

ROMIE O'POSSUM'S PIZZA & CHILD CASINO - RESTROOM - MEANWHILE

MALLORY washes her hands and face in the mirror. She takes a deep breath. She grips the sides of the sink. The water starts to flood it. A cricket chirps...

Thin roots creep around the side of the mirror. They snake up around the frame. In the reflection, 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. The cricket crawls up the side of the sink and into the water. Mal is tethered, and the world goes dark.

FADE TO BLACK.

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

EXT. DARK GARDEN - PERPETUAL DUSK

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 from the water 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 over her watery bed. 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.

A short figure with a doggish face, made entirely of twisted--almost sculpted--tree matter. Tightly gnarled roots, with a long narrow snout, and a tuft of wild leaves forming its hair.

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

You're bound to a watery stump, and
 your first request is answers.
 Iiiinteresting... Don't you want
 out of that bug-infested pit?

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!

She helps Mallory out of the well.

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 surroundings
 in wonder. The world is mystic green, verdant and tranquil--
 a dusky, dreamy forest.

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

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 be. Most people don't think, though, they just follow the flow of being. Like a river. Rivers empty into the sea, though, and the sea empties into the sky, and the sky empties into space, and space empties into--
(melodramatic)
--OBLIVION.

MALLORY

Y'know, if it weren't for you, I'd be enjoying this place.

EXODUS

Don't you wanna know what's UP the river? At the top of the mountain?

MALLORY

I don't even know what you're talking about. I don't see any river around here.

EXODUS

'Course not. You gotta go through the forest first.

MALLORY

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! How do I get out
of here?!

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

EXODUS

Y'know, your dad was here.

MALLORY

WHAT?!

Exodus licks Mallory's face.

EXODUS

Bye-bye.

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

MATCH-CUT TO:

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.

EXODUS hides in a stall, head buried in her arms and knees,
listening.

Mallory retrieves her father's PORTRAIT from her back. It's
broken again.

MALLORY

...Dad...