

Chapter Five

Dreamscape

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"I've been in this meadow with her for so long. I was raised just up the green hill, now settled in the valley, where she prepared a place for us. She rests between my arms when she's tired after a long days work. When she's cold in the never lasting winter. When she's worried that our crops are dying. Yet I ask, who is this that I now call home? Sometime's when I look at her, it feels like I don't know her at all. Or, that she might not know me. Who is she?... Ocea? I grew up with her. She was always next door, waiting for me at the tree on the fence line. The tree that held our memories for us. I never knew what love was. Or maybe I did. Maybe growing up has ruined it-"

Oslo takes a deep breath with the sun beating down on him, "I did always love her, didn't I? I did want to marry her, didn't I? And now I have... She's my bride. She's everything. She's there when I wake, there when I sleep. She's Ocea. My Ocea. But... Who is she exactly?"

He returns home from the fields with plenty of crops to last them the Winter. He hauls them behind the house, ready to be loaded into storage through the back door. He drops the wagon that he pulls by its two long wooden handles, resting its front pegs on the cobblestone foundation of the porch.

"Honey, I've returned!"

Steps clack rapidly against the stone on the inside of the house, "Hello, darling." Ocea kisses a scruffy Oslo. "Enough for the season?"

"And then some."

"Very well. Thank you, love." She brushes her hand against his face as she steps back to the kitchen. "I hope you're hungry, I've prepared enough for a small village!"

"Starving's more like it." Oslo drops into the old creaky chair by the table.

Nothing's changed about this house. It's just as humble as it was when Oslo first found it lying in the meadow. He looks out the window and ponders, how the village up

the hill is doing. Do they still play music and dance? Have they expanded? Had more children? Built more homes?

“What do you think Jay and them are up to? Back at the old village?”

“All good things, I’m sure.” Ocea makes a ruckus moving clay pots, arranging boxes, and plating the food. “Why do you wonder?”

“I miss them. My friends.”

Ocea turns slightly, then back to finish plating. “I hope I don’t keep you from them.”

“Maybe you do!” Oslo jokes, seeing as Ocea's not amused, “Only kidding. I did this for you, after all.”

“Did what?”

Oslo sits silently, trying to find an answer. “I... don’t suppose I know.”

“Where are you, Ossy?”

“What do you mean?”

“I want you here with me, Ossy.”

Oslo looks to Ocea, holding their dinner plates over the table. “I am here with you.”

Ocea sets the plates down and sits opposite Oslo, “You know... I understand if you want to leave this place.”

“What? Why would I want that?”

Ocea pushes the ominous, squishy, vibrantly colored food around her plate, “It’s nothin’ but you, me, and some crop. I’m keeping you from the dre—”

Ocea's face warps and bends for a moment before it falls back into place.

“—I’m keeping you from seeing the world.”

“How could you say that?”

“Do you even know what time it is? How long we’ve been here?”

“I dunno—Years at this point.”

“Ten years, Ossy. Ten. Years.”

“Okay? And?”

Ocea's mouth doesn't move, yet she screams, “*Wake up! Wake up Ossy! You’re stuck here because of me!*”

Oslo drops his hand firmly against the table, "That's not true! I made this choice."
His fist collides with his dinner, splashing it across the table and window.

Ocea's eyes well up, her cheeks flush. "What if you didn't? Ossy, what if you didn't? What if this is all my fault? What if I stole you and held your soul in the palm of my hands and now you can't leave? You can't do nothin' but love me, and I did that, I made you do that for me. What about then, Ossy?"

"I made my choice!—" Oslo leans back in realization, "...and I was meant to wake you."

Oslo looks down at his mucky fist, "Probably years ago. And yet..."

It's been so long...

The room fell silent.

"Let's not have this dream, darling." Ocea's words echo through Oslo's mind as the world around him becomes blurry.

"Let's not have this dream! My love!" She cries joyfully as she rises from her seat before she fades and vanishes.

He finds himself sitting at the table still, and the sun is just coming up with a rooster's call. As his vision clears, he knows it's time for him to tend to the crops. Yesterday was the Eastern fields, today is the Western. Ocea is asleep still.

