



**INT. BASH RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON**

ODRAN and OLIVIA talk over coffee. The TV is on the local news. Behind it, they watch MALLORY play in the back yard.

**OLIVIA**

I'm guessing things didn't go well at school. I thought maybe since Mal's a talker...

(sighing)

They'll get there. I bet Mal's at least excited about her birthday party.

**ODRAN**

We'll see.

**OLIVIA**

Are you kidding me? Odran, it's tonight!

**ODRAN**

I know, I know. I just didn't want to overload her with all this. Now she's going to have a birthday party with all these kids she didn't get along with...

**OLIVIA**

It'll be fine. Call it a surprise party. It's Romie O'Possum's! Who don't get excited about greasy tubes and plastic pizza?

**ODRAN**

(watching Mallory)

She has no idea how much of my sanity is in her hands.

**OLIVIA**

They never do. We didn't. But that's the thing, you know? It isn't their job. We're the dam. We operate the floodgates. Ease them into the chaos.

**ODRAN**

They don't deserve the trouble.



**OLIVIA**

Oh, yes they do. Life is all about trouble. If you ain't got trouble, you ain't got a life. It's not our job to stop it--it's coming anyway. I can't make Saki undeaf. I can't undo what those kids did. You can't undo what Phelim did.

(turning to Odran)

People gotta fix themselves. It's our job to be honest about it, that's all. Get 'em ready for it.

**ODRAN**

(stern, weary)

I can't lose another child, Olivia. I can't. I won't.

**EXT. BASH RESIDENCE - BACK YARD - MEANWHILE**

The wind picks up and darkness rolls in. MALLORY plays with her father's PORTRAIT, but is distracted, looking up at the treeline where she saw the Coyote Girl. Roots creep up from the ground and begin wrapping around the portrait.

The roots begin coiling around her hands.

**MALLORY**

Wha--

(as they snake her arms)

No-no-no!

She looks up and sees the Coyote Girl at the treeline with her hand against the ground. Mallory stumbles. A blur of ghostly green fireflies whir across her field of vision. The world gets fuzzy--she shakes it off. She tears the portrait away from the roots and rushes the Coyote Girl. The wind knocks her down, but she rolls back to her feet. ODRAN sees this and runs out, OLIVIA close behind.

**ODRAN**

Are you kidding me? Stop!

**MALLORY**

(turning back)

Did you NOT see the tree-whispering coyote girl? She tried to take the portrait!

**ODRAN**

This is getting ridiculous. Go say goodbye to Isaac and Saki.

(as she walks away)

And get ready. I'm taking you out to dinner for your birthday.

**OLIVIA**

Hey, Mal!



**MALLORY**

(grumbling)  
Hi, Missus Tsukino.

**OLIVIA**

Girl, I am thirty-five years old--I ain't no "missus" anything. You call me Olivia. Any good adventures lately?

**MALLORY**

Not with HIM around.

Olivia grins at Odran. Mallory tromps off.

**OLIVIA**

Coyote girl?

**ODRAN**

Yeah... Yeah, long story. I think I've seen that kid, too.

**OLIVIA**

Maybe she's onto something?

**ODRAN**

I can't afford to support her little inquisition.

**EXT. BASH RESIDENCE - FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS**

The wind blows heavy through the trees. MALLORY approaches the TSUKINO VAN. SAKI reads in the passenger seat, window down, and ISAAC sits in one of the captain chairs with the side door open.

**MALLORY**

You guys coming out tomorrow?

Saki buries her nose in her book.

**ISAAC**

Tomorrow's Halloween. Saki's mom is taking us trick-or-treating. Where would you even start? Do you know something the cops don't?

**MALLORY**

Pfft. Those numnut cops wouldn't know a clue if it turned itself in. I've got a lead. Some strange kid in a coyote mask has been lurking around my house lately.

This peaks Saki's attention. Mallory catches Saki looking at her in the side mirror. Saki looks back to her book.



**MALLORY**

She put her hand on the ground and summoned up these tree roots. I'm tellin' you this kid is magic. Something else is going on here--that kidnapper stuff is bogus. I think she controls a magic tree that my dad was looking for!

Saki rolls her eyes and ignores Mal. Isaac snickers.

**ISAAC**

(off Mal's glare)

I-I mean, you're messing around, right? Just to get us to go along.

**MALLORY**

Listen up, silk-sheets. Lying is for people too afraid or too stupid to just deal with it. I don't lie.

