follow my voice. Ossy.”

Oslo attempts to walk towards her voice but he can't, he looks down to see that he's levitating as if he's trapped in the Ether still. Moments later, as if Ocea's will granted it, he floated down and was softly placed on the dirt beneath him. He feels the rough and dusty Earth sitting beneath his feet, pebbles prodding him, and grass tickling his ankles. He realizes he has no shoes on and suddenly feels terribly exposed, believing he is naked until he looks to his torso to see himself dressed in medical garb, the same one Ocea was wearing in her hospital bed. He reaches to the back of the gown only to feel his buttocks exposed. Oh no. He quickly feels for the two strings keeping the back together and ties them tighter to cover him wholly.

He looks back up in the direction he heard Ocea calling him seeing a gap that spanned between the Waterfalls and Jungle region; an empty space in the horizon. As he took his first step to traverse the plains to the tree line, the land behind him started to fade. The molten rocks to his left dwindled, as did the Icy Mountains to his right. His focus remains on the gap above the tree line as it only shined brighter with each step. The waterfall and jungle surrounding grow hazy, though he does not notice. The skyline grows saturated to a bright blue hue, and a neon green radiates in the trees. As he approaches the forest, it becomes clear there are stone structures built among the trees. In them, are many signs of life. Charcoal remains from past fires with metal rods hanging Iron clad pots over them, busted up and cracked barrels filled with Oats and Rice, and many large Urns of green-tinted water that reflect the rich greenery. A smell of burnt bread passes as Oslo inhales, but is quickly followed by the stench of mossy wet

stone and mud-clung weeds. He scans the area for not just signs of life, but life itself, yet to no avail. He wanders in deeper hoping to find Ocea in that ancient wood.

He walks through seeing mostly stone remains of old homes with odds and ends inside of them. Wooden furniture, cloth and clothing, broken boxes and barrels. But as he continues forward he sees a great stone wall with an archway welcoming him in. As he approaches, it becomes clear it would be an entrance to a sort of town square or plaza with a fairly crummy-looking fountain in the center of it. As he steps into the archway he hears music fade into his ears. A gracefully energetic violin is being played, with a deep drum throtling shortly after. Flutes and harps join in the song with many clapping to the beat. Oslo sees people appearing out of nothing, thin air. They're positioned spastically around the fountain playing their instruments. Those without something to play are singing along with *La Di Das* and *Ooh Da Days*. They were dressed in leather tunics, robes, colorfully threaded brown boots, and tattered gloves. Their hair was a mess for the most part with scruff hanging around their necks and arms; except for the ladies. Their skin was clean and vibrant, and their hair was typically braided or cut short as it swayed in the wind with their brightly colored robes. The whole town square was filled with this joyous bustling crowd as market tents and stands surrounded them giving goods away.

Oslo walked into the crowd as a smile bloomed over his face.

"*What beauty is this?*" He thinks to himself with a shimmer in his eyes and an open smile.

He feels someone brush quickly behind, rubbing against his back. He quickly turns to apologize when he remembers he's only got a robe with his butt hanging out. He squeals, reaching for his behind when he feels... *fur*.

"*Fur??*" Me murmurs.

Thinking he'd become an animal for a moment he stands quickly, running outside of the crowd to look down around himself. He sees a similar leather garb to what the townsfolk are wearing, with a fur hide wrapped around his waist like a belt, coming to a dip that would hang off his back where the creature's head may have been. His boots were black leather, unlike the rest of the townspeople. He has no gloves, but cloth wrapped around his wrists that would extend to his elbows. He reaches up and

scratched his head, feeling a bit longer than usual, he pulls his hair forward within his eyesight.

“*White—hair??*” He cries in disbelief, “*Am I a completely different person?? Who am I?? OCEA!!*”

He runs toward the center of the crowd to see his reflection when he trips and falls, kneeling at the foot of the fountain. Gorgeous energetic music continues to pound around him, louder than ever, as no one noticed his dip. He grabs the rim of the ugly stone fountain and lifts himself up and over to stare at himself in the water.

“That’s me all right...” He sighs.

