

Oswald's Glittering

Part 1

Oswald slowly opened his eyes. There was a blackness all around him, but he did not think it was night. The air felt stagnant, almost too warm in its stillness. No, for some reason or another he had the distinct feeling that he was in a room.

Disorientation hung heavy over his mind like a fog and he could not remember where he was. So naturally after a moment he tried to sit up and gather his bearings, but failed to lift even his head an inch. The discovery wasn't immediately frightening, for Oswald was still confused. He simply tried to change positions a second time and again found he could not move. Now a small rush of fear flitted by as he fought to move his arms or legs even just a little to prove he wasn't completely trapped. But trapped he was.

All Oswald could do was look to his left and then conversely to the right. He couldn't look down to see how he was pinned or even begin to consider how to release himself. In any case; he had little time to worry about it, because at that very moment the room flashed into brilliance. As the lights sprung to life Oswald flinched accordingly at the suddenness of it.

Through squinting eyes he tried to survey his surroundings. Although the room was almost unnaturally bright Oswald could see no visible lights anywhere. The ceiling was low and the same sterile white color as the bare walls to either side. He desperately wanted to look down at himself or maybe even behind his head to see if the room had a door. Just to see anything at all aside from the uniform whiteness all around him. But he still could move very little and settled his vision on the left wall instead.

What is this? He thought frantically as panic began to settle in like an unwelcomed guest.

“Hello there!” called out a booming voice. Oswald was startled into flinching again at the loudness of it. “I’ll be using the language English since that is all you knew how to speak while on Earth.” Oswald flicked his head back over to the right and saw a relatively large green circle illuminated on the wall. “Come now, Oswald. Speak up for I don’t usually get a chance to speak with you for very long at these junctures in our relationship.”

“Who are you?” Oswald asked. But his voice didn’t sound right. Didn’t even sound like his own.

“As expected of course. You always seem to lead with the same question Oswald.” The voice said.

“You must have the wrong guy or something. I’ve never talked with you before in my life!”

“To the contrary my friend! We’ve had more conversations than you’d really care to know. All relatively similar, but many regardless.”

“Well come help me out. I’m stuck.” Oswald croaked still trying to fix his voice.

“We actually haven’t much time to chat so I will now move on to the congratulations.” The voice said. “You are quite a fascinating being to behold Oswald, and the life you have led has been completely and utterly stimulating to witness.”

Oswald stared at the green dot in confusion, and then just began again to pull at whatever was holding him. “This stage always takes far too long..” the voice sighed. Oswald gave up on the fighting and turned to the dot.

“Where am I?” he called out in frustration. The voice chuckled.

“You are home Oswald. Where you’ve always been.”

“Why am I here then?” he fired back.

“Interesting, now your questions are getting you somewhere. What do you remember last Oswald? I know it isn’t too far gone yet.”

“I still have no idea what you’re talking ab..” Oswald stopped himself short, as the sound of rushing water filled his mind. The memory overtook him then, and he was immediately rocked with several emotions at once.

“ROBIN!!!” he shouted to the empty room with an accompaniment of renewed struggles. “ROBIN!! NOOO!! NO! NO! NO!” still he twisted and turned against whatever held him. He was violently struck with sobbing and whipped his head back and forth before finally settling still. The tears wracked his frame as the remembering took him far away and the roar of a waterfall blocked out everything.

Part 2

He was walking the forest path with his wife Robin, matching her stride with his own. The oaken trees surrounded them on all sides as they eased their way farther and farther along the winding trail. Oswald took a deep breath of the fresh earthy air and let it out slowly. He kept up a cheerfully normal conversation, despite the feelings of anxiousness that flooded him every

time he felt the box in his pocket bounce against the outside of leg. He had a ring in that box and he was going to present it to Robin at the most opportune moment he could find while they were out. A lot of thought went into what he should do to celebrate their tenth wedding anniversary, and after some consideration he could think of nothing Robin would like better than to spend their time together outside. He had thought times like this would be easier for him by now, but he was still nervous regardless. Not that he minded the nervousness that much, it reminded him of when they were young and he had met Robin for the first time all those years ago.

“C’mon O, you’re lagging behind now.” Robin called back over her shoulder. Oswald startled out of his reverie and got back to the path. As he hurried to catch up a robin flew by with a heartening chirp to share.