**ISAAC**

O-oh no, I didn't mean--

**MALLORY**

But go ahead, chicken out. Cram your head in the sand. You'd be dead weight thinking like that.

**ISAAC**

I'm sorry, I... Well why don't you just come trick-or-treating?

**MALLORY**

There's gonna be a hundred kids missing from the streets tomorrow night. So sure, you go on and beg for candy dressed like a dracula or whatever while your daddy watches to make sure you don't get snatched up.

(indicating the forest)

But if you wanna find them, meet me at the abandoned RV camp tonight. Ten o'clock.

She walks off.

**ISAAC**

(scoffing)

My father wouldn't--

(realizing)

Wait, I thought you said tomorr--

(she's gone)

...rrow.

OLIVIA rounds the house. Saki watches as Olivia waves goodbye to Mal and approaches the van. Mallory looks back at them as she ascends the porch and enters the house.

**ISAAC**

Do you think she'll actually find them?

Olivia enters the van.

**OLIVIA**

Hit that door, Isaac. You guys have a good chat with Mallory? I hope so, 'cause we're headed to Romie O'Possum for her birthday...

Saki is clearly not happy about this development.

**ISAAC**

What? Like, right now?

**OLIVIA**

Surprise!

**CUT TO BLACK**

ON MUSIC CUE: Baby, Baby - Amy Grant

**CUT TO:**

**INT. ROMIE O'POSSUM'S - EVENING**

MONTAGE:

1. Colorful tubes, ball pits, and arcade games litter the playscape. Everywhere--bright triangles, circles, waves, and pastel design; this is the most 90's place on Earth. Kids zip and dart and dive everywhere.

2. Two kids race through a large tube, rushing past its porthole windows.

3. A plastic cube room designed to look like a television set. A boy approaches the "screen" from inside the TV. He smiles with awe. In the background, another doofus boy in a tube vacantly licks a porthole window.

4. COMMANDER 4K and ROMIE O'POSSUM sign autographs and take photos with kids.

5. One kid stands at the top of a skeeball machine as another kid feeds him balls from the ground.

6. AMBER TAMLIN and her entourage collect tolls at the top of the zipline. Kids begrudgingly hand over their tickets.

7. An open pizza box. Grubby little hands snatch up gooey pizza slices until the box is no more than a greasy bog.

END MONTAGE.

MUSIC CUE: "Baby, Baby" fades to diageitic.

**DELMAR (O.S.)**

Why do I gotta be here?

**CONCESSION LINE**

The wind rages outside as MALLORY and ODRAN buy their tokens for the games. Behind them, DELMAR and his blue-skinned mother, DOLORES, bicker.

**DOLORES**

Hush.

**DELMAR**

None of these stupid kids even like me.

**DOLORES**

(wrenching his arm)

I said shut it! Maybe if you weren't such a mean little sh--



She looks up at Odran and Mallory, then composes herself.

**DOLORES**

(whispering, close)

I spent my entire childhood dodging kids like you.

(standing)

The irony is tragic.

Odran and Mal shoot each other looks: "Yikes."

OLIVIA waves them over from one of the tables where the adults are sitting. SAKI is sitting next to her, reading. Mallory breaks off from Odran.

**ODRAN**

Where are you going?

**MALLORY**

Hoops.

**ODRAN**

Don't you want to at least say hi to Olivia and Saki?

Mallory keeps walking. Odran sighs and joins the adults.

**TABLE**

Olivia introduces him to the group.

**OLIVIA**

Hey, old man. Everyone, this is Odran.

(beat)

Glad the birthday girl made it. You already know my husband Hirohoto,

(MORE)

OLIVIA (cont'd)  
 but this is Amber Tamlin's father,  
 Clarence, and...his other daughter,  
 Lexi--

**LEXI**  
 Girlfriend, but thank you!

**OLIVIA**  
 Oh, sorry, I thought--

**CLARENCE**  
 (proudly)  
 Happens all the time.

**OLIVIA**  
 This is Mark Aldo, Isaac's father.  
 (tongue-in-cheek)  
 Glad to see he could be present...

**MARK**  
 Well, I wouldn't dodge an  
 opportunity to meet the parents of  
 Isaac's friends.  
 (grinning at Miss Parker)  
 Never miss a PTA meeting.