Before he has the opportunity to feel much relief, someone in the crowd grips his bicep and lifts him up, swinging him into the dancing circle as they all grab one another’s hands and spin around the town square. Cheering and singing continue as Oslo is forced to play along with them. He looks around him giving a half-enthused *Hi-ho* ever so often. He sees old stone housing around him, typically two stories high. Though each home get shorter and more damaged as you were to move down the alleys. With the exception of one alley, wide as a small highway, it ran down the center of the town with each building looking more glamorous as you walked on. At the end of it there stood a large residence, three stories tall with beautiful vines clinging to the stone. Torches framed each story at the seams over and under each of the windows. He suspects this to be a small castle or town hall. Before he could see much more, Oslo gets hurled out of the circle as it disbands, but the rest of the crowd continues cheering and clapping in synchrony. He finds it to be his best opportunity to slip out to the side.

He makes his way up the road to the castle. Along the way, he notices odd glares and glances from folk not paying attention to the party. They look up and down his figure as if they had questions about his appearance. Despite him not look *all* that different.

Nervous, Oslo picks up the pace.

As he approaches the castle he sees two odd-looking men standing outside chatting and laughing. He squints his eyes to see if he can get a better idea of who they are. Guards, townsfolk, rich, poor. He steps towards the double doors casually, acting like he’s supposed to be there as he brushes passed the two men to go inside.

“Goin’ to ‘gnore us now are ye?”

“Was’ tat all ‘bout? Fer’get sumt’n?”

Oslo’s legs lock up. Caught red-handed. He turns to the two men

To his surprise, “Peter?... Destin?”

Who appears to be Peter steps forward, looking Oslo in the eye with a death glare hanging just under his blonde swooping bands, “Take...” He steps closer, “A...” Now inches from Oslo’s face, “Neck Striiiiiiiiike!!!”

He swings his palm towards the back of Oslo’s neck.

Oslo braces for impact, until he realizes he’s stopped Peter’s hand with his own, far before Peter had much opportunity to move.

Destin laughs, “Ye’ll neva’ get ‘em Pete.”

“Ye ye, one uh’ these deys’ ye’ll see!” Peter’s dwarven-like body quakes. He quickly turns back to Oslo, “‘re’s Ocea? w’rnt ye goin’ to fin’er?”

“What?” Oslo leans in in excitement as he hears Ocea’s name, but couldn’t discern what Peter was saying.

“W H E R E, O C E A? Y E, W E N’ , T A, G O, F I N’ , H E R.” Articulates Destin.

“What do you mean I went to go find her? Is she lost? Was she taken?”

“Noh, ye’d both plan’d ta meet. It’s tha time of year.” Oslo looks at Peter confused as he speaks, “Yer’ lands. Ye always meet in yer lands. North of ‘ere.” Oslo stares blankly. “For gaw’d sakes’ wa’s inta this man’!” Peter throws his arms up and walks away, leaving Destin to deal with Oslo.

“Can you drop the accent, Destin? And help me understand, where am I meeting Ocea?”

“Sure. Clearly, you’re having trouble here—”

As Destin continues to speak Oslo hears in the distance beyond the castle, Ocea crying. Starting softly, getting louder with each whimper.

“*Ossy... Ossy... Ossy...*”

The world around Oslo falls silent as Destin’s lips continue to move and his arms gesture.

“*Follow my voice. Follow the sound of my voice.*” Ocea pleads through the echo in Oslo’s head.

Oslo turns, looking over the top of the castle. The sky radiates a bright blue, saturated in an overwhelming hue. He turns back toward Destin and shakes his head back and forth. Suddenly the music, cheering, and dancing come back. Destin's panicked, asking if Oslo's alright.

Oslo solemnly, "I remember, I remember everything Destin. I know what I must do now!" He grips Destin by the sides, shaking him like a leaf.

"You should probably wait till tomorrow at this point Ossy, nothing good happens out there this time of day."

"I can't. She needs me."

Destin shrugs his little shoulders, "Very well. In that case, be sure to pass it by our Lord. He'll have to grant you passage and your weapon at this time of day."

"My weapon?"

"Of course. He always hosts our weapons when we're in town."

"Yes... of course." Oslo points to the double doors behind him, "I'm guessing he's in there."

"Yep..." Destin shrugs, "G'day then, 'ope ye'r trouble's be gone 'morrow." He says as he skips away towards the crowd cheering and clapping.