“You just flew by again honey!” he said.

“That joke stopped being funny a few miles back.” She said through a chuckle anyways. Oswald grinned and thought to himself, for what must have been the millionth time since they had been together, how beautiful she was.

Although they were aging like normal adults do, they fought against it in every aspect of their lives possible. Which is why they were outside so much all the time in the first place. And why Oswald wasn’t that surprised when she giggled aloud and ran from him.

“Hey now!” he said through his own chuckles now as he stepped it up to catch her.

A slight breeze weaved its way through the trees and squirrels scattered as the two made their way by. Leaves and loose sticks crunched underneath the tread of their quickened pace. The sun grew old in the sky and clouds parted helpfully to let the rays shine down on the couple. And

as Oswald finally made up the lost ground he reached out and grabbed her by the waist. They slowed and he spun her round to come face to face with those eyes that always brought out his smile. Through deep breaths she asked,

“What you plan on doing now?”

He said nothing and only grinned even wider at her. But then in a flash he crouched and picked her up into the air with an arm behind her back and one under her legs. She gasped but he quickly finished with a kiss.

They stayed that way for several seconds until they finally parted and he lowered her to the ground.

“I love you.” She said into his chest through the hug she immediately gave.

“As I’ll always love you.” He returned. And with that he reached into his pocket and pulled the small box free.

It was then, in that perfect moment as he opened the box revealing the ring, that he noticed Robin and himself were not alone in the woods.

Robin gasped yet again when she saw what he had procured from hiding in his pocket.

“It’s absolutely breathtaking.” She whispered. But when she looked up into his face she stopped short. “What’s wrong?” troubled now; she turned and followed his gaze when he didn’t reply.

It was then that her third and final gasp escaped her. Off to the left of the path in the not so far distance stood one of the largest bears Robin had ever seen. It was on all fours and had

several cubs moving about amongst its feet. The bear was maybe a good two dozen paces from where they stood.

Oswald finally collected himself, and then moved in between the bear and Robin. The bear was threatened by the movement and immediately uttered a low guttural growl from deep in the back of its throat. Oswald knew it was too close to try anything else and he turned to Robin and said,

“I’m going to stay here and keep its attention Robin, and you’re going to slowly make your way up the path to get help. Do you understand me?”

She glanced at him and then back to the bear, too stunned to say anything. After another split second the bear found its way up to its hind legs and ushered forth the first real growl. Oswald grabbed onto Robin’s shoulders and turned her toward him.

“Robin, go now.” He said purposefully trying to read her. She snapped to life.

“No way! I won’t leave you Oswald.” She said as fear climbed its way into her voice. The bear dropped back to all fours and began slowly moving in. Oswald pushed her back and spun around to face the approaching bear.

“Now!” he commanded in a voice she had never heard before from him before. She stumbled back even more from the look on his face when he turned quickly for just a moment. He unsheathed the small hunting knife at his side and grabbed a branch off the ground. “Go down the path and when you reach the river cross the footbridge and get to the ranger station. It isn’t far.”

She backed away another step, all the while shaking her head. The bear stopped on the outer fringe of the trail and surveyed Oswald. "GO NOW!" he shouted, and she did. She watched in horror as the scene unfolded before her very eyes like a bad dream she couldn't get away from. And as her feet carried her step by step backward the bear stood up again on two legs and roared at Oswald. It towered over him and he stood his ground within its immense shadow. She knew she should be running at this very moment to get help, but she just couldn't leave Oswald behind.

"GET YOUR FURRY ASS OUT OF HERE!!" he yelled at it while brandishing his knife and the branch wildly in the air. It might as well have been a butter knife and a twig for the bear was unfazed and immediately returned a reciprocal snarl. Oswald still held put right up until it took a swing at him.

He dodged the blow and vaguely registered the breeze from the huge clawed paw as it whistled by his face. The bear quickly sent the other paw into action but Oswald was ready for it too and parried to the left. He saw his opening and with a burst he lunged with the knife towards the bear's chest. The bear also took this opportunity to draw back some and instead of the clean piercing where he thought the heart to be, Oswald just grazed the animal's meaty shoulder. It bellowed again and snapped down a mouthful of teeth on Oswald's arm. It pulled away a solid hunk of flesh and finished with a successful swipe of its paw.