**OLIVIA**  
 And this is Eve Parker.

**ODRAN**  
 Good to meet you. Which kid is  
 yours?

**MISS PARKER**  
 None of them. Or well, all of them,  
 I guess, haha. We do this as a  
 class every year. Mallory's already  
 the talk of the town, y'know.

**ODRAN**  
 I'm afraid to ask.

Odran sees Dolores look over at their table. She looks away,  
 but Odran finds himself staring.

**CLARENCE**  
 The blue family. That's Dolores and  
 her son Delmar. Don't worry about  
 staring--they draw attention to  
 themselves. The boy's got a bit of  
 a thing for my Amber, but she's  
 discerning, thank God.  
 (recovering)  
 Oh, it's not because...well,  
 gracious knows, that'd be awful of  
 us. No, he's a wretched little  
 creature. My Amber wouldn't dare  
 mix herself up with such a bully.



Olivia and Miss Parker simultaneously bark out a laugh.

**OLIVIA**

(clearing her throat)  
Ehem, sorry. Just had a--

**MISS PARKER**

Yeah, yeah, must be going around.

**ODRAN**

She's kind of rough on him.

**CLARENCE**

Oh, she's been like that as long as any of us can remember. Grumpy, distant. There was an old joke we used to tell, what was--oh! Why can't Delores get laid?  
(wait for it)  
She can't--

**CLARENCE / OLIVIA**

--take off her blue genes.

**OLIVIA**

(dismissive)  
Yeah yeah, I remember.

**CLARENCE**

Oh, and she used to write the WORST poetry--you remember that, Olivia?

**OLIVIA**

Mm, I remember you were friends back in the day.

**CLARENCE**

Yes, well. Thank God I found my way up, you know? Away from all that angsty high school nonsense...

Dolores and Clarence share an awkward glance as she isolates herself at another table. Clarence deflects, turning to Mark.

**CLARENCE**

(coy)  
So Mark, I sent a proposal to your secretary a few weeks ago. I'm sure it got lost in your correspondence, but maybe you, me, and Lexi could get together for dinner and...discuss?

Mark is distracted, eyeing Miss Parker.

**MARK**

The proposal?  
(MORE)



MARK (cont'd)  
 (realizing)  
 Right. Well, I saw it. I don't  
 usually go for, uh, joint  
 brokerage, but...

Mark glances at Lexi, reluctantly curious. Olivia and Miss Parker shoot an uncomfortable glance at each other.

**OLIVIA**  
 So where's my girl Mal?

**ODRAN**  
 (indicating the hoops)  
 Made a bee line.

**OLIVIA**  
 Saki, why don't you go say hi and  
 let the grown-ups chat for a bit.  
 (off Saki's eye roll)  
 Go on, now, git. It'll be good.

Saki hoists herself from the chair and trudges off.

### FREE THROW GAMES

MALLORY plays at a machine in the corner, sinking shot after shot. ISAAC approaches.

**ISAAC**  
 You don't look like you're having  
 much fun. It's your birthday!

She keeps shooting.

**MALLORY**  
 You coming tonight?

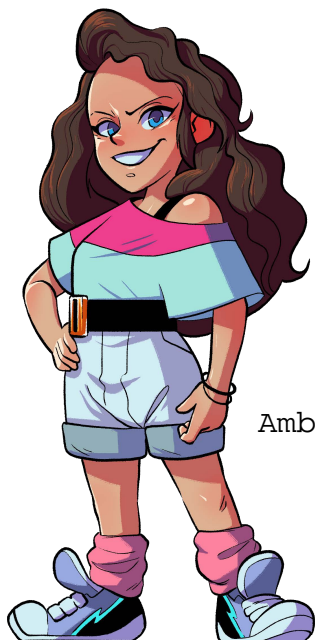
AMBER approaches, dressed like the Pink Power Ranger.

**AMBER**  
 I'm not used to being turned down,  
 you know. Especially for girls like  
 this plaid-clad garbage.  
 (dismissive)  
 Oh, and Saki. How many girls you  
 got now, Isaac? A ladies man just  
 like your dad.

Without thinking, Isaac turns and shoves Amber to the floor. Even HE'S surprised by his actions. DELMAR rushes up as Amber is getting to her feet.

**DELMAR**  
 I saw that, pennybags! Now you're  
 gonna--





**AMBER**

Shut it, Delmar!  
 (to Isaac)  
 Did you just SHOVE me?

