

# Chapter Seven

## *Virulent*

*xix*

“My body tumbles down into an infinitely deep and dark pit. It consumes me. I’m frozen cold. Dragged down the throat of an eternal nightmare. I was lying there. That’s me. In the hospital bed, with Ocea by my side.” Oslo smiles.

He continues falling,

“Of course...” Tears stream from his eyes, falling up in the air.

“Of course, it would be you saving me.” He smiles as tears continue to shed. With his stomach sinking incessantly, he looks down with hopes of seeing some end to this hole. The wind dries his squinting eyes,

“I can’t do this. I can’t do this.”

A sinister voice creeps into Oslo’s ears, “What happened, boy? Couldn’t quite shake this world could you?”

“Demon!” Oslo mutters.

“You want to stay. A world influenced by your every whim. Of course you want it, the girl’s doing everything she can to wake you, yet here you still lie.”

“I saw her, she’s by my side! She’s waiting for me!”

The wind’s force is deafening, but Kanashibari’s voice pierces through.

“Her conscious is heavy, child. She doesn’t love you, she’s ridden with guilt until you wake or die!”

“You’d say anything to get me to stay in this place.” Oslo shouts, “So your lonely existence might have some meaning!”

“Conscious or not, I am always with you.” The demon laughs sinisterly, echoing in the darkness, until it slowly fades to nothing.

“Demon!”

There is no reply.

“Demon! What do you want from me!”

Kanashibari's voice is distant, miles away, "I've only ever wanted your happiness."

With that, Oslo no longer feels his presence. Forever darkness looms beneath him. He turns and spins around facing the sky. He opens his eyes, with no difference from when they were shut.

Until...Moments later a spec of yellow is seen in the distance. Lightyears away. Yet it grows with each second. Oslo gasps, unable to do anything but fall. He hears a voice, muffled by the wind, emitting from that light,

"...As for today, I'm still working through *The Samurai's Gauntlet*."

Oslo calls out, "OCEA!"

"I—is it you? Please, tell me you're still there."

He throws his head back in a whimper, unable to hear as the light grows closer, and the voice becomes more clear,

"*The Samurai's Gauntlet* and...Well I was hoping to read some more of *Corea* for you today. I just can't seem to get it right." Ocea's voice emits from the light.

"It is you—It's really you! I'm here, I can hear you!" His lungs become tight, hungry for air.

"...Mmm...Yeah. Let's get through the *Samurai* one, I think you'd be enjoying this. Plus work is work. I gotta get through it by the end of the week. It hasn't been the best read...But the idea's there!" Her echo rattles Oslo's head.

She continues, "Now then. *Where were we?*"

At this moment, Oslo froze. No longer falling, his body is suspended in darkness.

Ocea continues, "...And there he stood, atop the great tower in his father's kingdom. The only sign of life he could see was the dragon's scales at the foot of the bed."

There Oslo stood. His arm wields the Gauntletta, the sky rages red, and his robes flowing in the wind.

"I know this place. I've been here before. When was that?" Oslo turns left and right, feeling the weight of the sheath at his side.

He kneels to the floor picking up a single black scale that sits on the wood floor beneath him. It emits a sinisterly black dust, swallowing up the light around it. He's reminded of the demon, Kanashibari.

"That's right...It was that creature! He has Ocea!"

Oslo follows the trail of scales to the window on his left, looking out to see a large mountain in the distance.

"He must have taken her there." Oslo grips the handle of his blade, "Ocea...I won't leave you here. I'm going to wake you!"

"I'm going to wake you!"

"I'm going to wake you!"

The *Terror Drake* circles *Mount Finnen*. Upon the descent of the great tower in Ryu's empty kingdom, Oslo looks up beyond the palace to the Mountain beyond. He runs at a steady pace, drawing his sword as he holds his sheath steady.

"None of this is real,"

Oslo stops in the middle of the muddy city wasteland.

"Yet, no matter how hard I try, this place is controlling me."