Oslo turns grabbing onto the handle of the door. The cold handle on his bare hand sends a surge up his nerves. A memory of grabbing a Hospital room door flashes through his mind. He pauses for a moment, then proceeds to step through the doorway. For some reason, he was expecting a spectacular hall, colored in reds and greens and lit with torches. But it was really just as stone and mossy as the outside. Better than the other homes he would still presume, he could still admire the craftsmanship of the carved wooden table that sat before him with intricate designs and the stone stairways that curved to a second floor. Guards filled the room, yet paid him no mind. He walked up the steps behind the table that curved back towards the front of the house. Brown carpet lined the stairs and balcony, leading to another set of double doors. Oslo pushes through these doors which sat slightly above the ground, swinging them open like it was a saloon. Before him, sat an underwhelming wooden throne with two guards on either side. Slouching on that throne was none other than Jay.

"You're kidding me." Oslo said under his breath.

“There you are, I knew you’d be coming back.” Jay grabbed either side of his throne and pushed himself into an upright position, “You forgot your weapon.” He reached to the left side of his throne grasping onto a long black sheath, chucking it across the room.

Oslo attempted to move forward and catch it but fell short as the beat-up weapon bangs against the creaky spruce floor. He leaned down and picked it up, feeling completely natural with it in hand. He attached it to his hip, with the use of a hook that’s attached to the sheath and a loop off of the left side of his fur belt.

“Thank you Sir Jay, I salute you.” Oslo loosely rests two of his right-hand fingers on his right temple, brushing his forehead until his fingers meet the other side of his temple.

“And I you.” Jay repeats Oslo’s motion in reverse. “Your passage has been granted. Now be off!”

Oslo runs out the back entrance of the hall to a square open field that extended for a couple of dozen yards until he met another tree line. With the party still occurring in the square, he hears the sound begin to dwindle with distance. He recalls what Peter was trying to tell him, completely forgetting what he was saying about him and Ocea meeting. *‘Maybe I should’ve listened.’* Regardless, he knew he must be on the right track now.

The land is familiar, yet he’s never seen it before. He steps confidently from path to path, stone to stone, river to river. He feels he’s been running for days and minutes all at the same time. Just when he begins to wonder why Destin was concerned about the time of day, he heard scurrying in the brush beyond him. He halts, gripping his blade softly to make no noise, staring down the brush ahead.

The only voice to be heard is the winds, whistling through the leaves, filling the hollow trees. Oslo stares longer. His gaze was as sharp as his blade, focusing on every leaf, every twig, and blade of grass. Next thing he knew his surroundings had all disappeared. He was floating again in an ether. But not the white space he was familiar with, it was a dark and cold place that’s clouding his vision.

“Sep...ar...a...tion.” A voice murmurs in the dusk.

The only sounds heard is that of the voice that speaks to him, even Oslo unsheathing his sword was silent.

“Who!—” Starting to yell with all the strength he could muster, he struggles to speak, “are... y...ou...” He loses his breath.

From the darkness, a figure shows, walking towards Oslo as he’s suspended in the air.

“Separation, a familiar... sensation. Is it not?” A crackly and ghastly voice speaks. Oslo still struggling to speak, “Wha—... are... you...”

“You may consider me one of your many demons, a mistake you’re alone for many reasons.” The dark figure emits a maroon coloring from his bones through his skin. The slender figure draws a blade darker than anything around him.

“O...ce...a...” Oslo beckons.

“That who awaits you is not your savior. My blade will redeem your unfortunate behavior.” He dangles the blade like a bone to a dog until he comes within a few feet of Oslo, he rotates it into his palm upright and ready to swing.

“*Ossy!*”

With one call, the entire world around Oslo shakes, the color is restored to the world around him as the trees form again. Oslo grips his blade and lunges towards the Demon, colliding with his dark figure. The tip of the blade digs into what feels more like he was stabbing a pile of Wax.

The demon drops his blade, letting out one final breath, “Digging ‘round here nothing good you’ll find, face your Demons or you’ll be left behind...”

He evaporates into the air, lifting high above the trees until a black cloud dissipates. Oslo looks down at his sword only to find it glowing a dark gray around the slender edges of the blade. Without giving much more thought, he sheathes the weapon and continues to move forward. He can see before him a clearing beyond the trees.

Oslo steps into a great open valley, filled with white and yellow spots for flowers, and a small brown speck for a house. Far in the distance is what looks to be some farmland just beyond the brown speck.

His gaze focuses on the house, “She’s there. She must be.”

