

OKUNOIN

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. GROUNDSKEEPER'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - LATE NIGHT

Opposite ends of a rickety wooden table: ICHIRO (15), and KOUSUKE (15). Two boys, groundskeepers, modestly dressed.

The home- a sturdy wooden shack, complimented by landscaping tools and the bare necessities.

SUPER: Mount Koya, Japan

The two take turns glancing up at a wall clock.

The tension mounts as the hands TICK closer and closer to-MIDNIGHT.

Ichiro and Kousuke bolt to a window overlooking the yard.

EXT. OKUNOIN CEMETERY, ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Across the yard in the boys' view: an ancient wooden bridge crossing a small river, leading deep into a dark forest.

INT. GROUNDSKEEPER'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The boys pine to look out...

ICHIRO
Nothing's happening.

KOUSUKE
It's only our first night on the job, let's just be patient.

ICHIRO
So much for the legend of Okunoin.

KOUSUKE
Maybe they're just shy- LOOK!

Kousuke shoves his face even closer to the pane.

EXT. OKUNOIN CEMETERY, ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

In the distance, across the old bridge: white, glowing humanoid shapes seep out from the ground, forming the silhouettes of humans and non-human figures. The spirits.

Simultaneously, two rows of stone lanterns illuminate, revealing the forest to be a winding, wide, singular stone path, lined by the lanterns, over-grown gravestones, and towering cedar trees. A cemetery.

INT. GROUNDSKEEPER'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Kousuke pulls back, brushing past Ichiro, bolting out.

EXT. OKUNOIN CEMETERY, ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Ichiro closing the distance, the two boys reach the bridge.

KOUSUKE

The bridge to the spirit world.

Ichiro regains his breath, and goes for a step- Kousuke stops him.

KOUSUKE (CONT'D)

We have to bow before crossing over.

ICHIRO

Oh, right.

Ichiro performs a sloppy bow, then crosses the bridge.

Kousuke takes a moment, lingering in his bow.

EXT. OKUNOIN CEMETERY - CONTINUOUS

The stone lanterns flicker, emitting a ghostly yellow.

Also lining the path- jizo bosatsu. Small, innocent stone statues, draped in red hats and bibs.

Walking down the ancient stone path, Kousuke weaves between the glowing figures of the spirits. Entranced.

Some remain still, some float about, some pay respects at gravestones, some MOAN softly and some LAUGH hauntingly.

Ichiro pays them no mind, he cannot see or hear them.

KOUSUKE

Aren't they captivating, Ichiro?

ICHIRO

You can see them? The wandering spirits?

Kousuke stops, turns to Ichiro. A pity behind his eyes.

KOUSUKE

They're all around us! Over to the right there, see the statue of the mother and her children?

Ichiro peers through the overgrowth.

On a stone pedestal sits a human-size stone statue of a mother, holding one child in her arms, and one at her feet. Underneath the three- a gravestone, too overgrown to read.

The mother and her children each wear a red bib, draped.

ICHIRO

I see it, she looks tired.

Kousuke walks towards the statue, Ichiro follows.

An illuminating figure, floating around the statue, stands and waves nicely to the boys. Two smaller, illuminating figures run around the altar area.

KOUSUKE

She's waving to us, Ichiro. Her children are running about, too.

Ichiro squints, focusing on all parts of the statue.

His eyes begin to well.

ICHIRO

I can feel them, but I can't see them, Kousuke. I want to see them.

His emotion overtakes him, face in his hands.

Kousuke wraps his arms around his friend.

KOUSUKE

Let's stay awhile and keep them company, okay?

Ichiro SNIFFLES, giving into his friend's embrace.

The two boys sit against the gravestone and the soft moss.

As they drift off, the faint LAUGHTER of children rings through the dark, haunting night.

FADE OUT.