Oslo blinks. Where he just saw towering ancient temples, a blazing red sky, and the Mountain just beyond, he's now left in the middle of a valley.

"No...Not this. I know this. This happened before." Oslo's eyes water, "And—and it won't stop will it?"

Oslo's heart races as he looks down to his palms wrinkling. He turns his hands over to see them becoming more cracked with each passing second.

"It's happening again! How long have I been here? How many times?" He looks around him, turning every which way for answers.

"How many times have I repeated myself?!" He cries, "Ocea! Please, Ocea. I'm here to save y—" He drops to the soil.

"This place. This was where we—This was home."

He's reminded of the time he spent living in the shack that sits just a few yards from him. His dream had come true, settling down with Ocea. She would write all day while Oslo went out to farm the fields. He was so happy.

The words of Kanashibari haunt him,

*"You want to stay. A world influenced by your every whim. Of course you want it..."*

"Ocea. Ocea." Sitting in the dirt, Oslo pulls at his skin. Stretching the wrinkles, scratching his blemishes. Tears drop down to each arm.

"There must be a way. There must be a way out."

The wind blows as foot prints appear in the mud in front of Oslo.

*"Darling."*

Oslo looks up to the shack. Standing over those foot prints, the blondish beauty stretches out her hand.

She continues, “Darling, it’s okay. Your wrinkles, your blemishes. They are mine. You are mine. In this land of dreams...”

The demon’s voice whispers simultaneously with her as she speaks,

“No one can hurt you here.”

“I’ll be with you, always.”

“The wrinkles. The blemishes.”

“We will grow old together here.”

“Will you stay?”

“Don’t go, baby,”

“I prepared this valley, just for us.” She steps toward Oslo. Her footsteps sink softly into the velvety grasses, sucking the life out of the ground, and drying out the mud until it cracks.

“I know I went away for some time. But I’m here now. I made this our home. Please, Ossy—”

Ocea and the demon whisper in unison, “*Please don’t go.*”

Her eyes glisten in the sunlight with the dew on each dying lily that surrounds them.

“Ossy...”

\*BANG\* \*BANG\*

“Follow my voice. *Come back to me!*” Her voice echoes, though not from the Ocea in front of him.

As Oslo stands, each wrinkle and blemish on his hand clears.

“I’ve been here before. You’re not the Ocea I know.” He steps toward her, “I remember now. Well, I remember *for* now, The real you is up above. You keep reading it to me over and over again...” Oslo laughs as he looks up to the sky, “You just can’t get the story right, can you?”

Oslo reaches out to the blondish beauty in front of him, grabbing her hand.

The air stops.

“I know you, Coreia.”

Ocea’s eyes open wide as she freezes in front of him, still holding hands. White scales flake off of her as they blow away in the wind, revealing the true face of Coreia.\

Ocea reads.

She cries, “*Tella, it’s you, my darling Prince. You’ve finally come. You’ve finally come to save me!*”

Oslo squeezes her hand, “Save you? You’re in the most beautiful valley in the kingdom! What am I to save you from?”

She smiles as she pulls herself to his chest, “*Myself.*”

The two embrace, and shortly after Corea pulls herself away, her hands still grip onto Oslo’s chest. She looks deep into his eyes, matching every word Ocea speaks above,

“Won’t you stay, and see how this story ends?”

Oslo lifts his head up and back down to meet eyes with Corea, “Of course.”

“My darling, Tella. I have so much to tell you—Come, come inside!” Corea turns and runs to the shack in the middle of the valley.

As Oslo’s about to take a step, Kanashibari appears behind his shoulder with his lips tickling Oslo’s ear.

“What are you doing, boy?”

Oslo keeps his eyes on the shack, “You’ve fooled me enough. I may forget it, but for now, I remember. These are my dreams and I may do as I wish.” Oslo turns to face the demon, “And if it’s to destroy you, I will do that. Be it today, or tomorrow. You will be gone.”

The beady-eyed creature grins, “The battle with me is eternal.”

Oslo shakes his head, “It doesn’t have to be.”

