

Forest of Words

by

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ACT I

FADE IN:

1 EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The TAYLOR FAMILY, consisting of NOAH (13), LILLI (9), EVELYN (39) and FRANK (42) are driving down a rocky country road in their minivan. It's pouring with rain and the windshield wipers are going at it like crazy. EVELYN is driving, while FRANK is trying to get the GPS to work. In the back seat, NOAH is wearing enormous headphones and watching a video of a guy playing video games (a parody of Minecraft) on his phone, possibly suffering a severe case of teenage angst and a default attitude of constant embarrassment. LILLI is watching the raindrops run down the window, excitedly following them with her eyes, fidgeting with her seat belt and hardly being able to keep her legs still.

LILLI

Come ooonnn, rain buddy, you got this!

Right before the raindrop, that LILLI is cheering for, reaches the bottom of the window, another raindrop quickly passes it, crossing the imaginary finish-line first.

LILLI

(to herself)

Aww, man. I was rooting for you.

NOAH takes his headphones off.

NOAH

Who are you talking to?

LILLI

Woah, you can hear me through these?

FRANK

(sarcastically)

I thought they were glued on.

LILLI

I'm talking to the racing raindrops.

NOAH rolls his eyes and puts his headphones back on.

FRANK

(to Evelyn)

I can't get this thing to work

(hits GPS)

The signal is so bad out here.

EVELYN  
 (confidently)  
 Honey, I lived here for 20 years, I  
 know where we're going.

Out of nowhere, the car rides over a particularly rocky part of the rural road, the ride climaxing in an ear-piercing motor-howl. The car doesn't move another inch.

FRANK  
 Well, good thing you know where we're  
 going because now we only have to  
 figure out how we're getting there.

NOAH groans.

LILLI  
 (chanting)  
 Adventure! Adventure! Adventure!

CUT TO:

2 EXT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - DAY

A tow truck is pulling the TAYLOR's car into the driveway of an old house.

LILLI  
 (disappointed)  
 Aww.

EVELYN  
 Don't worry sweetie, you'll get your  
 adventure soon enough. There's tons of  
 stuff to discover in Grandma's house.

NOAH  
 (sarcastically)  
 Oooh, moth balls and dusty old record-  
 players, how exciting.

FRANK  
 (poking fun)  
 I'm surprised you know what a record-  
 player is.

NOAH  
 Yes, young people equals dumb, we get  
 it, Dad.

FRANK falls silent, slightly insulted.

LILLI  
 (to Evelyn, leaning over the front  
 seats)  
 This is where you grew up?

EVELYN  
 Uh-huh, I was born and raised behind  
 these wooden walls.

NOAH  
 You were born in this house?

EVELYN  
 (proudly)  
 Yes, I was.

NOAH  
 Gross.

The DRIVER of the tow truck knocks on EVELYN's window. She rolls it down.

DRIVER  
 Well, here we are.  
 (to the kids)  
 Welcome to Abreless Acres. You'll love  
 it here.

EVELYN smiles at the driver and turns towards her kids in the backseat.

EVELYN  
 See, this is what we call rural  
 hospitality.

DRIVER  
 (smiling, putting his hand out to  
 Evelyn)  
 That'll be 120 dollars.

EVELYN's smile immediately fades.

3 INT. FRONT PORCH/ LIVING ROOM - DAY

EVELYN and FRANK are carrying cardboard boxes, stacked up so high that they cover their faces, into the house. LILLI excitedly speeds past them and bumps into FRANK, who trips and has to balance out the stacked boxes, almost dropping them all.

NOAH walks behind them, lacking any interest in the house and looking down at his phone.

LILLI

Can I go play outside? Where is my room? Can I jump on the couch? Is there an enchanted forest anywhere close?

EVELYN

(laughs, to Noah)

Noah, why don't you take your sister upstairs and check out my old bedroom.