**ISAAC**

Uh-mm, well, I--

**DELMAR**

I'll take care of this...

Amber pushes Delmar away as she slides up to Isaac.

**AMBER**

I kinda liked it.

**ISAAC**

UHHHH...

A BLUE FIST cold-cocks ISAAC and lays him out.

**AMBER**

DELMAR! You useless blue turd!  
 Ugh...

Amber storms off. Delmar stands over Isaac, rearing back for another blow. Mallory lunges toward Delmar, but a whack-a-mole MALLETT spins in and lays Delmar out next to Isaac. When Delmar looks up, SAKI stands over him.

**DELMAR**

All right, let's go, four-eyes!

Delmar jumps to his feet and the two scuffle. Delmar never lands a hit through Saki's martial dance. Mallory watches in awe. Delmar swings. Saki fluidly uses his own momentum against him and flips him over. He pounds the floor.

**MALLORY**

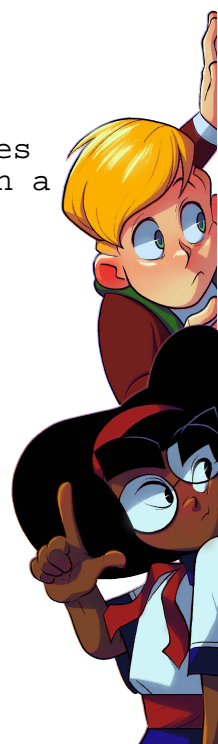
You have GOT to teach me that.  
 (to Delmar)  
 Get outta here, Blue. You don't  
 stand a chance against the MARTIAL  
 PROWESS that is sensei Saki  
 Tsukino, haha!

Delmar growls as he gets to his feet. He grunts, but makes the better call and slinks off toward the food court with a black eye for his trouble.

**MALLORY**

(to Saki)  
 You HAVE to come out with me  
 tonight. You and me, man, we could  
 END this Milk Carton Kid thing!

Saki approaches Isaac. She looks him dead in the eye and shoves him to the ground. Mallory scowls but, curious, refrains from stepping in.



**ISAAC**

(hurt)

I...I don't understand.

Saki motions him to stand up. He does, and she pushes him right back down. Mallory steps forward, but stops herself. She gets it. Isaac doesn't. Saki motions again.

**ISAAC**

You're just going to push me down again!

Saki holds out her hand to help him up. Isaac hesitates, but accepts the hand. She helps him up, and sure enough she shoves him again, but this time Isaac braces himself; he stumbles, but doesn't fall. Saki nods and walks away.

**MALLORY**

Figures. How about you, Isaac?

Isaac sighs and walks the other way.

**MALLORY**

Come on, guys! Really? I get nothing? ...Fine!

She turns back to shoot basketball.

**MALLORY**

I need FRIENDS, he says. Yeah, that's what I need--a mute and a flake. Whatever.

She shoots the ball, but misses.

**BALL PIT**

The ball pit is obscured in the shadowy reaches of the maze of tubes, enclosed by netting. Strangely, there are no kids present. ISAAC squeaks slowly, pathetically down the slide and stops at the bottom with his feet dangling in the pit. He picks up a ball and rolls it around in his hand.

**ISAAC**

Why would they want me around, anyway? I can't fight. I'm not some junior detective. No skills, no talent...I'm nothing.

(tossing the ball)

I'm my father, without the checkbook.

The balls beneath his feet rumble... He pulls his feet out quickly. Out of the pit rises--a GIRL!--with a great big smile and wild brown hair pulled back in a short puff of a ponytail. Isaac looks her up and down, baffled. Roller blades. Short shorts. A fanny pack. A t-shirt under a tank top. She looks to be about his age. She towers over him.

**WILD GIRL**

(melodramatic)

Useless! Boring! MILQUETOAST!

(dropping nose-to-nose)

Ah, but rich! A financier! Hm. Not good enough, eh? Daddy's little sadsack--the richest orphan in the world!

(sigh)

Just a sweater riding a ghost. Tell me, am I in the ballpit--eh, park?

Isaac is frozen with bewilderment.

**WILD GIRL**

Mm. You don't like your daddy because he's rich.

**ISAAC**

Who...

(clearing his head)

No! That's not true, I--

**WILD GIRL**

(chuckling)

Because his little black book is hanging in every phonebooth!

