“Forgiveness.” Carpenter scoffed at the word, the white branches of the forest’s husk crunching under his feet. He leaned on his walking stick, taking a deep look into the petrified brush. He scowled as the wind picked up around him, the trees clicking against each other. Sitting down, Carpenter reached into his bag and pulled out a chunk of wood. Pulling out a knife, he began to carve, glancing up occasionally.

“They dare approach me after all this time, after what they did to me.” Digging the knife into the oak, he roughed out the shape of a badger. Carpenter pushed his thumb into the base, his frustration growing. The ground under him began to blacken as all wildlife around him turned to ash and blew away. Taking a deep breath, he slowed his strokes. Keeping at it for a while, small flowers bloomed at his feet, a ring of green rippling out.

“They want forgiveness, for what they claim was out of their control,” Carpenter muttered, his carving growing wild. The ring of flowers stopped flowing outward, being choked by dead grass once more.

“Their blunder cost me my face, now I sit hiding behind a mask of Buloke!” Carpenter stood up, grabbed his walking stick by the foot, and swung it at the closest tree. An emerald axe head burst from the grip and glided through the tree with ease. He yelled in rage before noticing a wolf pup cowering in the brush.

“Apologies young one, my temper has failed me.” Crouching down he hoisted the tree onto his shoulder before dropping it down onto its stump. Emerald light burst out as the tree was healed. Turning his attention to the wolf, he approached the pup. The pup slowly approached him, watching the mask under Carpenter’s olive cloak. Crouching down, Carpenter had reached up and un-clipped his mask, laying it on the ground for the wolf. It lunged, biting down as it shook the mask. After watching a while, Carpenter sat on a log and took the badger in hand again. A pile of shavings had grown under his feet, the badger now smooth and refined. Glancing upwards, he noticed the wolf had stopped, now resting peacefully. He smiled, crouching down to stroke the pup’s neck.

“You always had a way with animals.” A woman said. In an instant, Carpenter swung around his walking stick as the axe ignited under the woman’s chin. The woman didn’t flinch, instead, she raised her eyebrow. Carpenter’s eyes narrowed. *A traveler? So far out here? No. Not possible.* He squinted, inspecting her features. *Untamed curly hair, coco skin. Wait, a fishhook?* Carpenter took a deep breath, his eyes widening as the potent scent of salt entered his nose. *No. NO! It’s her, of all the damned spirits it had to be her. Of all of them, WHY ANGLER!?*

Carpenter slid his hand up to the grip as he bent down for his mask

“Angler.” Carpenter reached up to put the mask back on, Angler grabbing his wrist. He tore his arm from her grip as he finished clipping the mask.

“Do not stop me.” he said in a bitter tone. Angler clenched her teeth.

“What happened to you?” she demanded. Leaning on the walking stick, Carpenter watched her intensely as emerald light bled from the mask’s single eyehole.

“Wouldn’t you like to know, ‘my love’.”

“Knock it off.”

“Make me.” Emerald light burst out. Blinking, Angler looked at the place where Carpenter once stood, now seeing a wooden statue of him instead. Searching in the distance, she spotted Carpenter's olive cloak fading into the trees. She growled, turning into water to make chase. Days passed, the forest now littered with wooden statues, leading to a small clearing as the two spirits stared each other down.

“What happened that day!” She yelled, her eyes glowing a faint purple. Carpenter raised his hand to his mask, his fingers following the grooves.

“Why does it matter to you,” he muttered, his knuckles turning white. “Why does it matter to you?! WHY DO YOU CARE SO MUCH ABOUT SOMEONE YOU LEFT TO ROT!” The wind ripped through the clearing, knocking Angler off balance. Grabbing her fishhook, she stabbed it into the ground. Looking up at Carpenter, his stance was wide, his hand clutching his mask as he leaned on his walking stick. The ground under him was black, bleeding out from his feet.

