

OUT OF THE WOODS

Written by

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INT. SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICE/HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

ROSE (13), soaked to the bone in a gigantic tee shirt and hand-me-down jeans, whines and mutters to herself while she rocks back and forth on the floor of a darkened office hallway. Flashes of lightning outside offer the only light in the room.

EMERAUDE (mid-30s), a naturally beautiful woman with a constant look of worry plastered on her face, kneels beside Rose.

EMERAUDE

It's alright. No one's mad at you, sweetheart. But you have to calm down, okay?

ROSE

Home. Wanna go home.

Rose pulls at her hair and scratches at her skin while she repeats the words over and over again.

EMERAUDE

Rose, you have to stop that. You're going to hurt yourself. It's okay. You're safe.

Rose continues scratching and Emeraude finally reaches out and pulls her hands away from her. Rose SCREAMS. Emeraude snatches her hands back. Rose closes her arms tighter around herself and recites a new word like a mantra, over and over.

ROSE

Adam.

Emeraude sighs and hesitantly reaches into her messenger bag and pulls out a book. A fairy tale prince named ADAM (16) smiles out from the cover.

EMERAUDE

It's okay. Look. Adam's right here.

Rose stills. She cautiously looks up at Emeraude. Upon seeing the book, she hold out her hands. Emeraude gives her the book. Rose holds it to her chest as a child might hold a treasured stuffed animal.

DAVID (O.S.)

Em?

Emeraude looks up to see DAVID (mid-30s), her husband and a police officer, standing nearby.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Is she alright?

Emeraude nods and holds up a hand, gesturing for him to wait.

EMERAUDE
Rose?

Rose remains oblivious, already flipping through the pages of the book.

EMERAUDE (CONT'D)
Rose, I have to go talk to someone
for just a minute. Will you stay
here for me?

Rose scans the page before her, ignoring Emeraude. Emeraude sighs and stands up. She leads David around the corner onto an adjoining hallway a few feet away from where Rose sits.

INT. SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICE/CROSS HALL - CONTINUOUS

Emeraude and David step into the hallway, not straying far from the corner. Emeraude glances back at Rose one last time while David speaks to her.

DAVID
What did she say to you?

EMERAUDE
Not a thing. She's completely
nonverbal right now.

DAVID
We found empty pill bottles inside
her house. Prescriptions haven't
been filled in over a month.

Emeraude exhales heavily.

EMERAUDE
Figures. I told the state three
years ago I didn't like putting her
with the Masons. They don't know
how to deal with someone on the
spectrum.

She nods toward Rose.

EMERAUDE (CONT'D)
She's a good kid. She deserves a
family. A real home. Not this crap.

They both glance around the corner at the girl, engrossed in her book.

INT. SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICE/HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Rose's eyes scan the text, never missing a beat as she turns the page.

A hand reaches out and grabs Rose's arm, pulling her up off the ground. Prince ADAM, as in the same prince from the book's cover, stands before Rose in full fairy tale prince regalia. NOTE: Adam refers to Rose as ALYSSA throughout.

ADAM

Hurry.

ROSE

Adam. You came back.

ADAM

Of course. Heroic big brothers always have a daring escape plan. Now, mother and father are waiting. And you should never keep a King and a Queen waiting.

Adam holds his hand out to Rose.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Let's go home, Alyssa.

Rose smiles and takes his hand.

INT. SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICE/CROSS HALL - CONTINUOUS

Emeraude leans against the wall of the hallway.

EMERAUDE

She's been doing so well the past few years. And now, running away? Full nonverbal meltdowns?

DAVID

She'll get through this, Em. She's just about as stubborn and strong as you are.

Emeraude rolls her eyes. The sound of a heavy door GROANING on its hinges gives them both pause.

INT. SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICE/HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Emeraude glances around the corner to see an empty hall with Rose nowhere to be seen.

EMERAUDE

Rose?

She rushes into the hallway, looking around in confusion. David follows her. At the end of the hallway, a door leading to the outside HISSES as it closes. A flash of lightning outside reveals the treeline not far off in the distance.

EMERAUDE (CONT'D)

Oh my God.

EXT. THE SOUTHERN FOREST - DAY - **FAIRY TALE WORLD**

Rose now wears a dress fit for a princess, and tiara of thorns and flowers adorns her head. She sits on a fallen tree, reading her book. Adam stands nearby, fiddling with a compass.

ROSE

Was getting lost part of the plan,
too?

