

Oldswheel Manor

The moonless night seems to reflect the despair within Oldswheel manor. The wind howled and scoured the empty lawn. The ancient oak that lined the driveway that led to Oldswheel manor stood sulking, ready to collapse in the deadliest of night. The Victorian edifice stood in the timeless decay. Its weathered facade, adorned with gargoyles and grotesque carvings, seemed to leer at the unexpected passerby. Within the ivy-covered walls, young Leslie Petiweak held her head with her hands, looking through the tarnished, neglected window with a fragile soul adrift in a sea of sorrow. Her eyes, large and expressive, held a haunting sadness within them. Her face was a deathly pale shade and severely translucent, as if lit from within by a supernatural glow.

“Grandpa Oldswheel?” whispered Leslie without tearing her gaze from the driveway.

Silence

“Grandpa Oldswheel? Where might mother and father be?”

“Quite the sulking and the cries you foolish little girl! They ain’t coming back. Now make yourself useful and push me to the backyard. And stop looking so dull and lifeless just like your silly old mother.” spat Archibald Oldswheel with the most disgusting expression.

Obligingly, Leslie pushed him to the lonesome, forlorn backyard. In truth, Archibald Oldswheel never fancied a granddaughter, a grandson would be more beneficial than silly young girls. Besides, what good would they give you?

Leslie’s world has been shattered into countless pieces by the unexpected and untimely demise of her parents. The circumstance left her desolate, sorrow consumed her, leaving her an empty shell. Days turned into weeks as young Leslie absent mindedly wandered through the echoing halls of the old manor. Her footsteps were creating mournful dirges. Meals that were served to her were never touched but only stared at. But tonight was disparate, the relentless downpour of rain invaded Oldswheel manor, the full moon hid ominously behind the thick, turbulent clouds. Earsplitting thunderclaps could be heard every now and then. The tumultuous weather kept Leslie awake. Her reluctant body pulled her inexorably towards the door that opened inexplicably. Dolorously, she examines the unoccupied hall, always facing down, afraid of what might appear before her.

At the very end of the hallway, a forgotten chamber’s door stood in an eerie and macabre manner. Vulnerable and fragile Leslie walked through the door, not expecting to find anything. But she was wrong. A peculiar sight: a life sized doll sat facing the dressing table. The mirror reflected her cheerful face, leaving Leslie thrilled and amused. “Just for you, Ms.Petiweak -Sinistera” the tag read.

Intrigued by Sinistera’s menacing presence, Leslie began to spend more time with her, finding solace in the silent companionship. Their bonds deepened in time. She confided her secrets, her fears and her longing for her obliterated parents. Sinistera seem to listen, it’s vacant eyes seems to hold a bizarre understanding. The once solitary manor began to seem less desolate. The presence of the doll brought comfort to the pervasive ancient edifice. Meals were once again being consumed by little Ms. Petiweak and was always accompanied by

Sinistera and her plastic meal. In addition to this, grandpa Oldswheel, as savage and ruthless as he was, approved of the doll and even lectured Leslie in playing with her more often. This made Leslie even more blissful and ebullient. All she ever desired ever since the loss of nurture from her parents was for grandpa Oldswheel to care and protect her.

One January evening, in the very edge of Oldswheel manor, little Ms. Petiweak and her precious Sinistera sat in front of the crackling fireplace, keeping each other company and comforted, maintaining the warmth within the fireplace.

“How I wish mother and father had met you... they would have loved you so very dearly.”

While rummaging through old family photographs, Leslie stumbled upon a chilling image: her mother was holding Sinistera, next to her stood grandpa Oldswheel assembling her head and body. Underneath the photo was a caption that shot a shiver down Leslie’s weak spine. “Burn her” the caption read. The words echoed in her mind, a haunting reminder of a secret she never knew.

With convulsive hands, Leslie Petiweak convey Sinistera towards the flickering fireplace that caused grotesque shadows on all four sides of the walls. As the furious flames engulfed the doll, Leslie stood watching motionlessly, frozen to the frigid stone floor. A pang of guilt and sense of treachery flushed through her. Unconscious of what she has done, she flung herself on the bed and buried her malnourished head under the pervasive pillow.

