Chapter Nineteen: Inner Demons - Part One

A grey mist whirled within a black expanse. Through the shifting clouds, indistinct shapes began to form. Images that Evan soon recognised.

The broad, powerful features of his father, King Alden Goodheart, wavered in the expanse. His heavy brows were furrowed, thin mouth upturned in a frown–the way he looked when his thoughts troubled him. The mists shifted to reveal Evan's mother, Leolen, who also held a grave look of concern. Her soft cheeks were flushed, tilted eyes wide with an unseen fear. Several other faces appeared in the swirling mist, some clearer than others, some so distorted that Evan could not recognise them.

Though he could not feel his body–not see any physical part of himself–he felt a deep longing swell up within him when he saw Reisa's peaceful face.

The clouds parted to reveal a marbled courtyard lined with plants and flowers. Two square pools of water were on either side of the main path, a statue of an old hero erected in the centre of each pool. A younger Evan was at his father's side, having come from visiting Reisa's sickbed. Once again, Evan was pleading with his father to teach him how to wield sorcery, even though he was still a year away from the legal age of practising the arts. If Evan had known how to fight with sorcery, he would have been able to protect Reisa at Moon Bay, several days earlier. He was sure of it.

As it happened, despite his initial protests, his father had listened to him.

A tall, thin man appeared in the yard that day. He wore a wide-brimmed hat and a high collared black and purple cloak that covered his body. Evan was afraid of the strange man at first, but his father introduced him as an old friend, Albian Feloria. He had asked Albian to teach Evan the ways of sorcery and magical arts. Evan was so elated that he shook with excitement.

And so began his sorcerous studies, a secret he would keep from his friends and the outside world for a year before he became of legal age. It did not occur to Evan at the time how much his father had abused his power to break the law, in order to please his only son.

A heavy mist gathered again, wiping away the scene.

Though he did not know why he was seeing these images, Evan understood that his meeting with Albian Feloria was a turning point in his life. An event that introduced sorcery into his world. Into his body and mind. It was also the start of the end of his friendship with Reisa, beginning a life without her.

<div align="center">The Glow is a part of you.</div>

Albian's words echoed around him as solid objects became visible through the dissipating mist.

Glistening rock walls covered the gloomy environment Evan now found himself in. He was back in his physical body, standing in the dark cave. Rocky pillars spread along the room in endless rows and columns, reaching into darkness after several yards all around him. A heavy ooze dripped from the jagged stalactites on the low ceiling.

"Where am I?" Evan said aloud, testing his voice. It sounded dull, muted, but also echoed softly.

He carefully stepped forward, aware that his father's sword was no longer on his back. He noticed that the moist rock on the pillars and walls appeared to move, slowly shifting downwards. He ran a finger over a pillar and found the rock was soft and wet, like thick mucus.

He considered his situation. The last thing he remembered was battling the huntsman, Audlin, and a stabbing pain in his neck. He didn't think he had been killed, as the huntsman surely wanted him alive when he sold him into slavery. His real body, still in Toolin, must be unconscious. So that meant he just had to figure out how to escape this dark world and return to help his companions.

With this thought came a throbbing sensation in his temple. A static buzz electrified the air, giving him a familiar, dreaded feeling.

Ahead, a figure rounded one of the pillars and faced him.

A silent gasp left Evan's cracked lips.

The newcomer wore a dark green tunic over a brown shirt, and dark trousers tucked into black longboots. Dark hair was slicked back tightly over a heart-shaped face, making his pointed ears stick out more prominently. His tight brows were pressed together over the large, tilted eyes that stared back.

Evan's heart raced. Before him, stood himself. Or something that looked like him, but in darker clothing and a colder, hardened air about him. Across the newcomers back was the black hilt of a long, sheathed broadsword.

Swallowing through a dry throat, Evan said, "Who are you?"

His darker self's hard expression remained. "You know who I am." His voice was Evan's, but with a deeper, heavier undertone that almost sounded like another voice speaking at the same time. "You have known for some time. Though you deny it to yourself."

The throbbing sensation increased as Evan considered his words. He fought for breath in the stifling air, a tight knot twisting in his stomach.

"You are not me," he said to his darker self.

The other Evan shook his head, slow and deliberate.

"I do not know what you are," Evan went on. "But... I have felt your presence before. You are the one that has been in my head. Invading my thoughts."

