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VILLAGE HIDDEN IN MOONLIGHT



CHOOSE
4
DIFFERENT
PATHWAYS

#1 GROUP TIMES BEST SELLER

 **GROUPS**

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PUBLISHING

THE DOOR OF ECHOES

The wind howled through the Umbral Reach's cliffs, where the Door of Echoes loomed, its obsidian surface pulsing with silver sigils. Snow Silverleaf stood before it, his tattered cloak snapping, silver hair whipping across his face. His steel-gray eyes gleamed under the crescent moon. The mission burned in his mind: retrieve the light flower to cure the Shadow Sickness, a blight blackening veins and stealing breath. Failure meant the end of Zephyros. Lunar is Glade, his home, was ash—burned a decade ago. Yet he faced this trial, a thief honed by survival, his will unbroken.

Snow's hand gripped the icy handle, the door's light whispering doubts: You'll fail them, like before. Gritting his teeth, he pushed back, resolve outweighing fear. The door swung open, darkness swallowing him—a void unraveling his thoughts. Then, a silver radiance seared his vision. As it faded, Lunar is Glade appeared, impossibly alive: white stone cottages, ivy-draped roofs, willows swaying under moonlight. The scent of moonflowers filled the air. This was impossible—his village had burned.

A child's sob broke the stillness. Beneath a willow, a boy with silver hair—Snow at ten—sat curled, trembling. His red-rimmed eyes met Snow's, accusing: "Why didn't you save us?" The words shattered Snow's armor. This trial wasn't about the flower—it was a reckoning with his past.

Choices:

Say, "I was a child. I couldn't have stopped it." (Turn to page 2)

Deny it: "This isn't real. I won't play this game." (Turn to page 4)

Kneel: "I tried. I wasn't strong enough." (Turn to page 6)

Turn away: "This past is dead." (Turn to page 8)

SHADOWS OF THE PAST

Snow stepped forward, his shadow cloaking the boy, blotting out moonlight. Kneeling, damp earth soaked his trousers, its chill grounding him. He met the boy's eyes—twin pools of grief mirroring his own. "I was just a child," he said, voice steady despite the tremor in his chest, each word a truth he'd buried. "I couldn't have stopped it." The boy's tear-streaked face twisted, small fists clenching. "Then why do you blame yourself?" he spat, his voice a blade slicing through the night's hush.

The question struck deep, unearthing memories of nights fleeing screams, his inadequacy a relentless shadow. He'd built a thief's mask—cunning, detached—but this boy, raw and unscarred, saw through it. "You should have fought!" the boy cried, his rage too vast for his frame. The village flickered, moonflowers souring into acrid smoke that stung Snow's eyes. Shadows stretched like claws, screams clawing his ears—high, keening echoes of that night. The willow withered, leaves curling to ash, drifting like blackened snow. The air thickened with loss, his heart pounding, each beat a reminder of failure.

The boy's gaze pinned him, unyielding, demanding an answer. The trial wasn't about the flower—it was about facing the man he'd failed to become. The ground quaked subtly, as if reality might collapse, and Snow felt the weight of his next words, a pivot for his soul. The scent of ash mingled with fading moonflowers, the air heavy with the ghosts of his past, urging him to confront or flee the truth.

Choices:

Stand firm: "I did everything I could." (Turn to page 10)

Admit: "I was scared." (Turn to page 12)



SHADOWS OF THE PAST

Snow clenched his fists, nails drawing blood. “No,” he said, voice a cold edge cutting the stillness. “This isn’t real. I won’t play this game.” The boy’s form shimmered, warping like wax in flame, eyes stretching into hollow voids. The village bled into a black abyss, cobbled streets dissolving, moonlight swallowed. Shadows slithered, serpent-like, their hisses a low menace. The air grew dense, crushing Snow’s chest, each breath a battle against the trial’s oppressive light.

“You can’t run,” the boy’s voice splintered, echoing in Snow’s skull, a chorus of grief and accusation. Figures emerged from the dark—his mother, her smile now sorrow, eyes glistening; his father, shoulders slumped, face etched with disappointment; friends, their laughter gone, hands reaching like specters. “Why did you leave us?” they intoned, a mournful dirge wrapping his heart, squeezing until breathing was pain. The scent of moonflowers turned to ash, the air thick with the weight of his choices.