Oslo steps out to the cobblestone patio. The air is crisp. The smell of apples drifts with the wind. Insects chirp in the distant trees. The dew drips from the flower pedals. Birds fly near the horizon. Oslo walks to the back of the house to grab his scythe. More of a sickle than a scythe, he could swing it with one arm. He prefers this, he could swing quicker even if it meant covering less area. Forgetting his wagon, he walks Westward.

"It's beautiful here." He says to himself, looking down to the field that sits close to a cliffside shore. Looking out to the horizon, he leans against his scythe. He breathes calmly, but without a smile. He has everything he wants here, but he's still not at peace.

He hears a voice in the back of his mind, *'Not this dream. Not this dream.'*

He works the fields, swinging left and right till the sun is straight above his head. He'd usually turn back and go home at this point, but he only just notices he forgot the wagon. He doesn't think much of it, as he continues swinging. The sun dips down to the horizon, hanging over the edge of the water beyond the cliff. Stunned by its beauty, he

drops his scythe and walks towards it. Getting closer to the cliffside he hears the waves beat against the rock with the captivating smell of the salty air. He sits close to the edge, on a slight hill. It feels like hours and the sun still hasn't moved. Thoughtless, he seems, until,

“Ocea... She must be wondering where I am!” He starts to stand and turn around until he hears a voice whisper from the sky like a gentle wind.

'Ossy... Ossy... Ossy. Follow my voice, Ossy.'

“Ocea.” He looks to the clouds high above the setting sun, radiant in reds and purples, he weeps to the heavens.

'Come now, Ossy. Follow my voice.'

Oslo stares back towards the Meadow with sorrow punching his chest. “Ocea, you were taken.” He looks back to the sky, “But I know you, you're waiting in the Meadow for me. You've always waited, for the last ten years it's all been the same. I know you, Don't I?”

'Ossy... Ossy... Ossy...'

Ocea's voice fades into the receding sun.

“Ocea!” His voice is sharp like a shiv, lunging towards the skyline as if he was to cut it open and have Ocea fall into his arms.

Instead, the sky cracks; A frozen lake stares down at Oslo as its icy breath drifts toward the cliffside. Cracks stretch across the length of the entire sky and Oslo can no longer breathe. He's picked up and carried into the atmosphere by a strange force. The icy sky continues to crack as Oslo creeps closer to the surface. Strange fish surround him, swimming every which way in a panic as though they were being chased. He turns back to look down at the cliff side where he was just standing, now being covered in a blue fog.

He realizes, *'I'm underwater.'*

Approaching the shattered sky, it emits a crisp breaking like the sound of chewing crackers. As Oslo floats closer to the sky, he touches the cold surface, firmly pressing against it until it gives. A light beyond the ice shines down on Oslo as the world beneath him is swallowed by the sea. He grips hold of the surface, lifting himself atop a floating iceberg. Brilliant lights surround him in blues and yellows.

Oslo drops to the ground as he catches his breath,

“I know this place—”

However, Oslo has never been here. He’s surrounded by nothing but icy plains and auroras when a mysterious voice whispers into Oslo’s ear,

“You leave the woman you love, for the land of the dead?”

Oslo startles upright, trying to crawl away from the voice, but as he turns to check he sees no one.

It speaks again, “You give up your life of dreams for this forsaken land?”

Oslo, petrified, “Who are you?”

“You chase a lie. The voice of some girl you think you know. You cannot save her —Return to the Meadow.”

“The Demon? Do you still have her?”

“You hold onto the past like it has something for you there. It didn’t then, and it doesn’t now. Turn back, live in your own dream world.”

“I’m meant to wake her! I won’t leave her now when I’ve come so far!”

“Ten years and you are still a fool.”

“Ten years? What does time matter in a dream like this!”

Oslo waits for a response, to no avail. The voice vanished into the tundra along with any hope of survival.

Oslo quakes as the bitterness starts to get to him, “I should’ve stayed home. Ocea’s probably worried sick about me.” He turns left and right, looking for some direction. He doesn’t know how he got here anymore until he looks to the sky for answers.