NOAH

(lacking any enthusiasm)

Woo-hoo.

He lazily punches his fist into the air and walks past LILLI towards the stairs, without looking up from his phone. LILLI jumps up and down and follows him, making sure to touch everything in the room on her way upstairs while oo-ing and ahh-ing at everything.

EVELYN

(yelling up the stairs)

Oh! Do you guys wanna help clean out the attic later? I'm sure there's lots of awesome stuff for you to find.

LILLI

Yes, yes, yes!

(chanting)

Attic! Cleaning! Attic! Cleaning!

4 INT. EVELYN'S OLD ROOM - DAY

NOAH and LILLI enter EVELYN's old room. The walls are decorated with posters of 90's grunge and punk bands and the walls and bedsheets are covered in tacky 90's pop-art/shape patterns.

LILLI

Woow! Mom was so cool!

NOAH pulls up a poster on the floor that has fallen off the walls. It reveals a cheesy Backstreet-Boys boyband parody on the front.

NOAH

Emphasis on was.

FRANK enters the doorframe, trying to shove a spare mattress through the door. LILLI and NOAH move to the side and FRANK drops the mattress on the floor, causing a great stir of dust. Everyone coughs.

FRANK

There you go. Now there's room for both of you in here.

NOAH

I call dibs on the bed!

He jumps onto the bed, raising dust from the covers again.

FRANK

(to Lilli)

To the attic?

LILLI nods happily. FRANK squats down and LILLI climbs onto his back. She's heavier than he expected and he tries to suppress a groan.

LILLI

(raising her fist like a superhero)

To the attic!

They "fly" away.

5 INT. ATTIC - DAY

EVELYN and FRANK are packing things from the attic into boxes, while on the other side of the room, LILLI is unpacking those exact boxes again. FRANK picks up a photo-album.

FRANK

Wait a minute. Didn't I already put this away?

He turns around to see LILLI unpacking boxes again.

FRANK

Lilli! You can't take those things out of the boxes again! We'll never get finished this way.

LILLI

But this stuff is so awesome!

EVELYN

Sweetie, why don't you look through

the stuff in the corner over there and once you're finished, put it in an empty box.

LILLI

Will do!

LILLI goes over to a corner of the attic with an old, dusty bookshelf. She takes a quick look at the books in the shelf and throws the "boring" ones - philosophical books and classics like "Dante's Inferno", "The Odyssey" and "Journey to the center of the earth" into a box.

LILLI

(while going through books)

Boring. Boring. Lame.

(picks up a Russian copy of "Alice in Wonderland", written in cyrillic)

Don't know what that means.

(throws it away)

She notices an old book on the floor.

LILLI

Ooh!

She picks up the book and blows away the layer of dust on the cover. It reveals the title "Adventures in Sylubre".

LILLI

(reading the name)

Adventures in Sylubre. Ooh, adventure!

That's more up my alley.

(to EVELYN)

Mom, can I have this book?

LILLI shows the book to her mother, who looks at it in confusion and takes the book.

EVELYN

Oh. Oh no.

LILLI

What?

EVELYN

I think I borrowed this from the library like...25 years ago? I guess I never returned it.

She takes a closer look at the book.

EVELYN

Actually, I thought Dad took this with him when he left.

FRANK

A children's book?

EVELYN

(lost in her thoughts)

I don't know. It was there one day and then the next day it was gone, and Dad was gone as well. I guess I never bothered to look for it.

(Beat)

Anyway, no point in returning it to the library now, right? You can have it.

She gives the book back to LILLI.

LILLI

(whispering to Frank)

What happened to Grandpa?

FRANK

Your Mom doesn't like to talk about it. He left her family one day and never came back. It's better for all of us if you don't ask her about it.

LILLI

Oh...okay.

LILLI traces the letters of the book title with her fingers and for a brief moment, it looks like they're glowing a little.