Oswald was swatted back with enough force to drive out all the air from his chest and tear his shirt wide open. The neighboring tree trunk he slammed into wasn't the easiest on him either, and when his head made contact with the bark stars erupted into his field of vision. Somewhere through the pain and swimming senses he heard a scream that brought him back.

When Robin saw him hurt and then tossed into the tree she couldn't help but scream. And at the sound of her shriek the bear turned its attention from Oswald's bleeding form to her. As if it was just noticing her for the first time.

"Get away from him!" she shouted. And the bear obliged after a moments consideration, and then proceeded to lumber towards her instead. This inspired an even more decently healthy amount of fear to course through her, and as soon as she was sure the bear had decided to leave Oswald alone she turned to jog away.

Another glance accompanied with a fresh roar broke her into a run. She didn't cry like people in movies always seem to do as they're being chased. No, all there was for Robin was only adrenaline and a paralyzing terror at being mauled.

The foliage whipped by as she made her way down that path as fast as her conditioned legs would take her. Nature, however; was adapted well and as she came up on the river she allowed herself one more look back. The bear was practically upon her. With a yelp she made a dead sprint for the small bridge spanning the water. She wasn't going to make it.

When Oswald came to his senses he realized several things at once. The grizzly pent on beating him was nowhere to be seen. His wife Robin was nowhere to be seen. And he himself was sitting at the base of a tree doing nothing. With a jolt he leapt to his feet, got back to the path, and took off in the direction he had instructed Robin to take. Fear rose up in him with every step he took. *What happened to her? Is she safe?* These and dozens of other questions flew through his mind as he ran and ran. The questions were answered when he finally arrived at the river.

Robin was about halfway across the bridge looking up at the bear standing over her. Oswald's stomach churned.

He dashed for the bridge even though he was far too far away to help. And as the bear raised a paw high into the air he could see the shadow of it cross over Robin's face. His Robin. Time seemed to slow to a standstill and Oswald suddenly saw everything with a stunning clarity. So when that paw began to swing down towards his love it was but the hour hand on a clock face.

The river raged beneath the bridge at a furious pace. The sky had darkened somewhat at some point and the clouds gorged themselves on the great expanses of nothingness. There were leaves rustling about here and there as the breeze picked them up and took them for its own. But all of it paled in significance to the sound of the crack that echoed through the air, and Oswald's very soul, as that bear's mighty paw made contact with Robin's head. Her body was tossed limply end over end off the side of the bridge and fell for an eternity before meeting the awaiting water's embrace below.

Oswald knew nothing.

He did not know of the screams coming from his own mouth. Did not know of the ground under his feet. The bear still standing on the bridge meant nothing. The only thing that mattered was the distinct form he knew was washing farther and farther away from him at every second. Now time was moving fast.

He found himself airborne one moment and swimming with the current the next. He hardly registered the icy cold or the fact that he had already kicked off his shoes. At some point he did reach her and clutch her to himself amongst the water's cruel force.

“Ro...” he tried to say without going back under. “..bin. Robin!” he said still struggling to keep her and himself up. And when they approached the falls that Oswald knew were there all along he only clutched her tighter. He could barely keep them afloat, let alone swim them to the side.

The falls were loud. Louder than anything else Oswald had ever heard. And as they plummeted over and straight into darkness, neither of them remembered the diamond ring lying on the forest path. Just a forsaken glittering in the fading sunlight.

Part 3

Oswald cried into the empty room for some time before the voice in the green dot spoke again. The room offered him no solace, and nor did the booming voice.

“We’re almost rebooted and ready to go Oswald, so I suggest you collect yourself.” Oswald turned towards the green dot slowly with tears still staining his face.

“I don’t know where I am, but I need to find Robin.” He pleaded.

“Ah... and this is why this is one of the more saddening parts of our relationship my friend. But also why you have proved quite the source of entertainment.”

“You don’t understand! I have to go find Robin! She needs me!” Oswald said finding his voice again.

“To the contrary my friend, it is you that doesn’t understand yet.”

“You aren’t my friend!! I have no idea who you are! And if you saved Robin and I, then you take me to her now!” he said as he strained against whatever held him.