“The sky led me here. But where... Where was I?” Oslo’s memory becomes shaky.

“Ocea? Did you lead me here?” Oslo slows his speech, looking down at the palms of his frozen hands, “But why? Why did she bring me here in the first place?”

'Ossy, come to me.'

A voice echoes from every direction.

Oslo looks left and right not being able to tell where it comes from, “Where?!” He shouts.

'Ossy... stay with me. You have to follow, just a little longer.'

“What do you mean?” Oslo’s grows tired. Exhaustion hits him in the chest with a burst of freezing wind.

'Look at me. Please. Look at me, just one last time. time. time. time.'

“Where are you!?” Out of the corner of his eye, he sees a fish jumping out of the water, petrified, as though it was escaping *something*.

Oslo runs as fast as he can, no longer feeling the numbing pain of the ice beneath his feet. He dives to the fish. Below him is a deep, red sea. He swims downward searching for the frightened creature while keeping an eye out for it's threat. Before he knows it, he sees the bug-eyed fish, floating far beneath him. He stops, as the bubbles settle, he realizes,

“That’s me.”

"In a twist of fates, the two lovers called home. The sweetest story ever told, that man or beast may ever know. Oslo, dove deep. The red water was his life source, the beating blood of the earth. The ripping cold bubbles burst on his skin, relieving the wounds on his broken heart. His love, so dear, touches the crack in the ocean, causing waves so violent, that it stirred the hearts of the sailors who long for her. Oslo, dove deeper. Captivated by her, he sinks."

The words run through Oslo's head, hearing his mother's voice read them aloud.

"His love, so dear. he touches the crack in the ocean..."

As Oslo touches the bottom of the sea, the earth erupts at his feet, illuminating the red sea in delight.

"I will tear this Dreamscape bone from bone to find you. You will sleep no more!"

Oslo steps through the crack in the Earth to be faced with the Demon, Kanashibari, in a dark cavern. It drip, drip, drips with bloody water. The creature's arm is covered in a cloak, hiding something underneath.

The demon lifts the cloth back to reveal the girl in his arms, “This is what you seek?” A crying Ocea lays with her eyes closed, unaware of Oslo’s presence.

“You can't have her any longer. I'm here to wake her.”

The demon laughs. His scaly skin raises as he lets out a ear splitting screech.

“Why don't you let me wake her? What do you get out of this?” Oslo pleads.

“I am he. I teach the lessons you neglect to learn.” He snarls with a sinister grin, “My satisfaction is in your failure. Which is inevitable.”

The cavern stretches wider and wider as the earth starts to shake around them. The demon and the boy alike look around themselves in confusion.

A voice,

"Remember that day, Ossa? You were so mad at me."

Her voice consumes the room, though she still remains in the demon's arms.

“Ossa, I'm right here! It's time to wake up! It's time to come home!”

"It's time to come home..."

“Yes! That's right! Wake up! Wake up!”

"Wake... Up... Please! Wake me from this nightmare!"

Oslo can hear her weeping. *BANG BANG* The weeping intensifies. *BANG*

“Ossa! Ossa! That's right, wake up!”

“Save your breath...” The demon whispers.

"You remember that day, right? You were so mad at me. That's what this is from. It's from that day."

Oslo's head pounds. He kneels to the ground, staring up at the demon, “What're you doing to her?”

The demon spreads dark wings as wide as the cavern until starts to crumble. Oslo dodges every rock. In the dust and smog, he runs for her, skipping from rock to rock until he finds himself landing in golden fields full of hay. He draws a sword from his hip, raising it to the sky, staring down the throat of a great black dragon.

“This is your true form—” The dragon lets out a burst of flame toward Oslo.

"It wasn't fair, I guess. Me saving you."

“We were just kids, Ossa! I was being selfish!” Oslo dodges pillars of fire left and right.

"I didn't give you much of a chance then, and I didn't know."

“Ossa!” Oslo gasps for breath, “Just— stubborn kids...” *gasp* “You made it up to me— remember? That letter?” He shouts to the sky.