ACT II

6 INT. EVELYN'S OLD ROOM - NIGHT

NOAH and LILLI are lying in bed/on the mattress, in their pajamas.

LILLI

(sighs)

I wish we could live here. This house is so cool and mysterious.

NOAH

It's just old. Old places are always mysterious. I prefer our home, where we have warm water and a working Internet connection. I've already used up all my data for this month and there's nothing to do here.

LILLI

(holds up the book)

You could read a book.

NOAH

(shrugs)

Eh. Pass.

NOAH turns off the light and puts his headphones on, turning his back to LILLI.

NOAH

(mumbles)

Good night.

LILLI

Good night.

LILLI sneaks under her covers and pulls out a flashlight. She opens the book.

The first page reads:

WARNING! ARE YOU SURE YOU ARE READY TO ENTER THE MAGICAL WORLD OF SYLUBRE? CONTINUE READING AT YOUR OWN RISK.

LILLI thinks for a second, then turns over the page.

LILLI

(whispering, reading)

Once upon a time in the enchanted

river of Sylubre...

Suddenly, a blinding ray of light emerges from the pages of the book and "swallows" LILLI.

We can see her blanket light up like a light bulb and - in the next moment - the blanket collapses and falls flat on the mattress. It goes dark in the room again. NOAH responds with loud snoring; sound asleep.

7 EXT. ENCHANTED RIVER - DAY

With her eyes closed, seemingly unconscious, LILLI is submerged in water and slowly floats along the stream of a deep, greenish-blue river. Behind her, a KELPIE (a shapeshifting water spirit, usually appearing in the shape of a horse, with wet, never-drying fur and a dripping mane) dives into the water and bites LILLI's pajama top, dragging her to the surface.

The Kelpie (EZRA) and a gigantic bald eagle (ADLER) are looking down on LILLI. While the Kelpie appears rather youthful, oozing with adolescent naiveté, the eagle is tall and ominous, giving off a sense of authority.

EZRA  
Is she...dead?

They inspect her for a second. ADLER carefully taps her chest with one of his giant claws. LILLI starts coughing up water and slowly opens her eyes.

POV OF LILLI LOOKING UP AND INTO THE FACES OF EZRA AND ADLER, WHO STARE DOWN AT HER.

LILLI  
(screaming)  
AHHH!

EZRA AND ADLER  
AHHHH!

LILLI backs away from the two, crawling away in a spider-like motion.

LILLI  
(terrified)  
Who are you?!

EZRA  
I could ask you the same question!

ADLER  
 (wisely)  
 Introduce yourself, human child.

ADLER speaks with a British accent à la Ian McKellen.

LILLI  
 I'm -  
 (hesitates)  
 I'm Lilli.

ADLER  
 It's a pleasure to meet you, Lilli. My  
 name is Adler, and this is Ezra.

ADLER points to EZRA.

EZRA  
 Hiya.

LILLI  
 H-hi.

EZRA  
 Welcome to Sylubre.

LILLI  
 (confused)  
 Sylubre? Like in the book?

EZRA  
 Exactly like in the book.

LILLI  
 What does that mean?

EZRA  
 It's...the book. You're in the book.  
 (under his breath)  
 Thought I made that obvious...

ADLER reaches out a claw to help LILLI get up. She hesitantly and carefully takes the claw, her finger only being big enough to grab a tiny piece of it. She pulls herself up, back on her feet.

LILLI looks around in wonder. They're on the riverbank of the enchanted river, with a beautiful mountain range in the background and a trail that seems to lead into a mysterious forest. The riverbank is surrounded with frogs quacking and huge dragonflies swirling around their heads.

Tall shrubs of reed surround the river and, looking closely, tiny fairies seem to live in there.

LILLI

(taken aback by her surroundings)

Woah...

(she brings her attention back to  
Ezra and Adler)

Wait. So you guys know that you're in  
a book?

EZRA

(brushes it off like it's obvious)

Yeah. Why wouldn't we?