Adam scoffs.

ADAM

I am not lost. The Prince of the
Southern Forest Court always knows
where he is in his kingdom.

Adam stares at the compass for a moment, unsure. Rose laughs at him. She closes her book and walks over to him, taking the compass out of his hand, turning it upside down, and then handing it back. Adam looks embarrassed.

ADAM (CONT'D)

I knew that.

He puts the compass in his pocket. A faint voice calls out in the distance, words unintelligible.

ROSE

Did you hear that?

Adam shakes his head.

ADAM

Hear what?

EMERAUDE (O.S.)

Rose? Rose, where are you?

The reality around Rose shifts and flickers. The daylight flashes away to reveal Rose in her tee-shirt and jeans, soaked to the bone by the rain. She shivers, but the illusion of Adam's world snaps almost immediately back in place.

ADAM

Are you alright?

ROSE

Fine. I'm just not feeling well.

ADAM

Come on. You'll feel better once we get you home to the palace. Race you there?

Rose laughs.

ROSE

Only if you don't get us lost again.

Adam steps aside and holds an arm out, pointing in one direction deeper into the woods.

ADAM

By all means, lead the way, little sister.

Rose takes off running in the direction Adam has pointed her. He follows on her heels.

INT. EMERAUDE'S OFFICE - EVENING

Emeraude holds a cell phone to her ear. A moment later, she GROWLS in frustration and hangs up. David enters her office from the hallway outside.

DAVID

I tried calling in, but the storm is screwing with my phone and my radio. I couldn't get anybody.

EMERAUDE

No luck with my phone either.

Emeraude drops her phone roughly on her desk.

DAVID

Calm down. It's going to be alright. We found her earlier, we'll find her again.

EMERAUDE

This isn't the neighborhood park near the Masons. These woods go on for miles. She could be anywhere.

(beat)

Unless...

David approaches her.

DAVID

Unless what?

EMERAUDE

Home...

DAVID

Sorry?

Emeraude makes a beeline for her coat rack and pulls on her heavy rain jacket hanging there.

EMERAUDE

She had the book with her.

DAVID

What book?

Emeraude rushes around her office, grabbing a small messenger bag and a book off her shelf as she explains.

EMERAUDE

Her therapy book. We wrote it for her to help her learn communication skills.

She hands David her pristine copy of the same book Rose carries. David examines it with confusion.

DAVID

Hold on. You wrote a book.

She waves a hand at him and ignores his question.

EMERAUDE

The main character is basically a carbon copy of Rose.

DAVID

And what does that have to do with anything?

Emeraude reaches into her desk to bring out a flashlight and other supplies, which she stuffs into her bag as she talks.

EXT. THE SOUTHERN FOREST - DAY

Rose and Adam race through the forest.

EMERAUDE (V.O.)

Rose was having a complete mental break earlier. She didn't calm down until I gave her the book.

INTERCUT - EMERAUDE'S OFFICE/SOUTHERN FOREST

David follows Emeraude's movement with his eyes as she speaks.

EMERAUDE

Her medication gave her a tether in this reality, one that was broken when she went off of it. But she didn't necessarily need a tether in this reality.

Rose trips in the forest and Adam catches her. He then pushes her back down to get a head start. Rose laughs and jumps back up.

As Rose passes a tree, the illusion around her slips and she stumbles alone through the dark and rainy woods, reading the book.

EMERAUDE (V.O.)

She just needs a tether in a reality. Rose has been learning to act like Alyssa's character. She's gotten so attached to the book that, given her mental state, it's entirely possible she thinks that world is the real one.

INT. EMERAUDE'S OFFICE - EVENING (CONTINUOUS)

Emeraude stops pacing and stares at him.

DAVID

So, she thinks she's a fictional character in a magical world?

EMERAUDE

More or less.

DAVID

That's insane.

Emeraude snatches the book back and stuffs it into the over-filled satchel.

EMERAUDE

Rose was talking about going home. Which, in the book, means going to the river. And since I hiked these woods to write the book, she'll be able to read it like a map to get to the real one.

She grabs another flashlight out of her desk and tosses it to David.

EMERAUDE (CONT'D)

Hope you're ready for a hike.

EXT. THE SOUTHERN FOREST - AFTERNOON - **FAIRY TALE WORLD**

Rose and Adam slow to a jog in a small clearing of trees. They both lean against trees to catch their breath.

ADAM

Okay. Maybe the palace was a little further than I thought.

ROSE

You think?