That night, a chilling silence descended upon Oldswheel manor. Leslie, unable to sleep, crept out of bed and stole a quick glance at the fireplace. She was gone. Dismayed, she ran down to the kitchen, hoping to find grandpa Oldswheel, hoping for him to be awake, hoping to find the answer to her question.

But when the poor child arrived, the kitchen was a scene of chaos. Chairs overturned, the floor was sticky with a tang of metallic aroma. Sinistera was laying on the stone floor. Her face, porcelain, was twisted into a mask of pure evil. Her grotesque, distorted figure was covered in blood as if it had just performed some type of surgery that failed significantly. As Leslie scanned the kitchen, she realised that the back door was wide open. Her heart hammered her chest. She rushed outside. In the dim moonlight, all she could distinguish were two figures, their bodies partially buried in the backyard. As she approached, she recognised them: her parents. The horror that washed through the innocent child was indescribable. Sinistera, the doll she grew so attached to, had been a harbinger of death...

The once haunting manor now a place of unspeakable terror. Leslie Petiweak, a fragile soul caught in a web of deceit and darkness was left confronted by the horrifying truth: her parents had been victims of a sinister plot and she had unwittingly played a part in their demise. As these thoughts run through Leslie’s mind, grandpa Oldswheel, his entire face engulfed in a vicious grin, slowly rolls himself towards the scene.

By Poppy Lam

The Return

The pale light of the sun fades away as night falls. Moonshine cascades over the pine trees. Laughter could be heard from a mile away as the sun dipped down under the horizon. A dimly lit flame illuminates the campsite. As the sun's rays get dimmer and dimmer and the forest gets quieter, only the sound of Lilith and Weevil could be heard.

Lilith was not an ordinary person, she got kicked out of her house and pursued with her dream and passion to travel the world. Weevil, on the other hand, likes to stay put. He didn't like his parents that much and his friends either. As the duo shared their past experience and stories by the fire, Lilith felt sensation in the breeze.

"I feel like we're being watched," she gasped.

"Yeah, but it's nothin," Weevil replied.

The two have been reading about the cryptids of North America like the Bigfoot or the Mothman of Point Pleasant but this made them even more curious. An ear piercing howl shatters the calm. Lilith stood up to investigate. Weevil tried to stop her but she kept going. The forest compelled her, forcing her to investigate.

"As they say, curiosity killed the cat," Weevil sighed.

They crept deeper, closer to the heart of the forest, searching in any nook and cranny in the undergrowth for the source of the noise.

"There's nothing, let's get out of this place" Weevil whispered.

Lilith kept going on. Her curiosity got the better of her. An eerie silence washed over them. "Keep going, there must be something" commanded Lilith.

She stopped. An orange flame in the fog caught her eye. She got closer. There was a boy sitting around the fire. "Looks like the one from the book" said Lilith with the tint of excitement on her face.

"Yes so don't look at its fff..." Weevil stuttered.

It was too late. Lilith had made a crucial mistake. One that she would regret until her demise. The creature stared back with blank, hollow eyes. She froze as the boy transformed to a grotesquely, tall ghastly figure with disproportionate arms and razor sharp fangs. It Had a merciless mission and that was to kill.

Everything went in a flash, she heard ear piercing shrieks from the creature. She ran. Weevil's not far behind. She was running out of stamina. She needed to run more. Something

grabbed her ankle and pulled her into a hollowed out tree stump. It was Weevil. Footsteps got louder and louder as the creature came closer, tracking them like a homing missile. The creature was unstoppable Lilith limped to a rapidly flowing Stream. It got closer. Heart's pounding got more intense. There was no way out. She closed her eyes and waited. The creature ran past Weevil, who was still hiding in the tree stump. Gruelling seconds passed, Lilith thought about the grotesque creature- its fang and its claws - and how it would have used to tear her apart. Seconds past. She waited and waited. She opened her eyes, tears running down her face. She looked up. There was nothing. The creature took Weevil with it...