Cold dread rooted him, the trial peeling back his soul’s scars—every moment he’d chosen survival over sacrifice. The void pulsed, its edges flickering with silver, daring him to step forward or flee. His hands trembled, resolve fraying, the faces of his past a mirror to his guilt, their whispers a relentless tide eroding his strength.

Choices:

Refuse: “This isn’t real.” (Turn to page 14)

Face them: “I didn’t want to leave.” (Turn to page 16)



SHADOWS OF THE PAST

Snow's legs gave way, knees slamming into the earth, the jolt rattling his bones. "I tried," he choked, voice raw, fingers clawing damp soil, seeking an anchor against guilt's tide. "I wasn't strong enough." The boy tilted his head, his eerie calm chilling Snow's spine. "Then why feel guilty?" he asked, soft but piercing, like a needle through old wounds. Flames erupted, licking the village's edges, their heat searing the air, the stench of ash and blood choking his senses.

Memories flooded: the crackle of burning timber, suffocating heat, his mother's hand slipping as she shoved him to safety, her final words drowned by fire's roar. A new voice sliced through: "You left me too, Snow." Eve stood in flickering shadows, soot tangling her dark hair, storm-gray eyes dim with betrayal. His closest friend, his almost-love, her arms crossed, shielding her pain. He'd abandoned her, too consumed by guilt to face her after the ashes settled.

"You never came back," she whispered, each word a deeper cut, her gaze a mirror to his shame. The flames paused, the world still, as Snow grappled with her presence, the weight of his silence heavier than the fire's heat, the trial demanding he face her or flee once more.

Choices:

Apologize: "I was afraid to face you." (Turn to page 18)

Stay silent: "..." (Turn to page 20)



THE BREAKING POINT

Snow turned from the boy, heart a stone. "This past is dead," he said, voice stripped of warmth, a shield against the trial's probing. The village shattered, fragments of white stone and ivy spinning into a void, glinting with fading moonlight. Silence fell, pure and fleeting, then cruel laughter echoed, raising hairs on Snow's neck. "You always run, Snow," it taunted, sharp as a blade.

A figure loomed, clad in black armor that drank the light, runes pulsing with malevolent glow. The raider—the butcher of Lunaris Glade, whose steel and fire stole everything. "You were weak then," he sneered, voice scraping stone. "And now." Memories surged: screams, the glint of his blade, flames consuming all. A dagger materialized in Snow's hand, its hilt cold, fitting his palm perfectly. His pulse roared, a decade's rage igniting, the void crackling with the trial's light, daring him to act—to slay his pain or be consumed by it.

Choices:

Attack the figure. (Turn to page 22)

Demand answers. (Turn to page 24)



THE BREAKING POINT

Snow rose, resolve forged in fire. “I did everything I could,” he said, voice steady against the storm within.

The boy’s eyes narrowed, searching for weakness. “Did you?” he challenged, voice a quiet blade. The village dissolved into ash, ground quaking under Snow’s boots. The boy stretched, becoming Snow—scarred, hardened, a mirror of pain and survival. A light flower bloomed in the man’s hand, its petals radiant—the cure. “Take it,” he growled, voice both foreign and familiar. “Saving them won’t save you.”

The words struck, echoing doubts from the Door’s whispers. The trial exposed his soul, a book of blood and regret. The flower was hope for the refugees, but the warning lingered—salvation wouldn’t heal his fractures. The void pulsed, ash-scented air thick with distant cries, his hands trembling not from fear but from the weight of a life unhealed, the choice a razor’s edge.

Choices:

- Take the light flower and leave. (Turn to page 26)
- Reject it, demand peace. (Turn to page 28)



THE BREAKING POINT

I was scared,” Snow confessed, his voice cracking, the truth bared under the crescent moon’s glow. The boy softened, anger fading, his small frame easing. “So was I,” he whispered, voice gentle, weaving through the stillness with shared vulnerability. The flames encircling the village receded, their roar softening, leaving Lunaris Glade bathed in silvery light. Cobbled streets shimmered, the air sweet with moonflowers, their petals stirring in a forgiving breeze. A light flower bloomed at Snow’s feet, its petals pulsing with warm radiance—the cure for the Shadow Sickness. Its glow lit the boy’s face, his eyes now holding understanding, not blame. “Fear doesn’t make you weak,” he said, hand hovering, trembling as if to bridge years, yet stopping short. “Running from it does.” The words pierced Snow’s core, a truth he’d fled since his world burned, now forced to face by the trial.