Adam shoots her a good-natured glare, smirking. His grin fades almost immediately as he watches something over Rose's shoulder. He moves forward toward the tree Rose leans against, stalking silently through the forest debris.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Adam?

Adam holds a finger to his lips. He continues forward, his hand resting on the hilt of his sword.

With a battle cry, a man in a royal guard uniform (DANIEL, early 20s) jumps from behind a tree, his sword drawn and aimed at Adam.

Rose backs away quickly with a YELP, the book in her hands. She watches as Adam draws his own sword and duels with this attacker.

She takes another step backward and trips over a raised root, falling backward and hitting her head hard on the ground.

Rose sits up dizzily, her eyes unfocused as they watch the fight. Daniel dodges a blow from Adam and his sword slices across Adam's chest. Adam falls to his knees, gasping for breath. Rose SCREAMS.

EXT. FOREST - SUNSET

David and Emeraude trudge through the woods.

EMERAUDE

We have to find her before the book ends or she'll lose touch with all reality entirely.

A shrill SCREAM rings out through the woods. Rose's.

EMERAUDE (CONT'D)

And it sounds like she's getting there faster than I thought.

They double their speed and run toward the direction from which the scream came.

EXT. THE SOUTHERN FOREST - AFTERNOON - **FAIRY TALE WORLD**

Rose watches as the world around her flickers again. For a moment, Adam and Daniel disappear, and Rose sits alone in the clearing. Rain falls, thunder CRACKS overhead, and her teeshirt hangs off her shoulders in ripped shreds.

The next moment, the illusion resets, and Adam glares up at Daniel, who circles Adam with a cocky grin.

DANIEL

I'd heard about the Prince's legendary skill with a sword. Apparently, I was misinformed.

Adam glances over at Rose, who sobs nearby, blood dripping down the side of her head where she hit it. Adam winks weakly at her. Daniel raises his sword.

Adam strikes out like a cobra, slashing Daniel's legs and knocking him to the ground.

He jumps up, kicks Daniel in the face to knock him out, and then runs over to Rose. With one arm, he holds the deep wound on his chest.

ROSE
Are you okay?

Adam helps her stand, cringing.

ADAM
Fine. What about you?

She nods, disoriented.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Good. Come on. We have to go before
he wakes up.

Together, they run away, further into the woods.

EXT. FOREST - SUNSET

Emeraude and David jog into the clearing where Rose's scream has come from, but find no one. In the brush near a fallen log, a bright spot of color stands out against the damp twigs and leaves.

Emeraude bends down beside the log.

When she stands, she holds Rose's book in her hands.

EMERAUDE
David.

David comes to her side and looks down at the book in Emeraude's hands. Shock, sadness, and worry fight for dominance in Emeraude's expression, whereas helplessness wins out on David's face.

DAVID
You said she'd lose touch with all
reality if she finished. What
happens if she doesn't get the
chance to finish?

Pause.

EMERAUDE
We need to find her. Now.

DAVID
How?

EMERAUDE

Rose knows what Alyssa would do without having the book. She'll still keep going until she gets to the river, until she gets home.

DAVID

Are you sure?

EMERAUDE

I'm not sure of anything. But finding this means we're on the right track with the book idea, so I'm willing to go out on a limb.

She stuffs the waterlogged book into her bag.

EMERAUDE (CONT'D)

Come on. The river's not that much further.

They set off running deeper into the woods.

EXT. THE SOUTHERN FOREST - DUSK - **FAIRY TALE WORLD**

Rose runs alone through the forest. The shadows completely swallow the sun whole as dusk finally arrives. Her dress now hangs limply off of her, torn and dirty. Coughing, she comes to a stop and looks around frantically.

ROSE

Adam?

The illusion of Adam's world flashes back into reality for an extended length of time. Rose stands in her soaked clothes, shivering and scratching her arms. She twitches and pulls at her hair. After a moment, Adam's world surrounds her again.

Adam appears with his world, walking toward Rose.

ADAM

We have to keep moving, Liss.

He reaches out for her arm, but his hand just passes through her as if through a ghost. He glances around, confused, before his gaze lands on her hands. His voice ECHOES, murky and almost unintelligible.

ADAM (CONT'D)

You don't have the book.

She looks down at her empty hands and then back up at him, terrified.

ROSE

Home. I want to go home. You have to take me home.

ADAM

I can't. You have to go yourself. The river, Alyssa. Do you remember what I told you about the river?