Kanashibari laughs, “Very well. When you’re ready, I’ll be waiting atop *Mount Finnen.*” As the demon turns to walk away, he turns his head once more, “—Let’s see if you have the power to wake up.”

Oslo nods, “I’ll find you. But for now—”

Oslo’s words explode into the sky, “I’ll follow Ocea.”

Ocea sits bedside to Oslo, hearing these words slip out of his mouth, she immediately drops a packet of papers,

“Oh my god—”

She nervously lifts herself from her seat, causing every book and paper to slide out of her lap. She grabs Oslo's hand with her left and his chin with her right, shaking it with a couple of slaps in between.

Tears fall down her face.

"Ossy. I wasn't just hearing things, right?" She whimpers, "It wasn't all in my head, was it?"

"Doc—Doctor—" She attempts to shout but only mutters the words as tears roll down her face. She runs out of the room, grabbing the first nurse she sees. Choked up, she can only point to Oslo's room with her mouth wide open.

Moments later Ocea waits outside of Oslo's room as the doctor conducts his examination. She paces back and forth chewing on her fingertips, waiting for the door to crack a centimeter.

"I shouldn't call Sachiko yet."

Ocea startles and turns as soon as the door cracks. The doctor appears with his bushy mustache and a badge that reads '*Dr. Makita*'

He starts, "Ms. Takayama—"

Ocea interrupts, "How is he?"

Dr. Makita droops slightly while sliding his glasses back up, "I don't know what to say, Ms. Takayama."

Ocea shakes.

"I'm afraid he's about the same as before."

"How can it be? Words came out of him?"

"I don't doubt that—I'm just going off of what I'm seeing, and unfortunately nothing's changed."

Ocea leans her back against the wall, "I see."

"I'm sorry. Would you like to handle calling the mother again or would you like me to?"

Hiding her eyes, she wipes a single tear that's about to escape, "No, no. I'll handle it. Thank you."

As the nurse finishes replenishing Oslo's fluids Ocea takes her seat again at Oslo's bedside. She picks up her manuscript that the nurse kindly placed on the bench along with her other things.

Ocea takes a deep breath, "Well—Where were we..." She flips open the draft finding where she left off.

"Ah. Here we go." She flicks her finger against the page.

Ocea reads, "*Tella...Won't you come inside?*" Says Corea as she leans against the doorframe with elegance."

Ocea taps her finger against the page. She pulls a pen from her bag as she leans over to scribble out the next few lines.

Her pen follows her voice, "Tella stares gracefully back, '*Corea, I have followed you to the depths and back again. I've waited for this moment to see you again.*' Tella looks down in shame, '*—But there is something I must do first.*'"

Opening his eyes once again, Oslo sees the tears begin to form in Corea's eyes.

"I understand...My prince. You have unfinished business." Corea slowly steps toward Oslo.

"It's just, If I don't take care of this now it's going to haunt me the rest of our lives."

Corea cries, "I'll come with you!"

"I'm sorry. This is my consciousness. I have to be the one to find it. I have to return to you, Ocea."

Corea steps, reaching out to her prince, "When you wake, I'll still be here." She continues walking, closing the distance between them.

She places her hand over Oslo's heart, "I'll always be right here. No matter what."

Oslo smiles, "And I you, my princess."

Tella gives one more embrace to Corea before bowing, "You have my love, Corea. Forever and always."

The ground beneath Oslo ripples as a thread of grey matter pierces his head from the sky in the blink of an eye. The thread pushes Oslo down into the gooey soil before his vision goes dark. With bubbling, bubbling up, grey goo pops to his left and right, leaving



a slimy residue over his ears. His goo-blocked eyes kaleidoscope as vibrant colors pass in front of him.

“Kanashibari, the demon. If there was a way out of this, it might be through you.”

Oslo shed a gooey blue tear, “Maybe he’s right, Ocea won’t be in love with me the way she is here. But she’s clearly suffering, waiting for me to wake up. I need to come back to you, Ocea.”

Oslo’s body shoots through the thick goop at the speed of light.