LILLI

I - I don't know. I just thought you  
might... never mind.

They sit around in awkward silence.

EZRA

So, uhhh. What do we do now?

ADLER

Perhaps you might be interested in  
exploring the world?

LILLI

Yes, oh, yes please! World Tour!!!

LILLI jumps up and down in excitement. But then, she remembers her family in the real world.

LILLI

Oh, but. I'll have to get back to my  
family in time, before they notice  
that I'm gone.

EZRA

Tell you what. How I about we bring  
you to King Atlas and give you a  
little tour of Sylubre along the way?

LILLI

Who is King Atlas?

EZRA

He will help you get back home, silly.

ADLER

Yes. Then it shall be that way. Follow me, child.

They start walking towards the mysterious forest. We see them walk away into the distance, their backs turned towards us.

LILLI

(to Adler)

You don't have to call me "child", you know? You can just call me by my name.

ADLER

Yes, of course-  
(brooding over it)  
umm...

LILLI

(realizing)

You forgot my name, haven't you?

ADLER

What? No, of course not, uhh...  
(still trying to remember her name)

EZRA

(leans over to Adler, whispers)

Lilli.

ADLER

Lilli! Yes, indeed. Lilli of the humans.  
(quietly, to himself)  
I knew that...

8 INT. EVELYN'S OLD ROOM - MORNING

FRANK switches on the light in the old bedroom.

FRANK

Rise and shine, sleepy-  
(he notices that Lilli isn't in her bed)  
- heads... where is your sister?

NOAH rubs his eyes and yawns, then looks over to the mattress.

NOAH

I don't know. Not here.

He rolls over again and tries to continue sleeping. FRANK walks over to the window and opens the curtains, shining the sunlight directly into NOAH's face. NOAH groans.

FRANK  
She's not downstairs, either.

NOAH  
She's probably hiding somewhere or searching the attic for more boring books.

FRANK  
Huh. Yeah, probably. I'll go look for her.

NOAH pulls his blanket over his head, but FRANK instantly pulls the blanket completely off the bed.

FRANK  
(serious)  
Get up.

9 EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF MYSTERY FOREST - DAY

ADLER, EZRA and LILLI are walking up to the entrance of the mystical forest, guarded by giant sequoia trees, closed off by their branches.

LILLI  
(bubbly, quickly shoots questions at ADLER)  
Can you fly?

ADLER  
(calmly, just slightly annoyed)  
No.

LILLI  
Why not?

ADLER  
I just can't.

LILLI  
What happened?

ADLER  
Nothing.

LILLI  
Were you ever able to?

ADLER  
No.

LILLI  
How tall are those trees?

ADLER  
Very.

LILLI  
(looking up, as if ADLER said an  
actual number)  
Woow!

They come to a halt.

EZRA  
(sighs)  
Welp, this is it for me.

LILLI  
Wait, are you not coming with us?

EZRA  
I can't. My part of the story ends  
here.

LILLI  
What do you mean?

ADLER  
We are characters in a book. Our  
purpose is to serve a story and the  
story must always move forward, come  
what may.

EZRA  
I'm a water spirit. I have no place in  
a forest.

LILLI is visibly disappointed.

LILLI  
Will I ever see you again?

EZRA  
If the story wants it that way.

LILLI

How do I know what the story wants?

ADLER

That's the secret, little human. You don't.

LILLI sadly hugs EZRA goodbye. The look on EZRA's face shows sadness, but also a hint of guilt.

EZRA lifts up a hoof to wave LILLI and ADLER goodbye, as they enter the mystical forest.

The branches of the trees lift up like arms and let them go through, closing again behind them.



ACT III

10 EXT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - DAY

The whole TAYLOR FAMILY is walking around the estate, searching for LILLI.

EVELYN AND FRANK

(shouting)

Lilli! Lilli! Where are you? Lilli!

