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## The Screen and Development: Creative Writing and Liminality in Children's Literature

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THE SCREEN AND DEVELOPMENT:  
CREATIVE WRITING AND LIMINALITY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
English

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by  
Rebecca Elizabeth Glenn  
May 2022

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Accepted by:  
Nic Brown, Committee Chair  
Keith Morris  
Dr. Aga Skrodzka

## ABSTRACT

This creative thesis strives to research and implement the overlap of liminality found within Children's Literature, especially those works that exist through the screen. The critical component of this thesis explores the ways in which childhood development and maturity, a theme commonly found within Children's Literature, embodies its own "right of passage" associated with the liminal. The journey of the Children's Literature protagonist is often wrought with this movement from familiar boundaries to a sense of new development. The critical analysis emphasizes the methods Children's Literature genre uses emotion, familial connections, symbology, space, and even elements of the monstrous to capture the passage of childhood immaturity into adulthood or mature growth. The creative component, a full-feature length screenplay, serves as an illustration of these liminality-grounded techniques. As a result, the screenplay demonstrates the ways in which the screenwriting craft and writing can implement, embody, and further genre research.

## DEDICATION

Studies within a creative thesis are no strangers to an exploration of writing themes and clichés. Yet, some truth can still be found within even the most clichéd phrases, such as “the real master’s thesis and studies were the friends we made along the way.” Regardless of clichés, both in creative choices and sentimentality, my accomplishments also belong to those family members, friends, colleagues, and committee members who I grew alongside. Any words I might write here may never be enough to express my appreciation, yet thank you for helping me write the chapters of my own journey.

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## CREATIVE CRITICAL ANALYSIS: LIMINALITY IN CHILDREN'S LIT

Traditionally, the form of literature we first come across in our lives is characterized by Children's Literature, a genre that is complex and shifting in its definition. Often, the adults of today are the children of fairy tales, fables, picture books, and stories created to enchant the mind and encourage imagination in the younger generation. Yet, this precise angle of "children" in Children's Literature only emphasizes elements of its shifting definition. After all, as *Children's Films: History Ideology, Pedagogy, and Theory* emphasizes within its own definition of the genre, Children's Literature is not literature written by children and it *is* literature *read* by children, written *for* children, and even films/television *created for* children (Wojik-Andrews 7). As a result of this multi-faceted definition and angle, we can make several concluding statements that branch off into their own realms of research: Children's Literature is written for an audience that does *not* always match its author, and the characteristics that make *up* Children's Literature are seen as varied or in-between categorization. My own interest in Children's Literature, thus, comes from both a reader's perspective as well as a writer's. Although it is difficult to break down and pinpoint *concrete* definitions of Children's Literature given its wide scope, through elements of research, we can define characteristics that are commonly associated both with the genre and the audience for which it is written. Thus, my own academic interest stems from the ways in which Children's Literature touches on elements of the "in-between," both within the genre's definition and within those genre characteristics.

In fact, many works of Children's Literature are often defined by placing children into situations *between* a traditional natural state. As Wojik-Andrews emphasizes, this break in natural state is characterized by a disruption. For instance, films starring children may characteristically involve elements of a "hero's journey" which include pivotal situations within the protagonist's life. Within these films, a viewer may watch the main character deal with the death of a family member, car accidents, and other physically or emotionally violent events that propel the plot of the Children's Literature journey (Wojik-Andrews 7-9). From personal research and inspiration in writing *Rummage*, the "personal journey of growth" has fueled many a story found within this specific genre. For instance, Brad Bird's 2007 *Ratatouille*'s plot is fueled by the disruption of the protagonist's sense of home, ultimately leading to his dream of being a chef in Paris and what it means to achieve said dream. Similarly, Henry Selic and Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2009) begins with the protagonist's physical and emotional disruption as she moves into a new home and deals with the dissatisfaction found in her family life. In both these specific examples, the characters and their heroic journeys are set up to focus on the character's development through moments of self-awareness or self-discovery, a trait found treated playfully and seriously in mainstream children's media (Wojik-Andrews 9). From a reader and a writer perspective, one often turns to these moments of discovery when implementing elements of craft, such as character, plot, visuals, pacing, and more.