"I was never sure what you thought of me after I wrote this letter. You never talked about it. I was embarrassed."

“No! Ocea, I fell in love with you that day!” Oslo falls to his knees with the tip of the sword on the ground. “But what you wrote... I can’t remember!”

"Ossy..."

“Ocea!!”

The dragon flies into the air, far away from Oslo’s grasp.

He falls on his face in defeat. The drool from his beaten lips and the ant filled dirt pool mud around his cheek.

“I can’t—I can’t save you... I couldn't then, I can't now.”

The dragon flies only farther and farther away with Ocea under his claw.

"Ossy... follow my voice. Don't give in."

She comes within arms reach, only to be taken deeper into her own consciousness. The mysterious demon, Kanashibari, taunts Oslo into insanity. He's felt like giving up is the only option many times, only for Ocea to pick him back up again and tell him to keep searching for her. Don't give up she says. *Don't leave me here alone.*

"I can't keep doing this. I could never keep up with a demon." He contemplates as he floats in the Ether, "There has to be another way."

"The Dreamscape—I've been able to use it before." He scratches his head, "I remember now, I used a weapon from a separate dream to save me. But what was it... What was that dream?"

"The mind isn't linear, and neither are dreams." Grey goo flashes between his eyes, "That's it. I've been doing it all along. Manipulating the grey space of her mind. I can influence her dreams with my own consciousness."

Images of a sword in his hand flashes in his mind. "That's it... What is it..." He cuts the rope, "Why... Why did I do that..." A man, no, a few men fall down from the bridge, "They were chasing me—and I called upon a sword to save me. That must be it. But how did I do it?" He screams on the edge of a cliff, "But what did I scream... Why did I scream?"

Ocea's name echoes in the Ether.

Follow her *BANG BANG* follow her voice *BANG* *That's it...* Drip, drip, drip. *BANG* Oslo was on to something. *Ocea.* He has to call *BANG BANG* to her *BANG* follow her voice. Follow. Follow. Follow.

A mirage of long blondish hair waves as a floral scent brushes by. The squeaking of sneakers, and a dramatic slap across the face. He can feel it still as his face pulses.

He lays his head back, meditating in the blank space of the Ether, trying to recall every dream he's been a part of up to this point.

First, it was the field. The grass spread underneath his feet like Ocea was painting strokes with her mind. There was something in the distance, many things at that. Cities? No. Mountains? Maybe. Water? Don't think so. Then every picture slowly came to mind. A radiant light hailing over tree tops.

“Ocea brought me here, twice. The second time, she shattered into pieces in that ballroom. I saw Jay again. Beyond the village was the Meadow. That’s where I first encountered the Demon.”

Sweat drops down his forehead, with a salty stream forming down to his fingertips.

“Now where was she then? The meadow's all a blur.” The gaps in Oslo’s memory are where Ocea had been. He can feel those moments, but can't for the life of him remember a single detail.

BANG

Oslo startles, “I don’t have much time. I have to move.”

In recounting as many dreams as he could, he hopes he'll gain access to them when he calls out to Ocea. This will open more dreamscapes, allowing him to traverse them, but not linearly. By recounting his steps in the other dreams and bending their reality, he may be able to create a fold in future dreams to catch Kanashibari off guard.

“Well.” Oslo stands, “Here we go.”

He closes his eyes softly, forcing them wide open with a shout, “OCEA!!”

When his eyes open he’s encompassed in grey goo, swarming around him as each droplet squirms like a fish. With no choice, he’s ripped away with the tide. He opens his hand, stretching out his arm as much as he can, gripping onto a piece of this gooey flesh. It bursts. The next thing Oslo knows, he’s standing in a field. Many different biomes surround him, but he’s focused on just one. A radiant light emits above the tree line. He knows just what to do.

He bends his knees, falling toward the ground head first. As his head drops, it sinks into the Earth. Oslo rotates on axis until he's flipped to the upside down surface. The solid ground beneath him forms ripples as goo drips off his body. And with this very movement, he’s found his way inside Jay’s throne room.

“I’ve bent this reality.” Oslo looks down at his hands.