By Namor

Distant Memories of Death

I had finally woken up, my vision full of hazy lines. I looked around me as I searched for my name. The room was dim and damp; the floor and walls resembled dirty pads. Ashamed, I searched my mind for a memory. Anything.

Suddenly, a traumatic memory struck me. I could still remember the screams; I could still see the blood, and I could only hear someone frantically call my name. As I snapped out of the gruesome memory, I felt the walls shuffle closer to me. Breathing rapidly, I found a rusty door left open, so I immediately leapt through the door, grabbing the half broken purple amulet, my only remains of my family, out.

I came out, only to be met with a dirty and dusty hallway. The ceiling's automated lights briefly flashed on wherever I went, and my footsteps were as loud as a lawnmower. I could smell the faint scent of mould, and I couldn't help but cough as I quickened my pace. Now I could see doors along the sides of the hallway, so I went into one of the rooms. It looked like the same room I woke up in, except there was a surprisingly well furnished mirror. I stared at myself in disbelief; my long copper hair looked messy and dull, my crystal blue eyes had lost all spark, and my tall body was scrawny.

I quickly exited the room. Why don't I have my memories? Where was my family? Are they even alive? I was lost in the loop of thoughts when the hallway stopped at an iron door. Pushing my thoughts out of my mind, I opened the door.

I was instantly surrounded by darkness. As I adjusted my eyes to the darkness, I could have sworn I saw a figure stab a lady with the same copper hair I had, but before I could come any closer, the vision scattered away, only to be replaced by a newspaper about a slaughtered family. I skimmed through the papers, expecting a result, only to find that their two nine year old daughters, Liana and Christine Cavanaugh, were missing and presumed dead.

No way, I thought, one of the daughters looked like me and it matched the event I had, but I knew I was called Miracle, because I heard the name in my mother's final words as the attacker... I blinked my eyes, and I could only hear my own ragged breaths. Was that the figure I saw being stabbed? Gradually, I drifted into sleep.

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I jolted awake as I saw a flash and heard a tremendous BANG echo through the room. I immediately stood up with a start, looking at the window. The heavy rain poured down, each raindrop pounding at the ceiling.

All of a sudden, something caught my eyes. A mixture of distress and relief instantly flooded me. Chained to the wall, there was an unconscious girl with messy blonde hair, pale

skin, and a scrawny body. I simply could not imagine her like this. I blinked, partially wishing that the image would disappear, but the image remained there. This wasn't a nightmare after all. This was real.

Not even a second later, a gloved hand covered my mouth, smothering the possibility of screaming, held a dagger to my throat, and shoved me to the wall. His ice blue eyes pierced straight through me with his intense gaze; his pale skin matched his withering pale hair; and his tall yet lean body towered over me. With a bolt of fear, I realised I was facing the infamous serial killer who slaughtered my family: Mallory Blood. At the same time, I realised that the girl on the wall was in fact my sister.

His heavily scarred face curled into a twisted smile as he saw me struggling fruitlessly with his grip, "Well well well..." he snarled, " Looks like you finally woke up. Maybe it's time to find the other piece..."

Mallory suddenly lunged at me with full power. Time slowed down as I summoned all my strength to roll left. I barely managed to roll over as I sent Mallory charging into the wall, knocking him out cold.

I knew it would be a matter of time before Mallory would wake up again, so as fast as a cheetah, I loosened the rusty chains, releasing my sister, causing her to fall down. Luckily, I caught her just in time. I immediately grabbed the amulet and made sure my sister was okay. Her bright green eyes fluttered open as she softly mumbled, "Liana, I managed to call the ambulance, but nothing can stop our murderer unless..." Christine hesitated for a moment, "Try merging the amulets together and hopefully the paramedics arrive in time."