The void’s weight lifted, its edges softening, as if the trial honored his honesty. Dew and moonflowers scented the air, grounding him. The light flower offered a choice—return to save the refugees or linger, seeking closure denied for a decade. The boy’s gaze, a mirror to his younger self, urged him to weigh duty against lost peace, the air thick with memory and hope.

Choices:

- Pick up the light flower and return. (Turn to page 30)
- Stay and face the boy. (Turn to page 32)



THE BREAKING POINT

This isn't real," Snow snapped, turning from the ghostly figures, his voice a sharp blade slicing through the void's heavy silence.

Their wails—"Why did you leave us?"—rose in a anguished crescendo, each word a lash against his soul, then fell abruptly silent, leaving an eerie stillness that pressed against his senses.

The void became a vast, suffocating emptiness, its darkness swallowing sound and light, leaving only the faint thrum of his own heartbeat. A light flower materialized, hovering in the abyss, its petals glowing with a steady, unyielding radiance—the cure for the Shadow Sickness. The trial's relentless challenges had exhausted themselves, but the weight of Snow's choices lingered, heavy as the guilt he'd carried since Lunaris Glade burned.

Snow stared at the flower, its soft light tracing the scars on his hands, each mark a testament to battles fought and losses endured. Beyond the Door, refugees waited, their lives hanging on his decision, their faces flickering in his mind—gaunt, hopeful, desperate. Yet the void whispered a different path, one of confrontation with the emptiness within, a reckoning with the boy who'd fled the flames. The air was cold, sharp with the scent of frost and stone, the silence oppressive, broken only by the faint hum of the flower's light. The trial's final test loomed: to choose between duty to others and the need to heal his own fractured soul. The absence of the figures' voices was a void of its own, their pain etched into his memory, urging him to act or surrender to the darkness that had haunted him for a decade.

Choices:

- Take the light flower and escape. (Turn to page 26)
- Reject it, confront the void. (Turn to page 28)



THE BREAKING POINT

I didn't want to leave," Snow said, his voice raw, trembling with the weight of a truth he'd buried beneath years of survival. The figures softened, their sorrow easing into a quiet warmth, their hollow eyes filling with a flicker of life. His mother stepped forward, her gentle smile a beacon in the void, her hands steady as she placed a light flower in his palm—the cure. Its petals pulsed with a warm, living glow, their radiance casting delicate shadows across her face, illuminating the love he'd thought lost forever. "Then don't leave yourself behind," she said, her voice a soothing balm, weaving through the air like a lullaby from his childhood, carrying the weight of forgiveness.

The void shimmered, its darkness retreating as if her words held power over the trial itself, the oppressive black giving way to a soft twilight. The light flower beat in time with Snow's heart, a tangible promise of hope for the refugees waiting beyond the Door. Yet his mother's gaze held him fast, her eyes searching his, urging him to find not just the cure but the strength to forgive himself. The air was thick with the sweet, heady scent of moonflowers, their fragrance mingling with the earthy tang of dew-soaked grass, a reminder of the home he'd lost. Two paths pulled at him: one leading back to the world, to fight for the living, and one deeper into the past he'd fled, where healing might finally be found. The willows swayed gently, their branches trailing like mourners' veils, their rustle a soft whisper urging him to choose between duty and the peace he'd sought for a decade.

Choices:

- Return with the light flower. (Turn to page 30)
- Stay and seek forgiveness. (Turn to page 28)



THE BREAKING POINT

I was afraid to face you,” Snow whispered to Eve, his voice barely a breath, each word a confession of shame that had festered for years. She stepped closer, her storm-gray eyes softening, no longer cold but warm with a flicker of hope. Her hand brushed his cheek, the touch fleeting yet searing, a reminder of the bond they’d once shared, its warmth grounding him in the trial’s surreal chaos. “I was afraid you’d forgotten me,” she said, her voice trembling with a mix of hurt and longing, each syllable a thread pulling at the frayed edges of his heart. The flames that had roared around them faded, the village quieting, its cobbled streets gleaming under the crescent moon’s gentle glow. A light flower bloomed between them, its petals casting soft, radiant shadows across Eve’s face, its glow a beacon of possibility.