“LOOK AT ME NOW! AT THIS MASK! LOOK AT WHAT THEY DID TO ME! WHERE WERE YOU, ANGLER, WHEN I WAS SUFFERING?! WHEN I NEEDED YOU!?” His voice thundered throughout the area, wind blasting through. Angler’s fish hook was torn from the ground, tossing her backward. Angler crashed against a tree, falling to the ground. Everything went silent. Carpenter stared at Angler as she struggled to stand, horrified by what he had done. Getting to her feet, she clutched her side.

“I walked into Architect’s home, and found him dead.” She stated, breathing heavily.

“Blacksmith had a chunk missing from her side, Prospector’s ribs were shattered, and Stonemason was out cold. Your blood was everywhere.” Angler looked up, tears welling in her eyes.

“You were gone. I thought you died. I searched for days, months, years! I mourned your death, Carpenter. That is where I was.” She said, the tears now flowing down her face.

Dropping his walking stick Carpenter approached Angler, the grass turning green under his steps. He met her face to face, his arm shaking as he reached forward. Carpenter grabbed Angler's shoulder, her veins glowed emerald as her breathing eased.

“What did you...”

“I am bitter, not cruel.” He responded, beckoning her to follow. Angler’s mouth opened slightly, lifting to a smile as the two began to walk towards the woods again, the wildlife gaining a lush color.

“What happened that day?” she asked, grasping his hand. Carpenter froze, his hand twitching before he grabbed hers back.

“You, deserve to know.” He pulled over a log and the two sat down so Carpenter could tell his story.

As he finished Angler had noticed the shift in his voice, changing from resentful to trauma filled. She wanted to console him, melt his pain away, but she knew her love better than to try that. Reaching up, Angler placed a hand on the top of Carpenter’s hood, waiting. Many moments of silence passed before Carpenter nodded. Pulling it off, the hood slumped to Carpenter’s shoulders, revealing his short blonde hair as it caught in the breeze, the mask hugging his face. Angler studied Carpenter's mask, smiling.

“It’s been a century since I’ve seen your woodwork.” He glanced at her for a moment, looking back into the now lush forest.

“A simple wooden mask, that's all it is,” He said, placing a hand where a mouth would be. The glow of his eyes faded ever so slightly as he squinted, his hand clenching against the wood. Angler reached up, placing a hand on the clip of his mask. Carpenter quickly grabbed her hand.

“Carpenter, please.” He sat in silence, his grip tightening.

“You were and are my greatest love, why would I judge you now?” She asked. Carpenter’s hand twitched, releasing his grasp.

“You may remove it,” he said, nervously grabbing the strap of his bag. A click pierced the air as she unlocked the clasp, pulling the mask off. Half of his face was burned and shredded, twisted and contorted through rough age. Placing a hand on Carpenter’s face, she gently turned him to face her.

“Carpenter.” Angler placed the mask in Carpenter's hands, folding his fingers around it.

“You are as handsome as you were a century ago.” She leaned in, kissing him. Carpenter froze, blushing and turning away.

“As for this mask, I know you can do better.” She smiled, patting his hand. Carpenter looked at his mask, turning it in his hands. He rubbed his finger across the face, gently following the curve of the eyehole. Angler stood up, turning to face Carpenter as her legs dissipated to water.

“Please come back, someday. It's killed me every day you're not there.” With her final words, a plume of water shot into the sky, salt lingering in the air. He paused, left to silence once more. Instinctively he grabbed his mask and raised it to his face. As his nose touched the inside, he stopped, pulling it away from his face so he could look at it. He scanned the mask over and over, finding he was no longer satisfied with its simplistic design.

“You are correct Angler.” Dropping his mask to his lap, Carpenter began to draw a new design. Adding a mouth, He began to feel something he hadn’t felt in a century. Excitement. He kept drawing, adding another eyehole with a diamond shape. When he was finished, he smiled, proud of this new design.

“I can do better.” With that, Carpenter dug into the wood with his knife, starting with the mouth.