Christine lended me the delicate blue amulet, mirroring the other half of my amulet. I was pondering what would happen when I merged the amulets when I suddenly heard a croaky groan coming from the now empty chains. I glanced at the floor and glimpsed Mallory stirring from his sleep. I had no choice. I merged the two amulets together as I heard distant sirens ringing. I stared in astonishment as the amulet glowed indigo, getting brighter every second until I couldn't stand the brightness any longer. I barely managed to dive into the ground as a deafening shockwave erupted from the amulet, sending billions of tiny pieces scattering across the floor. I knew I was starting to black out. I fought my mind to stay awake for as long as possible. Just as I went into a blackout, I heard the iron door collapse with a THUD as I strained my ears, only to hear some hushed voices gradually getting louder...

By Emmali

Teddy

‘Lily, hurry up, you are going to be late for the first day of school!’ Lily’s mom’s voice echoed from downstairs. ‘Just a minute, coming!’ Shouted Lily while zipping up her brand new purple school bag after putting a petite teddy bear in it— It was not just her favourite toy, but a piece of solace that she could always sob into whenever depression has stricken in her naive heart of seven, Teddy, who is now laying inside Lily’s bag, peacefully, satisfied that Lily has decided to bring him after all, she has never been anywhere without Teddy. It has always been with her ever since she was born. It’s her inseparable shadow and keeper to all her secrets.

‘Lily!’ Mom was yelling now.

‘Ok Teddy we can do this, no pressure.’ Teddy slowly nodded his fluffy fur head inside the bag, avoiding not even a tiny single movement, being alive was the only secret that Lily had absolutely no idea about ... Even Teddy himself couldn’t explain it, maybe their bond was just too strong?

Lily had left the room, only a few hours ago. Teddy was sitting on Lily’s now plain white bed sheet, purple and flower patterns were a bit too childish-like for a 13 year-old teen. For the past 6 years, everything’s been changed a lot in Lily’s bedroom, the round window on the ceiling was still there, so is the wardrobe and the tiny desk that is now full of textbooks instead of toys. Teddy was now staring blankly at some haphazardly laying photographs of Lily and him on the bedside table. They have also grown a lot, well, mostly Lily. The latest photo they took was a few months ago in wonderland, where they both had a thrill. The small blond girl with pink fairy dress and clear aquamarine eyes was gone, instead, the girl in the picture was a lot taller now and with the end of her hair dyed into a deep shade of violet, she also wore makeups on her face, just to fit in with the other girls at school. At least she still got that heart-melting smile, Teddy thought bitterly, that guileless little girl was still fresh inside his mind, what if I can cry like a normal human-being? Teddy often wondered, being a toy without any physical expressions was not a great pleasure. ‘Beep’ a buzzing sound under the blanket pulled teddy back from his memories, the wave of shock almost made him fall off the bed—lily’s phone was flashing, ‘you have got a new message from Ash’ envy rose in him when he read the notification on the bright, half-broken phone screen. Ashely, was Lily’s new and only friend from school, despite the fact that Lily was trying so hard to fit in, she is, and has always been a shy girl with a fascinating mind. but people at school have never noticed her. Lily’s only friend was just Teddy, and she loved telling things to Teddy. But, that was before she met Ashely, ever since they started to hang out, Lily’s love for teddy seems to be fading, he knew that he should feel happy for Lily, but something about that girl has made Teddy dislike her...

It was nearly 1:00 in the afternoon. Teddy, who has been sitting stiffly on Lily’s bed for the entire morning, has decided to stretch a little before Lily finishes school. He hurriedly jumped off the bed, ‘ouch’ he groaned with great pain as he landed face down in an awkward position on the wooden floor. Another disadvantage for being small, he mumbled as he staggered

clumsily towards the grand wardrobe, carrying his half-failing right hand (Lily has chewed on it so many times in her sleep that the brown sewing was now extended to a stage where his hand start to fall off) he stopped instantly in front of his own reflection inside the mirror, shocked—it's been ages since he had seen his own reflection, the body in the mirror was almost unidentified by it's owner, teddy was now frailed and withered by ages cruel clutches, the once fluffy, brown fur was now turned into some shallow mess, his eyes were dull with



dirt covering it's edges, part of his nose was missing, leaving a blank space between his mouth. There were only one button that survived the 6 years, it used to be teddy's favourite thing about himself, turmoil of sorrow lingered in his eyes as he remembered the day Lily has become his best friend, he was a birthday gift from Lily's dad, who had died and suffered from heart diseases just a few weeks after Lily's first birthday. He also remembered telling Lily that he will always protect her, and to always be a strong girl, but of course Lily has no idea—she was simply too young to understand.