“Take it,” she urged, her eyes locked on his, fierce yet tender. “But come back this time.” Her words were both a plea and a challenge, stirring a deep longing within Snow—to rebuild what he’d lost, not just with Eve but with the man he’d hoped to become. The trial had stripped him bare, leaving him raw and vulnerable, but her touch was a lifeline, offering hope amidst the pain. The void pulsed around them, its edges sharp, the air heavy with the scent of ash and moonflowers, a reminder of the choices that had shaped him. The light flower was within reach, a promise of salvation, but so was the chance to linger, to mend the bond he’d broken, to face the fear that had driven him away all those years ago.

Choices:

- Take the light flower and promise to return. (Turn to page 30)
- Stay with Eve. (Turn to page 32)



THE BREAKING POINT

Snow's voice failed, trapped behind a wall of guilt and fear, his silence a heavy chain binding him to the moment. Eve's eyes hardened, the warmth in them fading to cold, unyielding steel, her gaze a mirror to the betrayal she felt. "You're still running," she said, her voice cutting through the silence like a whip, each word laced with pain and accusation. The village erupted in flames anew, their roar deafening, their heat searing Snow's skin, the air thick with the acrid stench of ash and burning timber. Eve vanished into the inferno, her form swallowed by the fire's relentless embrace, leaving only the echo of her words to haunt him.

A light flower rolled toward him, its petals stained with soot, its glow dim but persistent—the cure. The ground trembled beneath his boots, the void pulsing with a restless, almost sentient energy, as if the trial grew impatient with his indecision. Snow's chest ached, not from the heat but from the weight of his silence, the choice he'd made by saying nothing. The flames cast flickering shadows, their shapes twisting into the faces of those he'd lost—his mother's gentle smile, his father's proud stance, his friends' laughter—all distorted by the fire's cruel light. The air was heavy with the scent of blood and regret, the trial pulling him between two paths: to take the light flower and flee this pain, or to chase after Eve, to confront the wound he'd left unhealed, to face the truth of his cowardice that had cost him so much.

Choices:

- Take the light flower and flee. (Turn to page 26)
- Chase after Eve. (Turn to page 32)



THE BREAKING POINT

Snow lunged, his dagger flashing like a streak of moonlight, driven by a fury that had simmered for a decade, each movement a release of the rage that had defined him. The raider parried with impossible speed, his black armor absorbing the blows, drinking in the light, his cold, mocking laugh echoing through the void like a taunt from the past. Sparks flew with each clash of steel, the air crackling with the trial's restless energy, the scent of blood and metal sharp in Snow's nostrils. The fight was brutal, relentless, each strike a purging of the pain he'd carried since Lunaris Glade burned, each block a reminder of his mortal limits.

The raider's blade knocked Snow's dagger from his hand, the weapon clattering into the darkness, leaving him exposed, chest heaving, sweat stinging his eyes. The raider stepped back, a light flower blooming at Snow's feet, its radiant petals stark against the void's black. "Take it," he sneered, voice dripping with contempt, "or die here." Snow's body ached, bruises throbbing, blood seeping from shallow cuts, but the fire in his chest burned brighter than ever, fueled by the memory of screams, of flames, of the boy who'd vowed to be more. The light flower was his mission, his duty to the refugees, but the raider's taunt lingered, daring him to prove he was no longer the weak child who'd fled. The void pulsed, alive with the weight of his choice, the air thick with the promise of violence and the faint, lingering scent of ash from a village long gone.

Choices:

- Take the light flower and retreat. (Turn to page 26)
- Fight on without the flower. (Turn to page 34)



THE BREAKING POINT

Who are you?" Snow demanded, his voice steady despite the storm raging in his chest, each word a challenge to the figure before him. The raider paused, then reached up, removing his mask with deliberate slowness, the motion heavy with menace. Snow's breath caught as the face revealed was his own—older, crueler, etched with a hardness that chilled him to the core, eyes glinting with a ruthless edge. "I'm what you'll become if you keep running," the shadow smirked, his voice a low growl, both promise and threat, holding a light flower in his hand, its glowing petals casting harsh, unforgiving shadows across his twisted features—the cure.

The void crackled, the air electric with the trial's light, as if the very fabric of this place hinged on Snow's decision. The shadow's words stirred a fear deeper than any he'd faced—a fear of becoming this cold, unyielding version of himself, a man forged by avoidance and pain. The light flower was within reach, a lifeline for the refugees, its warmth a stark contrast to the cold dread pooling in his gut. Yet the shadow's presence was a warning, a glimpse of a future where survival came at the cost of his humanity. Snow's heart pounded, his mind racing, the scent of frost and stone sharp in his lungs, the trial's final test a razor's edge: to claim the flower and reject this dark fate, or to confront the darkness within, to face the potential for cruelty that lurked in his own soul.