**ISAAC**

Hey! That's not...and how could you--

**WILD GIRL**

Because he doesn't pay any attention to you.

**ISAAC**

(indignant)

Who are you?

**WILD GIRL**

There it is!

(sidling up)

I know a place, you know. You know a place? I'm sure you do. But not like THIS place. Look at all these OLD people!

**ISAAC**

W-what place--

**WILD GIRL**

Ah-HA! Curious already--that's good. Sure, I'll show you the place. But you gotta meet me in a different place. Not this place--this place is too...place-y. Too many people here. Hmmmmmmmm.

(MORE)



WILD GIRL (cont'd)  
 Yesh. Yesh, I know just the place!  
 There's an RV in Brookwood  
 Forest--d'ya know it?

**ISAAC**

Well, I--

**WILD GIRL**

Smart boy! 'Course y'do! Ten  
 o'clock. Tonight. Don't be late or  
 the place might come looking for  
 YOU, and buddy...well, you don't  
 want that, let me tell ya. Best to  
 have the element of...

**ISAAC**

...of wh--

**WILD GIRL**

SURPRISE!

Isaac fumbles. Ava sees MALLORY approaching near them.

**WILD GIRL**

Whup, gotta go! Tonight, though--  
 Ten o'clock!

**ISAAC**

Who...ARE you?

She jams her hands into her hair and rubs like mad! Her hair  
 poofs up, rolling with static electricity.

**WILD GIRL**

Ava Baker!

She lunges forward and plants a kiss right on his mouth. The  
 static EXPLODES and fires Isaac right back up the slide,  
 like a bullet. She listens for him to hit the top...

**ISAAC (O.S.)**

Oof!

She nods approvingly and dives back into the pit--GONE. A  
 few kids surface in the pit and catch their breath. They  
 rush out of the ball pit in terror, nearly plowing straight  
 over MALLORY as she passes toward the restroom.

**MALLORY**

Yes, let's all TRAMPLE the birthday  
 girl!

She grumbles off.

#### **CONCESSION LINE - MEANWHILE**

ODRAN and OLIVIA watch MALLORY as she heads to the restroom.  
 They see SAKI sitting at a table reading and ISAAC stumbling



out of the hanging bags.

**ODRAN**

They aren't even playing together.  
I don't know if this is going to  
work out. Maybe I waited too long.

**OLIVIA**

I don't think you waited too long.  
But I do think you been lying too  
long.

**ODRAN**

I didn't mean for it to go on like  
this. I just wanted her to have a  
good father.

**OLIVIA**

She's got a good father.

**ODRAN**

She doesn't see me like that. I'm  
no adventurer. She wants to come  
from the guy in those stories, not  
some wary old man always telling  
her to settle down and be careful.  
She's so much like him--it's  
terrifying. Defiant, passionate,  
selfish, but...empathetic. Now  
that's definitely not something she  
got from him.

**OLIVIA**

This town hasn't forgotten, Odran.  
If you don't tell her the truth,  
someone else is gonna beat you to  
it. She deserves to know who her  
father was, for better or worse,  
and she deserves to hear it from  
the person that owes it to her.

Ahead in line is DELMAR and DOLORES. She chastises him, with  
an audience around pretending they can't hear it.

**DOLORES**

I shouldn't have brought you here.  
Look at you! A black eye, clothes a  
mess... You skipped school  
today--again--and now you want  
money for karate lessons? How  
stupid do you think I am? Well, I  
went to school and you keep playing  
hooky, so who's stupid? I went to  
school, suffered through their  
crap, too. You deal with it. I saw  
you flirting with that Tamlin girl.  
You think she wants to end up with  
somebody like this guy?

(MORE)

DOLORES (cont'd)  
 (indicating the cashier)  
 A thirty-something register jockey  
 at a possum arcade who brags about  
 knowing karate? It's tragic.

AMBER and CLARENCE stand in line a few people ahead. She busts out a chuckle. He smirks at the thought. Delmar stares at the ground, his eyes welling with tears. His fists are clenched and the pressure is coming to a head.

**DOLORES**

You'd better get your act together,  
 Delmar, or you'll have nothing, and  
 I'm not going to save you from it.  
 You better figure it out.

Delmar growls and shoves his mother. She stumbles.

**DELMAR**

Shut up! Just shut up! I hate you!  
 They can hear you, y'know! You  
 think I'm going back now? After you  
 shred me in front of all of them?  
 They already hated me, but you  
 gotta give 'em a good reason. You  
 messed up, ma, and now you gotta  
 deal with me.