NOAH

(yelling, genuinely concerned)

Lilli! Where are you, you hobgoblin?

FRANK

(to Noah)

Are you sure she didn't leave the room at night?

NOAH

(nervous, stammering)

I- I don't know, I had my headphones in. I don't know.

EVELYN

Okay, that's it. I'm calling the police.

EVELYN stomps into the house, determined to find her daughter.

CLOSE-UP OF NOAH'S FACE, WHO, FOR THE FIRST TIME, IS IN DISTRESS AND SHOWS GENUINE CONCERN FOR HIS SISTER, BUT ALSO A HINT OF GUILT FOR NOT NOTICING HER LEAVING.

11 EXT. MYSTERY FOREST - DAY

LILLI watches her surroundings in awe, taking in the mystical beauty of the forest. It's pretty and colorful and glittery, but it has a kind of menacing, creepy aura surrounding it.

The same dragonflies and fairies that were buzzing around the riverbank are also present in this forest.

LILLI

Woah, this place is amazing! I can't believe I've never heard of this world before. I mean, look at the way it draws you in, it-

(hesitates)

Well it takes...umm..  
(thinks again)  
Wait, how did I get here again?

ADLER  
You don't remember?

LILLI  
No, I - uh - I don't. I know that I  
found this book in my grandma's attic  
and then the next thing I remember is  
seeing you guys' faces.

ADLER  
You came here through the river.

LILLI stays silent, intensely thinking about something.  
Finally:

LILLI  
How long have I been here?

ADLER shrugs his shoulders.

ADLER  
Could be an hour. Could be a day, or a  
week.

LILLI  
A week?!

ADLER  
Yes. No-one knows exactly how time  
works in this world. You lose all  
sense of it after a while.

LILLI doesn't say anything, but suddenly, she looks at the  
forest with different eyes: suspicious, more carefully...

We hear two voices coming from inside the forest. It sounds  
like an old couple, arguing and complaining, accompanied with  
the sound of splashing water.

MALE VOICE  
(off-screen, distant)  
I told you we should have moved to the  
desert drive ages ago! If this keeps  
happening, we won't have anything left  
to take with us!

FEMALE VOICE

(off-screen, distant)

I like it here! How do you imagine living in the desert, exactly? Have you thought this through in any way? Besides, this place is great, it's only her who keeps giving us trouble!

LILLI

(to Adler)

What's that?

ADLER

Sounds like someone's in a bit of a tight squeeze.

LILLI

(gasps)

What if they need our help?

ADLER

Maybe we should -

Before ADLER can finish his sentence, LILLI has already run off into the woods. ADLER sighs, then follows into the woods.

12 INT. GRANDMA'S KITCHEN - EVENING

A POLICE OFFICER, FRANK and EVELYN are sitting around the kitchen table. NOAH is sitting on the stairs, eaves-dropping.

EVELYN

(in distress)

She's never done this! Usually, when she's off to one of her adventures, she at least tells us where she's going.

POLICE OFFICER

What do your daughter's "adventures" usually look like?

FRANK

She likes to play in the woods, in the rain, pretty much anything that involves being outside.

POLICE OFFICER

(completely serious, noting something down)

Have you checked outside yet?

FRANK and EVELYN look at him with a "are you serious right now?"-look. The POLICE OFFICER looks up from his notes and notices their stares. He immediately feels uncomfortable.

POLICE OFFICER  
Sorry. Routine questions.

FRANK pats EVELYN's back.

POLICE OFFICER  
Well, it's good that you called us immediately. Usually, the best chances to find a child are within the first 12 hours of it going missing.

FRANK and EVELYN nod, understandingly.

EVELYN  
So, you'll find her?

POLICE OFFICER  
Well, I don't want to worry you, but the number of people who go missing in this town is unusually high.

EVELYN shrieks and buries her face in her hands.

FRANK  
(upset, angrily)  
That is an extremely worrying thing to say!