“I have to know,”

“Do you love me?”

Oslo plants his feet firmly in the soil miles beyond Mount Finnen.

“The red raging sky. My father’s kingdom. It’s all—gone.”

“That Gauntlet, my robes.” He pats his body, “It’s all gone.”

*‘Ossy...Ossy...Ossy.’*

Ocea’s voice rings from the mountaintop.

Oslo treks forward in the new world. Soft green grasses, radiant blue skies, songbirds, and a peaceful breeze. This world was so beautiful, yet Oslo couldn’t help but feel something was waiting for him just around the corner.

As he traverses the plains, he comes to a small village over the hill. There are only about six homesteads with a short stone wall encasing them together. One house has a bit of smoke start to come out the chimney.

“A little large to be a regular old chimney.” Oslo suspects, stepping into the village.

The dirt roads are covered in loose chickens and children, hay and wheat within wagons, and a loud clanging coming from the smoking house.

“A blacksmith.” Oslo walks up to the open doorway, knocking on the frame.

“Ohio!” Oslo calls.

“Aye?” A grunt sounds at the stop of the clanging.

A tall bearded figure with a tattered leather apron and gloves steps out from behind some curtains, “Can I help you, boy?”

“Yes, I think I found you at just the right time.” Oslo bows, “I am a prince, long lost from where I ought to be. I’m in need of a weapon to protect myself for my journey back home.”

“Very well... I’m in the middle of a batch of broadswords at the moment.”

Oslo contemplates, “You don’t happen to have anything on hand?”

“Afraid not. Not available at least. Everything you see over on that wall—” The blacksmith gestures to the wall furthest from them, “—Is meant for Lord Salizar later this evening.”

Oslo curiously asks, “Lord Salizar?”

The blacksmith stares back with a confused eye, “Yes, you know, Lord over this region and many beyond.”

Oslo hesitates, “—Of course. I must’ve misheard. I’m sure he’ll be alright by me snagging a blade early. He’s ought to be worried about me anyhow.”

“I’m afraid I can’t do that—”

“How much would you take?”

“Sir, I cannot—”

“I suppose I don’t have money on me anyways...”

The blacksmith sighs, “Please, I’m going to have to ask you to step out.”

“Yes, of course.”

As Oslo turns to walk out, he notices a window just beside the wall of weaponry. After one step, Oslo makes a run to the wall, grabbing the sword that hung nearest to the window. Its hilt was golden, wrapped in a dark brown leather, with a long silver blade that radiated blindingly sharp edges.

“Hey! What’re you doing!” The blacksmith blocks the door, drawing a dagger from underneath his apron.

“I’m sorry, sir. It’s nothing personal.” Oslo breaks the wooden window frame with the bottom of the hilt.

The blacksmith reaches his hand out toward Oslo as his leg hangs out the window, “Lord Salizar is displeased. For this you will pay.”

Oslo sees the blacksmith’s soulless gaze. Emptiness. Something was off. Nevertheless, Oslo continues to jump out of the window, running through the town to exit the other side.

“There’s the exit, just over that bridge.” Oslo runs up the dirt, gilded blade in hand, anticipating his steps on the hard stone of the bridge.

As he approaches he sees two men come from the left and right of the bridge, appearing from behind the two houses that sit on either side of the street. Shortly after, two more men appear. Two more. Two more. And so on. Oslo slows his pace as multitudes of men continue to form a blockade in front of the bridge.

He hears mutters from the crowd, “Lord Salizar is not pleased. Lord Salizar is not pleased. Lord Salizar is not pleased.”

The men are all identical. Long cloth tunics, cloth leggings, and brown boots. Hair covers their eyes, though a distinct glow emits from them. They draw a sword from their hips, “Lord Salizar is not pleased. Lord Salizar is not pleased—”

Oslo holds up his blade, “What is this...”

The voices creep up behind Oslo now. He turns to see a crowd of villagers approach him from behind, all wielding the same bronze colored swords as the rest of them.

“I—I am not your enemy!” Oslo spins, calling to each of them.