The dark Evan nodded. Again, slow and menacing motions. There was an aura about him, a powerful energy that felt like it could suck the life from a person. A presence that wilted flowers and boiled oceans. Evan could feel himself weakening, as if struck down with an ailment.

"Who are you?" Evan asked firmly, tired of playing games.

"Like yourself; a soul who should not be here. You stumbled upon my dwelling." The dark Evan began to slowly step towards him. "How a mortal being could navigate the godly realms and pass through my existence, I did not know. Until I entered your mind and saw you had travelled across the galaxy."

Realisation came to Evan in a confused chain of thoughts. "You. I felt you. When the Light Council sent me to Carnan. No. Before then, when Lord Thaenos teleported me away in his machine."

"As I wandered the infinite expanse of my being, I became bound to an intercepting soul. Yours. The Voarn Prince, Evan Goodheart. And so I waited. And watched. Felt. Everything you were."

"What wayward spirit are you?"

The dark Evan raised his arms in a shrug. "A mere lost soul, long forgotten. You and I are not so dissimilar, Evan Goodheart. We were fated to be bound together. I believe we can benefit one another."

Evan eyed his darker self. He found his own face both frighteningly familiar and yet hard to read. "Benefit one another?" he asked.

The other Evan came to a stop several paces ahead of him. "You are a powerful being. I can prove to be a great boon for you. With your permission. Or, having one such as myself could prove troublesome for you."

A compliment and a threat. This could be a dangerous entity before him, or a weak soul who feared him. There, above his head, Evan finally saw it. A glint in the darkness. A shiny splash of colour that revealed to him this spirit's intentions.

"You could leave," Evan said, keeping his voice even. "I could help you return to your realm."

Dark eyes narrowed on him. "Do not play games with me, boy. You mind is my mind. I see what you see." He took a measured step closer, staring menacingly at Evan.

"You wish to take over my body," Evan told him.

"I grow weary of my place. I have been without a body for so very long. Your resistance to my interference was impressive, at first. I must admit. But no longer. While your body remains unconscious, *I* rule your mind."

"I will never allow a parasite to infest my soul," Evan said, his voice rising with contempt.

His darker self withdrew the sword from across his back. The broadsword was the same as Evan's fathers, but instead of a silver blade this one was a solid black mass that gave no shine or glimmer, as if absorbing the light around it.

Evan focussed his mind and channelled a sorcerous energy through him, preparing to attack. He struggled to connect to his power, so he cleared his mind and searched once again for the spark within him.

Nothing.

His heart raced as he tried again, willing himself to tap into his abilities. A cold shiver ran through him. His sorcery was gone.

The dark Evan grinned. "Your mind cannot reach your unconscious body, and thus locks you out of your 'inner spark'–as our father called it."

Evan grit his teeth. "Do not call him that. He is *not* your father."

"He is no one's father, now."

A shuddering rage rippled through Evan. He eyed the ebony sword, his shoulders heaving with heavy breaths.

"You want the blade," his other self said. "My connection to you is stronger than ever. I see all and feel all you do. There is no escape." He raised the sword with one hand and stepped closer.

Evan back stepped. He searched the cave, but the surrounding darkness and slimy rock offered no help.

The dark Evan suddenly broke into a run. Within a few steps he was upon him. The ebony blade swung down, forcing Evan to duck and dive to the side. Evan gathered himself and jumped away from a horizontal strike, the blade just missing his chest.

The throbbing sensation increased in his head, clouding his thoughts and tightening the tension in his temples. The cave spun and wavered as he lost his footing, but his enemy was on him again. Evan dove away from another strike. The black blade bit into a pillar, embedding in the soft rock.

Evan scrambled to his feet and saw the demon was struggling to retrieve the blade from the rock. He ran towards his darker self, colliding into him and wrapping his arms around his

waist. Evan cried out and lifted the demon up, before pushing off the ground and slamming him down.

He rolled onto the demon and attempted to pin him down, grabbing the dark tunic, feeling his own bony form struggling against him. Seeing his own dark eyes looking up at him, and the pained expression in his grimacing face, Evan was taken aback.

An elbow shot out. It connected with Evan's jaw and sent him tumbling sideways.

The demon rose to his feet, towering over Evan's bent form. He seemed taller now. "It is useless to resist," his heavy voice said. "In here, I am a god, and you are powerless."