NOAH has been listening to this conversation the whole time. His eyes widen as he hears the POLICE OFFICER say this. He pulls up his phone and tries to google (search for) "Abreless Acres Missing Person" but the search doesn't go through because there is not internet connection. NOAH silently curses the old house with its bad signal.

POLICE OFFICER  
Well, here's the thing: most of them turn up again sooner or later on their own.

EVELYN looks up from her hands.

EVELYN  
(angrily)  
So you're basically saying that the police haven't managed to find any of them and people just had to wait for

them to return on their own?

The POLICE OFFICER shrugs his shoulders.

POLICE OFFICER

I'm sorry, Ma'am, we're doing our best here. You know, sometimes people just don't want to be found.

EVELYN

Get out of my house.

POLICE OFFICER

Huh?

EVELYN

(yelling)

I said GET OUT!

The POLICE OFFICER flinches and backs away from EVELYN on his chair.

NOAH sighs and tries to think of something to do. He tries to get a glance at his family in the kitchen and notices a book shelf behind the kitchen table. He suddenly remembers LILLI's voice:

LILLI

(from before; in Noah's head)

You could read a book.

NOAH smirks.

NOAH

(to himself)

Hmm. maybe I'll find something in the - what's that place called again?

EVELYN

(from before; in Noah's head)

I think I borrowed this from the library...

NOAH

(to himself)

Right! The library.

13 EXT. ENCHANTED RIVER - DAY

We notice that, while time seems to pass rather quickly in the real world, it is just as bright in Sylubre as it was

when LILLI first arrived. There is no sun to be seen in the sky, no clouds whatsoever. Still: bright daylight.

EZRA is standing around the riverbank, pushing frogs on water lilies down the stream, as he feels a gust of wind dancing through his mane.

EZRA

You're quick.

The wind suddenly takes the shape of a ghostly, somewhat-anthropomorphic cloud.

WIND

Well, yes. The news spreads like wildfire here.

EZRA

Oh, really? What news is that, exactly?

WIND

They say another human has entered the world.

EZRA

Not just any human. A child.

The WIND is surprised by this and turns slightly nervous, concerned even. His eyes widen.

EZRA

You haven't told him yet, have you?

WIND

No. I mean, a child? I don't know how I feel about that.

EZRA

(suddenly turning more serious)  
He has to know, though.

(Beat. Emphatically:)

It's not our decision to make, Wind.

WIND

(sighs, defeated)  
I know.

A bad premonition is imminent in the way they exchange looks.

CUT TO:

14 INT. THRONE ROOM/KING ATLAS' CASTLE - DAY

The king's personnel lines up along the sides of a path leading to the throne. The personnel consists of a wild mix of fantasy creatures, who stand perfectly still, but can't hide a terrified look on their face. We hear loud stomping, making the ground vibrate like an earthquake.

Two giant, furry feet enter the hall. The creature slowly walks through the lined-up staff, straight towards the throne. It's so gigantic that the staff only reach up to its furry hips.

It sits down in its massive throne, taking its time. We reveal KING ATLAS, a megathere (extinct; giant ground sloth) wearing a huge, golden crown.

A staff member (#1) pokes the one standing next to him (#2) with his elbow. The other staff member stumbles and steps forward.

STAFF MEMBER #2

(stuttering)

Your highness. There have been reports of another human entering the realm.

King Atlas' eyes widen. Staff member #1 gives his colleague (#2) an urgent look.

STAFF MEMBER #2

It's...it's a child. A little girl.

KING ATLAS

(speaks with a slight Russian accent)

That's great news! Bring her to me. And make sure she likes it here. Might be a while until she gets to leave again.

The staff stare at him, dead-faced. King Atlas breaks into laughter. Nervously, the staff join in, forcing laughter, but we see the terrified looks on the faces of #1 and #2 again, as we fade out.

FADE OUT.