(punctuating)

Well maybe not.

Delmar runs off. Thunder rolls outside. His mother brushes herself off. All are silent.

**DOLORES**

What are you all looking at?

(sotto)

"Why so blue?"

(laughing through tears)

You remember that? Yeah...

(beat)

You see what a little monster he  
 is. Yeah, well look at how they  
 treat each other. You see it. You  
 made it, y'know. You made them, and  
 they made him. So he's a monster.

(indicating Amber)

It's that little girl there.

(to Clarence)

And her father... I remember how  
 they treated you, too. Maybe you  
 forgot. I was there when you  
 finally...knew. When you couldn't  
 hide it anymore. They already  
 knew--they buried you for it, and  
 you came crawling, begging for the  
 scraps of their popularity. And  
 when it became fashionable, you

(MORE)



DOLORES (cont'd)

were just too eager to drink that milk and bathe in that honey. Well, it looks like you made it, Clarence. But what is this?

(indicating Lexi)

You think you're fooling anybody? What is this for, your job? Your family? They'll never let you be, y'know.

(to Lexi)

I bet he pays you real good to keep him straight.

(beat)

Look around, kiddos. They ain't any different from you. They just read a few more books. Got a little certificate. Got a little more jaded so they had an excuse. Don't put your hopes in them. The world is an ocean, and they're all straws.

She lumbers away and sits at a table, alone, chewing her thumb. A few kids in line hold their giggles, clearly thinking some freak just lost it. The crowd goes back to what they were doing.

**OLIVIA**

We don't always get a chance to make things right before it's too late. Before they become all the things we tried to teach them not to be.

(a thought occurs)

I said it wasn't our job to fix the world for them. I think maybe I was wrong. We're building it. Whether we know it or not, we're leaving something. Something for them to deal with. We set up the game and they gotta play it.

**RESTROOM**

The wind roars outside. The thunder rumbles deep. MALLORY washes her hands and face in the mirror. She takes a deep breath. Water starts to flood the sink as she grips the sides.

A cricket chirps...

**COYOTE GIRL (O.S.)**

(singing)

Little red bird, under a chair...  
Waiting for crumbs to fall...



**MALLORY**

(bewildered, wary)

Who's there? Hello?

Thin roots creep around the side of the mirror. They snake up around the frame. In the mirror, Mal sees the Coyote Girl behind her, with roots coiling around her arms. The roots spin up from the sink water and bind Mallory's arms. Thunder cracks and the lights flicker out. The cricket crawls up the side of the sink and into the water. Mal is tethered. Fireflies flicker across her vision.

**CUT TO BLACK**

A watery reflection waves by, like a green ribbon, rolling over the abyss.

**EXT. DARK GARDEN - NIGHT**

A long hollow stump wrapped in gnarled roots rests still in a dark wooded grove. Its well is filled with black water.

From the water, a small green glow rises. A firefly emerges and buzzes above, meeting a few others over the stump. MALLORY floats up to the surface, unconscious. Her eyes shoot open and she GASPS for air.

Above her, she sees the dark, deep blue sky and the silhouette of the forest canopy. The fireflies circle above. She tries to move her arm, but it's tethered to the well. She panics and struggles against the roots, until a FIGURE appears at her feet -- the Coyote Girl, EXODUS, in her Dark Garden form.

**MALLORY**

...Coyote Girl?

The figure's dramatic presence collapses as it leans playfully against the edge of the well and plops its chin into its mossy hand.

**EXODUS**

(cutesie)

I prefer Exodus, if you don't mind lies. If you do mind lies, call me whatever you like!

**MALLORY**

(weary)

What's going on? Where am I?

EXODUS grips the edges of the well and the root tethers fall away from Mallory. She reaches out a hand.

**EXODUS**

(mocking piety)

Congratulations, my child!

Mallory refuses the hand and climbs out herself.



**EXODUS**

(playful)

So...is this your first baptism?  
 It's my first time officiating, so  
 y'know, excuse the dizzying madness  
 of awakening. Still trying to--  
 (capturing a firefly)  
 --work the bugs out.

She releases the firefly. Mallory gazes at her mystic green surroundings in wonder.

**MALLORY**

How about those answers now? What  
 IS this place?  
 (inspecting her hand)  
 It feels weird here. Like a dream,  
 but...one of those super real ones.  
 More real than being awake.