“Mom, I'm home—”

Teddy could hear Lily's voice down stairs, like a bell ringing, it's a sign for Teddy, he must go back now, the place where Lily has left him—the bed! he struggled as he pulled himself up, he can now hear the footsteps slowly coming closer, wait, he listened carefully, there is another person with Lily.

‘—Ashely,’ Lily slammed open the door as the two girls stormed in, one with blond hair and the other with dark brown hair, “This is my room, it's not the best but—”

"what is that?" Ashely was now pointing at Teddy, her face twisted with laughter, her sharp stare was making Teddy uncomfortable. ‘Oh, that's Teddy, my toy bear” Lily answered quietly, her face turning bright red. “Toy?! You still have these stupid stuffed animals sleeping with you? What a child!” Ashely's word was like a million sharp knife that is now cutting Teddy, piece by piece, the anger was boiling in him, come on, say something, Lily. He was desperate as he saw Lily standing numbly behind Ashley, shrouded by humiliation, she went completely rigid. Teddy soon caught a glimpse of tears rolling down her cheeks, her eyes now turning red. ‘Oh what a cry baby’ Ashely smirked at Lily's face after she stormed off the room laughing, holding her phone.

Lily collapsed in her bed, crying convulsively, thinking that everyone in her school was going to know about Teddy. ‘Oh why can't you just stay out of my sight, I am so foolish to keep a toy in my room, I am not three years old, I don't need you, Teddy, NOT anymore!’ Lily snapped at Teddy, for the first time, and probably the last. Amid the fury, she brusquely grabbed Teddy's arm and, unpredictably, threw him out of the window without looking twice. It was a regrettable mistake for Lily, but this is not the end yet, for the horror of vengeance has only just begun...

By Jenny

The Montauk Project

The silence was deafening, broken only on the soft hum of the lab's advanced technology, a stark contrast to the emptiness that surrounds you. A dull, extinguishing cloud was moving above the Lawrin's lab, no one could see it, but they all could feel it. The hallucinating white walls seemed to pulse with a strange energy, as the laboratory itself was alive and aware of your presence, a sentient of being watched by unseen eyes. Nine was moving towards the half-opened door that was leading to the rainbow room. Moving along the hallway in pure silence, her surroundings were reminiscent of a mental hospital, though it would be a mental hospital where no one could express themselves starting from their hair all the way to their shoes. They were all the same, except for the tattoo on everyone's right wrist representing the child's name in a number. Meanwhile there was a hairless boy in striped pyjamas walking by. Although he was holding papa's hand, the boy took a glance at Nine. His eyes were full of unease and fear as he was asking for help. With madness, Papa squeezed the boy's hand so he would turn his head back. Nine assumed he was in trouble. Curiosity fulfilled her, but she kept her legs moving since she couldn't turn back.

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"Well, well. Look who finally decided to join us. Someone's a sleepy head this morning." Stated Brady while the door to the rainbow room was opening. Nine couldn't get her attention off his wavy blonde hair and the sky, ocean eyes; though she slowly walked away. Ticking clock, rolling hall, footsteps. Carefully, Nine stopped by Eleven, and got engrossed in him manipulating a ball through a maze using telekinesis. As the timer on the wall above the rainbow ticked down, beads of sweat formed on the children's bald heads, each second feeling like an eternity. Not paying attention to Brady sliding behind her, she was staring at Seventeen trying to squish a coke bottle. As the man wearing a white suit approached, he respectfully put his hand on the girl's shoulder. Goosebumps running down her spine, teeth shaking non-stop. She was shivering from stress. Nine has never been so stressed in her life but the time she was taken away from her mother.