“I am here to defeat the demon on the Mountain! Mount Finnen!” Oslo points beyond the bridge to the peak in the horizon.

The chanting stops. One man that stands by the bridge walks out from the crowd, “That is Lord Salizar’s Mountain. You dare call him a demon?”

“No—No of course not!” Oslo panics.

“There is no greater Lord than that of our Salizar! Do not deceive us, for not another soul resides on that Mount!” The man cries.

“Your Lord is trying to kill us all! He values no life other than his own!”

The man rebuttals, “Then what do you think we’re here for?”

The crowd simultaneously grins, making an advance toward Oslo.

He begs, “Don’t do this! I don’t want to hurt you! Join me—”

Oslo’s interrupted by a woman stepping out from the crowd behind him, “*Tella.*”

He turns to lock eyes with,

“Corea—You shouldn’t have come, you shouldn’t be here! Go back to the meadow!”

“You don’t remember, do you?”

Oslo shakes his head, “Remember what?”

Corea gestures her arms to the village surrounding them, “This is our home. These are our people. This village is part of our kingdom.”

Oslo’s heart sinks, “It’s impossible.”

His eyes widen, “No, I remember now,” As Tella.

She continues, “They’ve all fallen to Lord Salizar’s spell. They do not know what they do. There’s no defending them, and they will do everything in their power to not let you go.”

Oslo quivers, “What about us then? Why aren’t we under this spell?”

“The meadow, my love. Nothing could’ve touched us in that meadow. It’s the only safe haven in this corrupt world of ours, filled with demons fighting angels.”

Oslo gazes at the villagers standing, witnessing Corea’s declaration, yet having nothing to say for it. He turns back to the villager at the bridge.

“And what say you? Another witness stands before you! Lord Salizar has manipulated you and used you! He must be stopped!”

Silence falls over the crowd. The wind sits still. The crowd scatters back to their homes as they stare eerily to the sky.

The last man to leave looks back to Oslo, “Lord Salizar is not pleased.”

Oslo grips his sword, turning to Corea. Before he could speak a burst of wind strikes the both of them. The two standing in the midst of the dirt road attempt run to each other, resisting every bit of wind they can as it starts to pick them up off their feet.

“Corea!” Oslo cries.

“T—Tella...You’re going to have too—”

A heat wave radiates towards the both of them, knocking Oslo down to his feet as Corea gets swept away by the wind. He looks up at her and screams for her, blinded by the light of the sun and a deep, dark dragon carrying her away in his claws.

She calls to Oslo, “*You’re going to have to follow my voice! Follow my voice, Tella!*”

These words pierced Oslo.

“I’ll...I’ll wake. I’ll wake, Ocea.” Oslo wipes the tears from his eyes.

He yells to Corea, “I’ll come find you!” The dragon and Corea disappear into the clouds as they soar toward Mount Finnen.

He speaks softly with a whimper, “I’ll save you, Princess Corea.”

One by one, the villagers walk back out. “I see he spared you, eh?” One villager remarks.

Another, “It’s just a plan to lure ‘em!”

“Shh! He won’t fall for it now!”

Oslo maintains his gaze on the Mountain, “Don’t worry, I’ll fall for it.”

He continues forward, stepping toward the bridge. The villagers and their brown tunics swarm Oslo, drawing their swords as they cry out.

Oslo stops, “Corea would have me spare you...” He kneels, holding tight to his gilded hilt. “But I cannot have you stand in my way.”

As the villagers surround him and thrust their swords to his back, chest, hips, and thighs, Oslo swings his blade from his side. It collides with the villager’s blades, breaking them on impact. He turns, swinging viciously behind him. The villagers closest to him fall to the ground as more villagers pile over to cut him down. To their failure, Oslo drives his blade into the chest of one villager. Their ribcage pops like a pile of balloons. He can feel their heartbeat vibrate through his sword. Any blood that touches his blade is absorbed, causing the metal tint to become slightly redder.