**EXODUS**

We call it the Dark Garden. A  
 working title that just kinda  
 stuck. Seems fitting, though, don't  
 you think, Mallory Robin?

Mallory roams the area, inspecting her surroundings.

**MALLORY**

It's Bash. And how do you know my  
 name?

**EXODUS**

Oh, I know lots about you. I know  
 lots about lots of people.

Exodus looks at her reflection in the stump water. She spins her finger around in it, and her reflection cycles between her Dark Garden figure and her coyote-masked child figure from the real world.

**EXODUS**

The real question is WHY, don't you  
 think?

**MALLORY**

Stop asking me that. Of course I  
 think.

**EXODUS**

Y'think? Well it's an important  
 question. To think is to be and to  
 be is to think, so it's good to be  
 sure that you're thinking when  
 you're being. Most people don't  
 think, though, they just follow the  
 flow of being. Like a river. But  
 rivers empty into the sea, and the  
 (MORE)



EXODUS (cont'd)

sea empties into the sky, and the sky empties into space, and space empties into...OBLIVION.

**MALLORY**

Y'know, if it weren't for you, I'd be enjoying this place. Is this some kind of vision quest? I read about those in a book.

(suspicious)

...What's in those roots?

**EXODUS**

Tree stuff and brain magic.

**MALLORY**

Great. Does D.A.R.E. know what kind of operation you're running here? Why don't you just show me where the river is so I can get out of here?

**EXODUS**

Beware of unearned wisdom.

**MALLORY**

Okay... So what, then? Am I stuck here?

**EXODUS**

Maaaybe. But YOU'RE the sticky one. Not this place.

**MALLORY**

No more riddles! Just show me!

**EXODUS**

Don't say I didn't warn ya...

Exodus raises her arms and a dune of roots rolls up to lift she and Mallory through the trees. As they breach the canopy, the vault of the sky opens up; it's a massive dome of roots stretching miles up and out to the horizon all around--and then Mallory sees it: an enormous specter to the east, a shadow towering over all the Dark Garden, with eyes like milky glowing moons. A black pillar is obscured at its core, reaching from the ground all the way up through the tangle of roots in the firmament. They both gaze up, Exodus with reverence and comfort, Mallory with dread.

**MALLORY**

Oh no. OHHH no...h'oh boy. Nope. Nope, that's terrifying--aaand it's making me dizzy. I don't like things that LOOM. What IS that?

**EXODUS**

The Keeper. He protects the garden.



**MALLORY**

Cool. Okay. I'm ready to leave, now. Let's just--

**EXODUS**

Yeah, your dad didn't like him either.

**MALLORY**

WHAT?

**EXODUS**

Bye-bye.

Exodus's arms explode out in a mire of roots, pulling Mallory in, tethered face-to-face. Exodus licks Mallory's face.

**MALLORY**

NO, WAIT! Where's my dad?! You can't--

Exodus turns Mallory's back to the well, and dives with her into the water with a great SPLASH.

**INT. ROMIE O'POSSUM RESTROOM - CONTINUOUS**

The roots EXPLODE out of the water from the sink as MALLORY is blown back into consciousness and across the floor. Glass shatters from inside her backpack as she slams against the wall. She's soaked to the bone and gasping for breath. The lights are out and the room is dark. She retrieves her father's PORTRAIT from her backpack. It's broken again.

**MALLORY**

...Dad...

**DINING AREA - MEANWHILE**

The power is out. On a small stage, COMMANDER 4K gives an announcement. She is joined by ROMIE O'POSSUM.

**COMMANDER 4K**

We've been informed that the wind knocked out a transformer and the repairs will take some time, so we're shutting down early tonight. Our sincere apologies.

**ODRAN**

Where's Mallory?

MALLORY walks up, drenched and bewildered.

**ODRAN**

Good God, Mallory, you smell like a bog! What happened?

**MALLORY**

(vacantly)

A tree attacked me in the bathroom  
and a talking coyote told me dad  
was in a dream forest. Can we go  
home, now?

Olivia shoots Odran a look: "Get this kid some FRIENDS."

**ODRAN**

Yeah. Yeah, we have to leave now,  
anyway. Did you have a good  
birthday?

SAKI and ISAAC approach. Mallory doesn't say a word.

**ODRAN**

Okay, kiddo, time to go home.