As he steps down the slope into the valley, the world behind him fades away into a vapor. He pays no mind to anything above or around this valley, his only focus is on her. His home.

Oslo's boots skid through the lumps of greenery, down into the valley until there is no longer a decline. He's paid no mind to the gorgeous meadow of rich colored flowers as he makes his way down. When his feet stop at a large half-buried boulder, he looks up to reveal the tall and short grasses, wild flowers of blues and yellows, with dainty butterflies fluttering around them. In the distance a couple of dozen yards away he sees an Oak Tree stretching over a rooftop; though he cannot see the whole of the house through the bushes.

He steps out of the wild vegetation and into trimmed grass that circles the house made of lumber and stone. A wooden roof sits on top of it with hay fanning out from underneath. Dark spruce logs frame the house, with stones set around the foundation, and a light tan clay spread over the walls between the windows and framing. The sun shone golden rays, like heaven's gates stood before him. Without further hesitation, he runs for the door. As he approaches he hears gentle humming and water running. His heart pounds faster and faster. He breaks through the door in excitement exclaiming,

"Ocea!"

A blondish beauty turns from the water pump that sits upright on a waist-high shelf. She doesn't turn in haste, nor worry. The elegance of a patient woman is revealed as her eyes meet with Oslo's.

"Ossy."

Oslo chokes up over his tears, "I've come. I've followed your voice. I'm here." He confidently steps toward her reaching for her hand, "You can wake up now. You can come home. Your parents, they—"

As his fingers reach hers the room is no longer beaming in gold colors. It's dim and gloomy.

She's gone.

Who once stood before him, has vanished with nothing but the light from the crack of the roof shining in her place and a few dust mites mingling in the air.

He croaks, "O...cea..."

Oslo runs out of the house looking East and West, North and South. He looks to the sky for answers crying out for Ocea, waiting to hear her call and reason.

When he's almost given up he hears movement in the brush beyond the front door. He looks up from his grief to see Ocea standing at the edge of the grass.

"You won't find me here, Oslo."

"Ocea!" He runs to her in excitement, "What do you mean? you're right here!"

She shakes her head, "As are you. But I cannot simply embrace you in a world like this. The darkness that a loved one would rest in is far deeper in one's mind. The parts of you that never truly leave you even, they live within one's spirit."

"Where should I go? what do I need to do?" Oslo pleads.

Ocea's interrupted by horns sounding off in the distance. Three or four, one after another. Ocea stares back up the Valley where the sound is coming from.

She turns to Oslo, "I wish I could say."

She turns to walk into the brush, looking back at Oslo, "But please, do not give up. Don't leave me here."

BANG

Oslo blinks and everything around him is gone. He floats again into the Ether, a great white expanse with nothing in his sight. He spins in circle, dropping his arms at a loss of words. As soon as he's found her, she leaves. She feels farther than ever.

BANG BANG

Before him, a water stream as thin as a hair flows a few feet in front of him, spanning miles high and miles deep, he cannot see the end or beginning of it. Lifting himself upright, he reaches his arm out to grab it, but just as he does it starts to widen. Forming a waterfall, he can see his reflection as his hand collides with it's splitting force. The water pressure throws his hand back towards his body. Curious, he stands there a while longer, waiting, but Oslo grows impatient. He steps towards the wall of water, bracing for the pressure to splash against his head. To his surprise, there is no resistance as he steps through. Naturally, he's soaked. But as soon as he steps foot on the other side he's dry as before. Wiping his eyes he's appeared in a small pool of water. Beyond is a reflective opal tile floor spread across a dimly lit room with nothing but torches lighting the way. Those torches sit on giant pillars colored green. On the floor lay maroon carpets with a golden trim. Beyond the wild expression of colors, the rest of the walls and room are built of the same dark Spruce as the old shack. He looks behind him to see a small

fountain, decorated with small stone cats, disturbing demon faces, and gold coins with square holes in them.

From the depths, beyond where the torches shine he here's a strangely familiar voice through the halls, "You have come!"

Oslo's reminded of the Demon he ran into in the woods. Without much hesitation he reaches for his blade, though, his weapon is no longer there. He looks to his reflection in the water. He's dressed in nothing but a black Kimono. His hair is black, and wrapped around his waist is a thick rope. Tied to that rope in near his backside sits a short-bladed katana with a green handle.

He stumbles as his hands try to grip a hold of the weapon. Eventually finding it through the jungle of rope, He swiftly turns back to face the darkness.