“What?” Jay stares at Oslo blankly. “Anyways, you forget something?” Jay throws Oslo his sword. “Go find her.”

Oslo nods gratefully, “Of course.”

He rotates his body into the ground again, finding himself in the dense forest where he first encountered Kanashibari.

“Come out, Demon.” He draws his blade.

Before the demon could fully appear as he attempted to surround Oslo in dark clouds, Oslo’s stabbed him just like before.

“You know not what you do, child.” The sinister creature lashes out.

Oslo extends both his arms outward with open palms. In one swift move, he grips his palms and pulls his arms to his chest. The grey goo rushes toward him from beyond the Meadow. He grips the gooey strands as it circles back down into the valley where Ocea was before, though there’s no longer any sign of her in this dream.

“He’s taken her already.”

The goo scoops Oslo up onto it's back as he continues to ride the slimy goo trail into the horizon, until the sudden burning red sun blinds him. An icy cold sensation coats the bottom of his feet,

“Makita.”

“My lord!”

Oslo stands in a well of cold water, healing his cursed feet in the midst of his temple hall.

“Grab the Gauntletta, our enemy is not whom we expected. There’s a Demon at the heart of this war.”

“Yes, my lord!” Makita runs to the room to Oslo’s right, grabbing the Gauntletta from its glass casing. “But my lord, have you been wounded by the beast?”

“Yes, but the wound will be no more in a moment.” Oslo puts on the Gauntlet, rotating through the fountain water until the wound is healed.

“Come, Makita, fetch the horses.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“And Makita—”

“Yes, my lord?”

“You should stay back here. Call the men back, at that. We can’t afford the casualties. Especially you.” Oslo rests his hand on Makita’s shoulder with a look of endearment.

“My lord, you mean to ride into battle alone?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“But my lord—”

“I’ll hear none of it. I can’t lose you. Any of you. I’ve seen the future, and it isn’t so bright unless I do this alone.”

Oslo snaps his fingers, the grey goo comes rushing, breaking through the large wooden gates, flying down toward him like a serpent. The goo picks him up, flying him above the battlefield. He snaps again, and the goo dissipates in seconds. He falls forty feet from the sky, drawing his katana with the Gauntletta, cutting an enemy horse in half as he lands.

He stands, looking in the eyes of an enemy samurai, “I don’t intend on killing you, we are not enemies with each other.”

Though, when Oslo looks deeper into the eyes of the enemy, he sees darkness. The Samurai’s skin on his face is see-through, exposing his bones. His teeth drip a purple and black essence, hungry for bloodshed.

“No, you’re not Koji’s men, are you?”

The Demon Samurai lunges toward Oslo. He dips to his side, rising behind the enemy to cut his back down. Arrows fly to Oslo, but he dodges without thinking about it. More enemies flood the trail, horseback or not, Oslo does what he can to cut them down. Flames burn on the horizon, growing taller and darker than before.

“These men, they’re of demon. I’m still moving too linear.” Oslo slices clean through each warrior, leaving a black and bloody trail behind him.

“It must be that I’ve been here before.” Instead of continuing forward, Oslo curves to the right, avoiding the main path to the gate. He runs at a greater speed than he’s ever run before. Like a bullet slicing through the thin air. Enemies fire many arrows, with nothing close to a chance to land one. When he reaches the gate, he pushes it open with the power of his Gauntletta, only to see Koji isn’t sitting there this time.

“Koji! Koji!” He cries to the empty kingdom.

Oslo looks up to the tower, knowing the lengths he went through last time to reach the top. He dips down, rotating into the surface, transporting himself to the top of the tower.

“Demon!” He shouts.

Only this time, the demon that once held Ocea here, is gone. Gripping his blade, he knew it couldn't have ended here. Kanashibari has taken her deeper than this already.

Oslo calls out, “Ocea!” Causing the goo to spiral down on him. He falls far and deep out of control. The current is much stronger this time. He can feel himself aging, forward and backward. Old and young. He squeezes a bit of goo in front of him, it gleams of street lights and smells of manure. With one quick tug it takes him into the city where he stands in the puddle of water that ruined his suit, staring up at the ballroom tower.