"Dr. Brenner is waiting for you outside, it's lesson time."

Brady whispered, patting her on the head and then letting her go.

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Taking a big breath, the girl made a brave step forward out of the rainbow room. As Nine opened the door, she saw Papa waiting for her, she nodded as the sign to say hello and so they went. As Nine walked beside Papa, suddenly, his hand seized with a forceful grip, his eyes blazed with anger, and his grasp conveying a fierce intensity that sent a jolt of fear through. Striding through the corridors, her dress billowed and danced around her legs. Taking the scene in front of her, Nine observed the deeply engrossed students in their training, their faces being a portrait of determination and focus. The practice rooms buzzed with activity as young minds honed their telekinesis skills. "Today you will be practising with Dr. Alla, Nine. Have fun"

They reached room '207', as Dr. Brenner led her in first and shut the door.

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The teacher wasn't there yet, so Nine decided to study in the practise room. The settling mirrors, the enigmatic atmosphere. Shadows twist ominously on the tile white walls, and the air crackles with another, worldly power as if reality itself was manipulated with unseen forces. The door opened. A cold breeze created chills on Nine's hands.

"Good morning Nine. Hope you're feeling alright today, We will start off with me drawing pictures and you will tell me what you see, but with your eyes closed"

Mumbled Dr. Alla while turning the machine on, that connects to the student's brain. The woman grabbed a yellow coloured crayon while moving her hair out and traced a circle with sticks sticking out of it.

"Now, tell me what you see."

"Ah... a sun?"

Nine attempted. She didn't even really care at this point, she was just frustrated with her cycle being the same every day. From the hour to the very second Nine knew everything during her day. Her fingers tapped repeatedly on the table, while a smirk appeared on her face. You could see the revenge she was planning in her closed eyes. During that in room '208', there was the same lesson happening just with Dr.Brenner and Eight.

"Okay. Now, how about you tell me what is happening in room two hundred and seven, huh?"

After this question, Eight was having unease on his very face, his face was empty, he was helpless, and lost in his thoughts,

"Take your time."

"She is looking very malevolent. Uh-oh, something bad happened. She is-uh.. blood. Dr.Alla-dead."

He didn't get to finish as, BANG! The door was knocked out, that put both of them unconscious...

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Time has flown by, Dr. Brenner woke up from his pass out. He had a crack on his head which was dripping with blood. Not waiting a minute, Papa got up and ran to the rainbow room. Running through that grisly laboratory felt like a nightmare, the air heave with the stench of death, every creek of the floorboard echoing like a haunting whisper of the past. The sight of bloodstains and the lifeless bodies sent chills down his body, each step further into the darkness intensifying the scene of dread and sinister that was gripping down his very being. He got to the room pushing the doors out of his way with an increased force, just to find more innocent dead souls, and Nine with her hand out pointed to the broken glass and a red hole that was covered in slimy veins looking like bloody spider legs.

"What have you done..."

Nine slowly turned around as her eyes and nose were bleeding non-stop, leaving unerasable spots. She kept staring.

"What have you done Nine." He shook his head in pure madness taking a look at his unalive 'children'

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE."

His words echoed leaving just the both of them on a 'graveyard' in pure silence...

By Kamila

The Withered Curse

Long ago there was a village, where people have lived in it for the past centuries. That village was surrounded by the woods leaving no light to pass through. Deep within the woods, it lies within a curse: souls of people whoever lived in the village would be kept locked, not being able to rest in peace. This was a never ending cycle, passing generations through generations. Young Raven Willow was taught all of that by her beloved Mother. Before passing away with cancer, when young Raven was only six years old. But now she is seven-teen years old, she never thought much about that story. Raven lived with her Father. In a small wooden house. Tragically, her father recently had also passed away with a heart attack. Leaving only her to now survive by herself.