"Open the gates! He's come!"

A loud creaking sound echoes through the hall, revealing a slit of light off in the distance between the pillars. As the creaking continues, the light stretches wider, revealing an army of men pushing through a large doorway from the outside. The light shines the length of the hall, revealing to whom the deep voice belongs.

"My lord! She's been taken! Amidst the regime's final push!" A large scruffy man in a similar attire, colored teal from head to toe, bows to Oslo. His bowing reveals his bare head, with little hair around the edges, becoming rather bushy towards the back. It's tied up as if he put it in a high ponytail and clipped it to where the tip was pointing towards his bald head. This was known as a chonmage, though Oslo wouldn't know this apart from the samurai anime he'd watch.

The woman he refers to is Ocea. Oslo can see it play out in his mind, his blondish beauty being taken from him by an army of horseback riders and spear wielders.

Oslo relaxes the grip on his katana, "Order the men to fall back." He states calmly with his feet still soaking in the fountain.

"My lord!"

"Trust me, my friend, order it at once." He stares out the gate seeing an expansive city with curved tile roofs glowing in a blood-stained darkness. Fire flares in the distance of battle as a great smog fill the air.

Makita, the man who bows to Oslo, stands at once and runs back to the gates. Oslo hears him call in the distance, “Fall back! Fall back at once!” With horns sounding shortly after.

One foot after another, he steps out of the fountain.

“AH! Damn!”

Oslo slips off the tile back into the fountain causing Makita to rush back.

“My lord, did it burn you?”

“What? Did what burn me?”

“The beast you went to delay. This is why you stand in the fountain?”

Lying in the fountain, he picks up his right foot. His feet don’t appear burnt, but white and scaly. A sight he’s not at all familiar with but admits to Makita, “The beast laid its curse on me. I had to return. Though... I was successful in delaying it.”

“Excellent, my lord. Please, continue to sit in the fountain of your grace and they will be healed shortly. For now, what is our next move?”

“Makita, we must guard our lands with all we have until the curse is lifted off of me.”

A youthful Samurai in armor comes running into the hall from the gates.

“My lord! My sincere apologies for running in! It is your lady, I had seen what she has done and I have seen the Emperor of the West has taken her with his own hands!”

When this is spoken one name comes to Oslo’s mind.

Ryu.

“My father. My own flesh and blood.”

“We cannot delay!” He yells as he attempts to step out of the fountain once more.

The white scales meet the tile and dig desperately into the bottom of his feet, sending a piercing pinch up his legs.

“AHHH!” He steps back into the fountain.

“My lord, you’re in no shape. Give the command to your men, we will move on your behalf!”

Oslo, defeated, “Very...Well... Wait until nightfall, then send three camps to the West. One circling from the South, another circling from the north, and another direct West.”

“*Hai!* Consider it done my lord!” Makita bows and runs for the gate with the young samurai following just behind him.

The great gate is shut again leaving the air with nothing but silence and a gentle stream trickling from the fountain. Oslo breathes heavily, looking down into the water at his reflection.

“*Ossy... Ossy... Ossy... Follow my voice. Follow my voice.*”

Oslo falls back into the water, stirring the fountain with waves and bubbles. The voice, it came from the water. He urges the waves and bubbles to dissipate, though has no more control than to sit still. He stares, daring not to move nor speak until he hears her again.

“*Ossy. What’ve I done?*”

BANG

A great loud ring resounds through Oslo’s head, clenching his eyes and gripping his chest. He breathes heavy, bent over the ground where he feels soft, almost wet, soil. Confused but in pain, he awaits the body to be at ease before he can open his eyes. His head pounds like a block of ice is spinning inside of it. His eyes feel like they’re being pulled back into his head. When all at once, he recovers.

Oslo opens his eyes, bent over on the ground, and his hands in the soil. But, it’s not soil at all. It’s grey powder spanning as far as the eye can see. Not another substance is in sight. The air was stuffy. And when Oslo made a sound there was no Echo. This space wasn’t at all like the Ether he’d seen before, though it felt just as empty with its bright white horizons.

It was only moments ago he stood in front of Ocea. She was within arms reach, waiting to be embraced. He cries. And that cry leads into a desperate weeping. The search for Ocea within her own mind was shaped to be many things, but never did Oslo expect to feel so utterly alone.