Rose shakes her head and cries. She stutters her response.

ROSE

If you can find the river in the forest, you can find the palace.

Adam nods. When he speaks, he sounds like a broken record. His image itself becomes translucent as he fades away.

ADAM

Good. You have to get there by yourself. Alyssa --

Adam disappears, as does his entire reality. Rose stands alone in the pouring rain, sobbing.

She spins, looking at the woods around her. The trees all look the same. She stops and listens. The RUSHING WATER of river rapids splashes in the distance. Rose runs in the direction of the sound.

EXT. FOREST/RIVER BANK - NIGHT

Rose stumbles along through the woods. She trips over branches and other forest debris in her haste, but manages to remain upright. The world around her spins. She loses her footing tripping on a limb and falls forward.

The sound of RUSHING WATER roars loudly. Rose looks up and sees the river sparkling before her in the moonlight.

ROSE

Home.

A twig SNAPS behind her and she looks anxiously at the trees.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Adam?

More twigs BREAK and Rose edges away from the treeline. She whines and pulls at her hair again. Multiple distorted voices RING OUT from the woods, along with the RUSTLING of leaves and more BREAKING TWIGS.

Rose stands, backing up even more until her feet hit the river. She GROANS as the water soaks her sneakers, but she keeps moving.

She SHRIEKS at the woods incoherently.

DAVID (O.S.)

Rose?

EMERAUDE (O.S.)

Rose, sweetheart, it's okay! We're almost there!

Rose sobs and backs further into the river. The water reaches her knees now. David and Emeraude emerge from the trees on the river bank.

EMERAUDE (CONT'D)

Rose!

David starts toward the river, but Emeraude holds out an arm to stop him.

DAVID

What are you doing? That water's freezing.

EMERAUDE

And if you go in there and try to grab her, she's going to spiral even faster and then you could both slip and get hurt. There's a better way.

ROSE

Adam! Adam, help me!

Emeraude pulls her clean, dry copy of Rose's book from the bag on her shoulder and holds it up so that Rose can see.

EMERAUDE

He's right here, Rose. Just walk back over here and you can talk to him.

Rose glances at the opposite bank of the river. She struggles to form a complete sentence.

ROSE

Home. I want to go home.

Emeraude looks down at the book, seems to think for a moment, and then opens the book to a page near the end. David watches her in confusion.

DAVID
What are you doing?

EMERAUDE
Taking her home.

Emeraude clears her throat and then begins to read.

EMERADUE
"Adam had never been afraid of
death, and he wasn't in that moment
either. He was only worried..."

Her voice trails off into silence as Rose's fairy tale world rises around her again. Rose watches in awe as her dress is restored and the rain fades away to a perfect night.

ADAM (O.S.)
Well, I guess that's good news.

Rose looks up to see Adam standing on the opposite river bank, his face deathly white and one arm hanging limply at his side. She smiles through her tears.

ROSE
Adam. You came back.

ADAM
Of course. Heroic big brothers
always keep their promises.

ROSE
But I'm not home.

ADAM
Of course you are. And you got here
all by yourself.

Adam nods toward the river bank where Emeraude and David stand in the real world.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Look.

Rose turns around. On the bank stand Emeraude and David, adorned with the jewels and fine clothes of a King and Queen. Her family.

ROSE
But I was with them before.

ADAM
And now that your journey is done,
you'll always be with them.

ROSE

But... They're still the same
people they were before. So am I.

ADAM

Are you really?

He winks at her.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Don't worry. You'll get it one day.
For now, you should go home.

ROSE

But what about you? It's not home
without you. You have to come back.

ADAM

Not today. But that doesn't make
this goodbye, little sister. Just
until next time.

ROSE

When will that be?

ADAM

One day.

Adam winks across the river to the King and Queen, then disappears for good, and now, so does his world. Rose glances up at Emeraude and David on the bank, back in their normal clothing. Emeraude closes the book and smiles at Rose.

Emeraude hands the book to David and steps forward, wading into the river until she stands a few feet in front of Rose. She holds her hand out. Rose hesitates, but ultimately takes it, letting Emeraude lead her from the freezing water.

Emeraude leads Rose up onto the bank, where David takes off his jacket and drapes it over Rose's shoulders. Rose takes one last look at the opposite bank where Adam just stood and then looks up at David and Emeraude in turn.

ROSE

Home.

She lets her head fall onto Emeraude shoulder. Emeraude shares a smile with David before the three of them walk away from the river and out of the woods.

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