“Hey, Cal!” A mysterious woman waves to him, “What're you doing here?”

“*I remember you.*” Oslo thinks as he approaches the man she's with, “I'm going to need that suit.”

He throws his arm toward the man's chest, his hand sinks into it like putty. As soon as Oslo pulls his arm out, the man's white suit swaps places with Oslo's dirty one.

The woman screams, “Cal! What did you do!”

“I don't have the time.” Oslo throws himself into the ground, appearing inside the ballroom. As soon as his body rises from the ground, his hands latch onto Ocea's as they continue their dance.

One two step, one two step.

Oslo smiles, “I finally found you—“ he says before seeing a faceless Ocea stand in front of him. A blurry mush replaced her eyes, nose, and mouth. Horrified, Oslo steps back, tripping over,

“No— no!” He falls, rotating into the ground without his intention.

Falling. Falling. Fal—drip—ling. Drip—Fall, Falling. Dripping. The grey goo surrounds Oslo as he spins out of control.

'Dream, think of a dream. Ocea, think of Ocea.' It wasn't working.

Oslo kept slipping. Slip, slip, slipping. The goo around him began to crack and angulated outside of arms reach. Flashing lights. Darkness. The lights flashing from dark to light dizzied Oslo. Warm. Cold. He started to heave. Splash. Splash. Splash. In came the waves, pushing Oslo back towards the shore, until the sand melted and sank,

draining the waters. Clouds began to form under him, breaking his fall as he landed amongst the trees. The birds fluttered to his body laying in the brush. Their claws dug into his skin, clinging desperately to him until their feathers belonged to him. Flap. Flap. Flap. They rose above the ground taking him to the horizon. “We won’t let you lose her. We won’t let you lose her.” The birds chanted, fluttering to the skies. Rain. Thunder. Sunshine. Rainbows. Dancing. They were dancing again, holding each other tightly. Closer than before.

“Please don’t let go Ossy.” Ocea begs.

“I might not have a choice.” He shrugs.

The wood of the paneled flooring wraps around Oslo’s ankles, pulling him away from her.

He looks sorrowfully into her muddled face, “I’m sorry.” As his hand leaves hers and their finger tips drift apart softly.

Drums bang left to right in Oslo’s head.

“Ossy, it’s our favorite. *Teirra*. Remember?”

Oslo gently replies with his eyes closed, “Of course I do, how could I forget?” Flashing lights glare in front of him.

“This isn’t going to work. I need to... do... something...”

Ocea’s voice screams, “*wake up. JUST WAKE UP!!!*”

The chaos stills. Oslo’s shaky hands calm. He finds himself sitting at a table. Soft sunlight lays against the skin on his wrists. Silence fills the air. He’s back home. Their house in the meadow. He slowly lifts his head.

“...Ocea.”

“...Yes?” She stares into Oslo’s eyes, as if he never left. As if he never stepped off that cliffside. As if he never swam up into the sky. As if he never dove into the deep Red Sea. As if he never left to look for her consciousness again.

Oslo, with a lump in his throat, “You’re not real, are you?”

She looks down, tears falling onto her plate, “No.”

“This is all a dream?”

“It’s all a dream...”

The silence is sharp. Heartbreaking.

Oslo reaches over and lifts Ocea's chin. "It's the most beautiful dream I've ever had." Ocea whimpers, dropping her head into her hands as Oslo holds her cheek, turning her to him as he drops to his knees beside her.

His voice trembles with a weary throat, "I have to wake you. The *real* you." He starts to crack, tears quiver below his eyelids. "Even if it means the real you won't love me like this."

Ocea lifts her eyes to Oslo's. "I understand." She smiles. "You know, I'll always love you. This me will always love you."

The world around Oslo begins to turn. Their house begins to shake. Light surrounds them as they hold each other tight one last time. Remembering what Jay said to him about loving her in another dream.

"I love you. I do. I really love you, Ocea. I hope this isn't the last time I get to tell you that!"