One full moon, everyone in the village would be asleep by eight. The air was thick with despair, cries, coming from the unknown. The clouds darkening more as time passed by. Raven Willow wasn't asleep. Yet she was outside, standing in front of her door. Every night, Raven would always do this. It was like taking a fresh air whenever all the villagers were asleep. She never found or saw anything, just the wind passing by. This time, she couldn't help but feel someone or something, watching her. The sounds of the crows echoed throughout the village. "The wind has become more chilly than usual," Raven thought. Abruptly, an unnatural sound of a "CRASH" could be heard in the bushes. Raven became more overwhelmed; at this state she should just be going to sleep. But something held her on. Each step she took, the wooden floor creaked. Raven shifted her gaze, focusing them on one of the bushes where the sound had just been heard. Her brows frowned. A long, scrawny, yet utterly familiar figure, was just standing there, menacingly. Her thoughts were trying to figure it out, it was like solving a piece of puzzle, not until a melancholy cry rang along the village. Raven observed at it for much longer, eventually figuring out it was her father's spirit. She thought this was a sign, to see one of her family again. Raven didn't hesitate to composedly walk towards the spirit, hoping not to frighten it away. For some reason, as Raven walked closer, the figure seemed to be more far away than what she expected. Hoping to see her father one last time, it caused a total upheaval in her life. Raven soon realises that herself is now far away from the village, and in the middle of nowhere in the forest.

The village could not be seen anymore. All that Raven could see were just the fetid fogs floating around. Looking around, Raven seemed to notice the tenebrous tree seemed more alive. The branches looked like broken bones, wanting to reach out for her. Raven knew going back wouldn't help with anything, due to how everything was just trees. She started walking, instinctively pulled her arms in close, her shoulder hunched slightly. The breezy wind passing by. Raven appeared more anxious, every step she had taken didn't feel right. An unsettling stillness hung in the air. Every rustle of leaves made her feel as though something was lurking just beyond sight. Her skin Prickled with unease. Voices of anguish played in her ears like headphones. Some were pleading to help them, yet the others were chanting Raven's name. Walking further, Raven tried telling herself it all had to be a dream, clinging to hope that any moment she'd wake up from this nightmare. At that point, the spirits figure started to surround her. Just before taking another step, a deafening scream tore through the air. Almost causing Raven ears to burst. Raven's heart raced as she stood paralyzed, the spirit's hollow eyes looming like silent watchers. She clasped her hand together, standing perfectly still. Raven then noticed a paper-like object on the ground. Gathering her courage, she glanced upwards to the spirits again, before taking a tentative step forward. This time, they didn't make any single noise. It seemed to be an antiquated scroll, now that she got a closer look. Raven picked it up, the rough textures telling her how there was a deep sense of history behind it. A large weight was now on her back, due to the constant growing stares of the spirits. Hesitating, but with high hopes of returning to her home. She unfurled the scroll gently, revealing the intricate, faded letters saying. "Bind yourself to the shadowed tree. And the lost shall walk free."

Her stomach twisted, her muscles tight. Raven looked up to find both her parents' spirits floating right in front of her. A wave of grief washed over her upon seeing them. She wouldn't want to bear them to suffer, knowing she'll also be trapped here in this tormenting forest forever after she dies. Raven thought about her decision carefully, till a desperate wind rushed by, catching Raven by surprise. An echoing despair voice called out. "To end the curse, my life shall cease. I offer my soul, and grant them peace. In sacrifice, the chains shall break, and freed at last, the lost shall wake." The heavy voice repeated. Each time the wind got profusely intense. The souls rise from the ground. Raven's voice caught in her throat, glancing around nervously. With a shaky breath, her words barely above a whisper. The words tumbling out from her lips.

The air around Raven paused. The spirits hover in silence, as they begin to ascend. The gloomy forest transformed before her eyes, the shadows disappearing creating radiant beams to pass through. The fogs also lifted, revealing the village. The atmosphere felt more warm and brighter. Raven had a smile of happiness and sorrow. It wasn't long until the tree branches reached out for her, the ancient curse took hold binding her into the forest, her last memory would forever be her village. Safe and sound.

By Mud-Mee