Choices:

- Take the light flower and reject the future. (Turn to page 26)
- Face the shadow of himself. (Turn to page 36)



ENDING: THE SURVIVOR'S BURDEN

Snow stumbled from the Door, light flower clutched tight, its warmth a stark contrast to the Umbral Reach's biting wind. Jagged cliffs loomed, the moon casting cold light. His younger self's sobs echoed faintly, the trial's weight clinging like damp cloth. He descended to the refugee camp, tents sagging under despair. Healers crushed the flower, its mist banishing the Shadow Sickness—black veins faded, breaths steadied. Cheers swelled, voices calling him hero, hands reaching to touch their savior. Yet Snow felt hollow. Lunaris Glade's ghosts—his mother's smile, father's pride, Eve's eyes—haunted him, their absence a wound no flower could heal. The dead were unavenged, their voices whispering in his mind's quiet corners. By the campfire, he sat apart, the crescent moon mocking his grief. The flower saved lives, but his soul remained fractured, a survivor carrying the weight of those lost forever.

THE END



ENDING: THE SEEKER'S PEACE

Snow stared at the light flower, its radiant petals tempting yet cruel, a beacon of duty that promised salvation at the cost of his own peace. "No," he said, his voice steady, a quiet defiance that silenced the trial's insidious whispers. "I won't trade my peace for theirs." He turned from the flower, facing the shadows of his past—the boy, his family, the village—and let their weight wash over him, not as chains but as threads woven into his being. The Door of Echoes trembled, its silver sigils flaring brightly, then dimming to nothingness, as if acknowledging his choice with a final, solemn bow.

The void surged, swallowing the trial whole, its darkness enveloping Snow like a tide, but he didn't fight it. He closed his eyes, the screams of Lunaris Glade fading to the soft rustle of willow branches, their gentle sway a lullaby from a lost home. The flames cooled, their heat giving way to the tender touch of moonlight on his skin, the air sweet with the scent of moonflowers and dew. For the first time in a decade, he breathed without choking on ash, his chest rising with a peace he'd thought forever lost. Outside, the refugees waited, their eyes fixed on the Door, their hope pinned on a savior who would never emerge. The Shadow Sickness spread unchecked, a relentless tide claiming the camps, leaving only silence. Snow was gone, lost to the trial, but he'd found what the light flower could never grant: absolution. In the end, he was free—not from the past, but from its shackles, a soul at rest in the embrace of his own truth, forever bound to the memory of what was.

THE END



ENDING: THE HERO'S RETURN

Snow bent and lifted the light flower, its glowing petals warm in his palm, a tangible promise of hope that pulsed with life.

"I'll come back," he whispered—to Eve, to the boy, to the ghosts of Lunaris Glade, his voice steady with a vow he meant to keep. The trial dissolved in a flare of silver light, the void collapsing as the Door of Echoes spat him back into the Umbral Reach, its sigils fading to dull, lifeless stone. The air was sharp with frost, the cliffs looming like silent sentinels, but Snow's steps were sure, driven by a purpose he hadn't felt since the night his world burned.

He descended swiftly to the refugee camp, a patchwork of tattered tents and flickering hope, where survivors clung to life amidst despair. He handed the light flower to the healers, their hands trembling with awe as they crushed its petals, releasing a radiant mist that banished the Shadow Sickness. Blackened veins gave way to healthy flesh, the air filling with cries of relief, then joy. The camp erupted in celebration, voices rising in a chorus that drowned out the wind, hailing Snow as a hero, their savior. This time, he didn't turn away. That night, by the central fire, his new family waited: Jasper, strumming a triumphant chord on his lute, his grin infectious; Groupie, clapping Snow's shoulder with a gauntleted hand, laughter booming; Groupette, offering a quiet prayer, her eyes gleaming; Lucina, leaning on her bow, her rare smile warm; Davrin, nodding solemnly, glasses catching the firelight; Thimble, scampering with a tiny loaf, squeaking, "For the hero!"; and Amelia, pulling him into a hug, her warmth a balm to his scars. Their laughter washed over him, easing his guilt. Not whole, but home, Snow vowed to live for them and himself, a hero reborn in their love's glow.