As if they were swept in a whirlwind, they spin in a bright light that consumes their kitchen, until the world around Oslo fades, and Ocea along with it.

Now, lying in the emptiness of the Ether, much older, more lost, not knowing where to begin again. He questions, *where do I find her now? how do I wake her? And how long has it been out there? Am I still the same Oslo I was at the start of all this?* The questions lay heavy on Oslo's shoulders as he lifts his head to the sky, hearing the one thing he can hold on to.

"Ossy... Ossy... Follow my voice."

“Ossy... Ossy... You can wake up now Ossy...”

A peacefulness resides inside of Oslo,

“I’m following you, Ocea. I’ll wake you.”

He floats in the Ether with his eyes closed picturing the blondish beauty laying in that hospital bed. Focused, his eyes are squeezed shut.

“I’ll follow your voice until I can no longer hear it. And even then, I’ll keep going, looking for answers.” Oslo opens his eyes and looks above him. *“Please don’t wake me yet, I can’t leave without you.”* Tears cloud his vision, only for him to wipe them away before they fall. *“I have nothing to return to without you coming with me.”*

Ocea continues,

“I haven’t told you what happens to Corea, have I?” Ocea’s voice continues to echo throughout the Ether.

Oslo shakes his head, *“You haven’t.”*

“Prince Tella finds his way through the woods into Corea’s Meadow.

Remembering what her parents told him to do, he ran through the fields beckoning to her. Disregarding his sour feelings of her abandonment. Eventually he yells with one final breath, ‘Corea, darling Corea. It wasn’t you that had left me, but I that had let you leave.’ The Prince wept. His crying turned into the largest tears that had ever come out of his eyes. The soil beneath him started to grow richer than before, blooming saplings into trees and branches buds into flowers—”

Oslo blinks, seeing images of the grey lands. He too shed large tears that formed rivers and trees. *“I’ve seen this before. Inside your mind, Ocea.”*

“—And just as he thought she was gone for good, that she had left her meadow without him knowing, Corea calls to him, ‘Tella, tella, follow my voice. For I have never meant to hurt you. Come home, Tella.’ The prince lifted his head, seeing the beauty of the princess with her hair and bright blue dress blowing in the wind, he runs to Corea until they embrace in the middle of their Meadow.”

“Cor—Ocea. It’s beautiful. A beautiful story. One so familiar, I can’t explain it.” Oslo drops his head looking down at his feet. “I hope you remember this story when you wake up. I want you to write it down and tell it to me again some day.”

“Ossy. Please. I don’t know how much longer you have.”

“Ocea! You can’t push me out! Let me stay, I’ll find you I promise!”

“Look deeper, Ossy. You’re going to have to look deeper.”

Just then Ocea’s voice started to fade into the distance. Oslo stoops low. He opens his palms, staring into their vacancy. Looking closer, he sees spots of grey between the cracks of his hands and fingerprints.

“Deeper...” he softly speaks to himself.

“Dreams...” Oslo contemplates, staring blankly at his messy hands. “Yes, the dreamscape. But this place, the Ether, isn’t that.” He takes a deep breath, “The place between dreams.”

Memories of the grey goo that’s engulfed him flash through his head, he could feel the squishy, sticky substance just by thinking about it. “It’s the flow of time... They’re memories.”

Oslo brings his palms closer to his face to study them more intently. “The place between dreams. The Ether. It’s memory. It’s her memory!” Oslo’s eyes jet up above him.

“Deeper—Go Deeper... if I can access her memories, I have to be able to access her consciousness.”

He stares back at the grey marks on his hands, “This is from the goo. Her... brain? This is the key to unlocking her memories.” Oslo softly leans his head into his hands and curls into a ball.

“Focus... Focus” Oslo floats, head in hands.

“Focus. Focus. Focus.”

Drip. Drip. Drip.

BANG

“Focus. Focus. Focus.”

Drip. Drip. Drip.

BANG

“Focus. Focus. Focus.”

Drip. Drip. Drip.

BANG

“Focus. Focus. Focus.”

Drip. Drip. Drip.

BANG *BANG*

“FOCUS—“