“She can’t be saved Oswald.” The voice said solemnly. This one statement alone hit Oswald like a brick wall. After a few moments Oswald finally asked,

“She didn’t make it?” almost at a whisper. A pause from the dot.

“We don’t really know if she made it or not I’m afraid. No one does.” Oswald tried to interrupt but the voice continued, “You see, as far as Robin is concerned you are the only real authority.”

“Well go back then!” the frustration returning quickly. “She might still be there!”

The voice chuckled.

“You still haven’t grasped it have you? I’m beginning to get disappointed my friend. You’ve caught on so much faster in the past. Maybe love is blinding after all.”

“I wish you would let me go so I could go to her.”

“Alright Oswald, alright. I’m going to have to be more direct with you then.” The voice said. “You can’t go get Robin because Robin doesn’t exist.”

Silence. The voice continued. “To put it in better terms, the life you have just experienced is one of your own creation.” Another few moments of silence.

“I think I understand now.”

“Do you Oswald?”

“Yes, I understand that YOU’RE COMPLETELY INSANE! I don’t know what the hell you’re going on about but you need to let me go!”

“Oh Ozzy... You don’t have to believe it. In a few short minutes you will be somewhere else entirely. You will have a new start, and most importantly of all, you will continue providing the entertainment you’re here for.”

“Stop it!”

“You see, we broadcast whatever your brain comes up with Oswald. You’re a hit really. A celebrity.”

Oswald shook against his restraints.

“The populace just loves your originality. The depths and beauty of your very imagination..”

“What you’re saying makes no sense so I have no idea why you’re telling me these lies!”

“Like I said before, I have no real need to convince you. You’ll be back under soon regardless. It’s really ingenious you know, while you’re unconscious you experience events so much faster without realizing it. An entire lifetime, or in that last case many years to say the least, pass normally for you and rather quickly for us.”

The room began to dim slightly.

“What are you doing!?”

“You’re going in for another run Oswald. Although I personally believe your brain will have difficulties topping that last show.”

“Please just let me go home.”

Another laugh from the voice.

“Don’t you see Oswald? There is no home for you. There is no Earth. There are no bears. There is no Robin. All of these things were made by your mind and put into your own special reality. The full untapped potential of your inner mind’s creativity is our show! You’ve already done this countless times.”

“Why are you doing this to me?”

“You volunteered of course! Here let me show you.” The voice said as the ceiling above Oswald detached itself and rose from view. Emptiness gave way and in its place a large mirror was lowered and set into position directly over him.

“Wha..?” Oswald managed. In the mirror staring back at him was a creature he had never seen before. And yet the more he looked the more familiar it became. Oswald tried denial. To deny the grotesque form watching him would be almost easy. But lights were beginning to dawn, memories were resurfacing.

The wall with the green dot hissed and slid out of place revealing another room filled with equipment and monitors. And standing behind a panel of toggles was a monstrous thing as veiny and purple as the one in the mirror. The horrid creature waved at Oswald with three different hands.

“That must help a little Oswald. Look there, you aren’t human after all. There’s no such thing as humans!” the monster laughed.

Oswald watched the realizations drop like bombs on the creature's face in the mirror. And as he began wildly thrashing at his bonds the creature reciprocated in unison. The darkness settled in with the screams, and before too long it blotted out even those.

Epilogue

When the shadows receded there was chaos. Crystalline boulders streaked down from the sky like rain. The craterous surface below accepted the impacts willingly as if it had a choice in the matter. And as a newborn cloud of brown dust cleared over one basin in particular a rumbling penetrated the air. Snakelike tendrils forced themselves from the ground and whipped about before surrounding the foreign object.

The rocklike disturbance began to shimmer and quake under the grasp of the tendrils until finally shattering with a deafening brilliance. Shrapnel tore at the dark assailants and forced them to retreat back into the dusty floor. Immediately from the depths of the boulder there was a stirring movement followed by an infantile shriek. A murky form struggled from the wreckage and stretched its limbs for the first time. Massive talons spanning the creature's entire body shimmered off the other collisions that still were striking all about.

The creature knew very little. It knew that it was hungry. And it knew itself as Oswald. Show time.