The villagers are persistent as Oslo pulls his blade from one chest, only to drive it into another. “You will not stand in my way. You will not stand in my way. You will not stand in my way.” Oslo continues to cut down each villager left and right.

He screams with everything in him, “You will not. I will save her. I will save Ocea! You will not stand in my way!”

The crazed and bloodthirsty Oslo continues to defend himself as the unfazed villagers throw themselves into his maroon colored sword.

Soon enough, they’re gone. He stands in a pool of bodies with no blood as he continues to hear the chanting in his head, *Lord Salizar is not pleased*. He tilts his sword in front of him. The once silver blade has absorbed all the blood it touched in battle.

*“The blood of the demon’s people will be the very blood that destroy s h i m .”*

“What do you think, Ossy? ...It’s not too violent is it?” Ocea shakes her sore wrist in the air to relieve it as she looks to Oslo for some kind of affirmation.

“Yeah, I kinda like it too.” She writes on,

Oslo searches the sky after hearing Ocea’s voice, “What? What do I think?! Of what!”

The corpses lie at Oslo's feet, and the blood has stained his garb. He steps over each body one at a time until his feet meet with the cobblestone of the bridge. He crosses, just over a gentle stream, to fields of green and gold. The wart torn blade is firm in Oslo's grip as he continues across the grasslands.

Cora, if only she hadn't followed him to the village. The swishing of the gust, the swirl of her dress, the cry of her voice. Over and over, it replays the Oslo's head.

*'Deja vu.'* Oslo thinks.

"I have no time to waste. I have to make it up this Mountain in one piece."

The wind tickles Oslo's hair as he walks a shallow incline to the foot of the Mount. The vision of Corea still flashes over and over again. He tightens his jaw.

"Corea. Corea. Corea." He says in tandem with his footsteps. "I know you. Corea. I...Love you. Right? Your house in the meadow."

He can see her, a young girl running through the woods beyond an oak tree.

"Swept up in the wind, taken by the dragon. That's happened to her before. I've seen it." Memories of when he was young flash through his mind.

"We were young. Corea was just a girl. And the dragon—"

The ground beneath shakes. The earth groans. As Oslo braces himself to the ground, he looks up to see the sky burning. The fiery red glow shines from the mountaintop, stretching further out with each passing second as though it's carried by the wind. Soon enough, the entire sky was a deep red without a cloud in sight. A wretched cry falls from the mountain. It pierces Oslo's ears. He maintains a hold on his sword, thrusting it into the ground to give him a more sturdy foothold. The grass beneath Oslo's feet recedes, like an ocean wave killing all the grass it touches, exposing scorched soil beneath.

The ground halts, the wind silences, and Oslo is left still.

"Corea, I'll do it this time." He shakily stands to walk forward.

"I'll save you." The soil challenges his every step as it crumbles back down the mountain.

"All you ever did was prepare a home for me—for us." Oslo wipes tears left and right. As the mountain becomes more steep, the tears cause him to stumble.

“And yet, I’ve led you to this place.” His crying turn into groaning as his ankles shake on every pebble beneath him.

“All I wanted was to love you. And you left—You left me. Alone! So alone. And I just loved you. So, so much.” His foot slips over a rock, dropping his sword next to him.

Sadness overwhelmed Oslo. Remembering everything, or so he thought. Corea is his best friend. The same friend he wanted to save over, and over, and over again. Yet, he never could.

Playing pretend, writing, friendships, heartache. Oslo wanted to be there to fix it all for her, always. And yet here he is, stumbling beneath the mountain, completely helpless.

“Can I save you this time? Will you love me? Will you love me until the day we die? How about after that?” Oslo chokes on his tears.

“What about after all of this?”

Oslo’s face falls into the gravel, digging into his pores. He thinks to himself, Corea, but he only sees Ocea. The blondish beauty dances in his mind. The one he fears he may never have the chance to tell how he feels.

Oslo tiredly, “Wake up...Wake up...Corea... You’re dreaming.” His eyelids drop as he passes out in the heat of the earth.

“I’ll save you. I’ll save you.”