THE END



ENDING: THE LOST SOUL

Snow couldn't leave. The boy's eyes, Eve's voice—they were roots sinking deep into the soil of memory, binding him to this place. "I'm staying," he said, his voice a surrender and a plea, trembling with the weight of a choice he couldn't undo. The village stilled, the flames freezing mid-dance, their heat fading to a gentle warmth that caressed his skin. The shadows softened into a perpetual twilight, the cobbled streets gleaming under a crescent moon that hung frozen in the sky, its light soft and eternal. Eve reached for him, her hand trembling, her storm-gray eyes filled with a quiet acceptance that broke his heart anew. "You don't have to run anymore," she said, her voice a whisper that carried the weight of their shared past, the boy nodding beside her, a faint smile breaking through his tears, his small form glowing with moonlight.

Snow sank to his knees, letting the past envelop him like a warm cradle, not a pyre. The light flower wilted, its petals fading into dust, unclaimed, as the Door of Echoes rumbled shut, its sigils darkening forever. Outside, the refugees waited in vain, their eyes fixed on the Door, their hope dwindling with each passing hour. The Shadow Sickness spread unchecked, a tide of darkness swallowing the camps, leaving despair in its wake. Snow didn't see it. He was lost to the memory, trapped in a Lunaris Glade that would never burn again, its streets alive with the laughter of his childhood, the warmth of his family, the love he'd thought lost. His guilt was his prison, but it was one he chose—a soul adrift, forever bound to what was, never to return to what could be, a ghost in a world that no longer needed him.

THE END



ENDING: THE WARRIOR'S DEFIANCE

Snow roared, hurling himself at the raider with a fury born of ten years' rage, his dagger a streak of silver slicing through the void's darkness. Each strike was a release of the pain he'd carried since Lunaris Glade burned, each clash of steel against black armor a defiance of the past that had broken him. Sparks flew like dying stars, the air thick with the scent of blood and metal, the trial's energy crackling with every blow. The raider laughed, parrying with contemptuous ease, his movements fluid, mocking, but Snow pressed on, relentless, driven by a fire that refused to be quenched. "You took everything," he snarled, voice raw, as he drove the dagger home, the blade finding flesh beneath the armor, blood seeping in a dark stain. The raider staggered, his laughter silenced, his form dissolving into the shadows, leaving only the echo of his taunt. The light flower withered away, its glow fading to nothing, lost in the void's black embrace. Pain lanced through Snow—his own wounds, deep and mortal, blood pooling beneath him, soaking the unseen ground. He sank to his knees, the Door of Echoes flaring briefly before fading to silence, its light spent. Outside, no cure came. The Shadow Sickness raged through the camps, claiming lives as Snow's faded, its darkness unyielding. Yet in his final breath, Snow smiled, his eyes fixed on the crescent moon lingering in his mind, its light a quiet witness to his end. He'd fought—not for survival, but for defiance, for the boy who'd watched his world burn and vowed to be more. His death was a hero's, unyielding, etched into the stone of the Umbral Reach as a legend whispered by those who remembered his name.

THE END



ENDING: THE SHADOW'S EMBRACE

Snow stared into his own eyes—older, colder, crueler, a version of himself forged by years of running from pain. “You’re me,” he said, his voice hollow, trembling with the weight of recognition. The shadowed version smirked, holding out a light flower, its glowing petals casting harsh, unforgiving shadows across his face, the cure’s radiance a stark contrast to his ruthless gaze. “I’m what you’ll become if you keep running,” he said, his voice a low growl, both promise and threat, each word a challenge to Snow’s fragile resolve. Snow reached out, not for the flower, but for the shadow, his hand trembling as it met the other’s, a jolt surging through him—darkness merging with light, guilt with resolve, fear with strength.

He became whole, but changed, his heart now beating with a ruthless determination that felt both foreign and inevitable, a cold fire kindling within. The light flower was his, its warmth a reminder of his mission, and the Door of Echoes spat him back into the world, its sigils flaring one final time before falling dark. He returned to the camp, light flower in hand, and the healers crushed its petals, releasing a radiant mist that restored the afflicted, banishing the Shadow Sickness. But the refugees shrank from his gaze, now sharp and unyielding, a predator’s stare that brooked no dissent. Snow saved them, yes, but as a tyrant, his will absolute, his mercy scarce, the camp thriving under a cold prosperity shadowed by fear. The shadow had won, and Snow embraced it, a savior cloaked in darkness, ruling over a world that feared the cure as much as the sickness, his victory a hollow echo of the boy he’d once been, lost to the ruthless man he’d become.

THE END