As a result of this development, these moments of transition and growth can be defined by Children Literature's exploration of liminality. As *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality* emphasizes within its study of liminality, most human experiences

are often embodied by the idea of the “rite of passage” (*Breaking Boundaries* 17). The very concept of the passage, of the ambiguous middle ground of thought and behavior that lies between concrete moments, makes up liminality itself; as a result of this connection, one can witness how liminality is specifically applicable to the “journey” involved in the childhood experience. Waddell’s *Wild/lives: Trickster, Place and Liminality on Screen* also delves into the ways that studies of liminality often correlate with phases in development and intrigue longevity found in related stories (Waddell 12). Specifically, both Waddell and *Breaking Boundaries* refer to the work done by Turner and van Gennep focusing on initiation into intermediary passages or “stages.” These stages are especially relevant as this brand of liminality is often embodied by the initiation of youngsters into adulthood (*Breaking Boundaries* 17). Consequently, the experience found in childhood often mirrors that of liminal transitions as outlined by Waddell and Turner. From childhood to adulthood, the child must find a point of separation from childhood (the first stage), travel the point of ambiguous classification (the second stage of adolescence, neither childhood or adulthood/maturity), and finally reenter the social structure of adulthood (the third stage) (Waddell 13). Thus, the “rites of passage” that traditionally defines liminality fits well into the personal transitions found within childhood development.

Of course, with my interest in Children’s Literature at the forefront of my research, I am equally fascinated with the ways in which liminality crosses over into the realm of literature. After all, the movement through childhood, to adolescence, and finally through adulthood capitalizes on many traits associated with Children’s Literature:

the child must experience a type of disruption of what is considered natural, make choices within this new disruptive and in-between stage while on a hero's journey, and ultimately find themselves in a different space of development. As a result, my definitions of liminality correlate directly with childhood development often emphasized through the aforementioned "hero's journey." Many works of Children's Literature follow along with such themes through their personal worldbuilding and craft. For instance, works by authors like Mark Twain, C.S. Lewis, and Robert Lois Stevenson delve into elements symbolizing elements of this growth and development (Joseph 138-140). Even modern cinematic works today such as *Inside Out* (2015), *Soul* (2020), and *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009), offer stories where the liminal and childhood growth intertwine. This growth is highlighted especially as it is explored through transitional spaces and hero's-journey-centered characters.

My interest and inspiration within Children's Literature liminality stems not only through the creative *choices* surrounding these characters, setting, and plot development, but also through the *medium* of the writing craft. Delving outside of prose and poetry, my work in *Rummage* explores the medium of screenplays and screenwriting, a form found in many of my own studies, examples, and pieces of inspiration. In many ways, my interest in this medium stems from the growth of literature experienced by my generation, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century made way into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a member of this pivotal generation, my own introduction into literature was founded on the ease in which film and television have evolved in terms of access and academic studies. As a result, not only was my own liminal childhood development marked by the screen, I have discovered

how screenplays (especially those within Children's Literature) push into academia and creative liminality.

As a writing form, screenwriting carries its own element of transitional instability when one considers the final cinematic product. The filmic experience is made up of multiple moving parts including the script, editing, directing, cinematography, etc. Without one of these elements, the final cinematic product will not come to full fruition. As a result, the "creation method" does not have a definite end as this cinematic process is grounded in developmental transition between the entirety of the movie-making team (*Screenwriting* 4). The act of screenwriting is only one step of this transition, an in-between stage for a story that exists on the page and serves as the vehicle for telling a story with pictures. Every moment of character growth, passage, development, exist within both written and visual symbology (Field 3&7). Thus, from my experience, screenwriting embodies this in-between state of writing: of writing on the page, yet with great consideration of how the pacing embodies elements of the screen. Therefore, my interest in Children's Literature can extend to how screenwriting symbolizes moments of childhood liminality while *simultaneously* serving as a medium for relaying this story and development itself.

Ultimately, choices made in *Rummage*'s production echoed this desire to explore liminality in Children's Literature *through* the screenwriting craft. For creative choices and research, this liminal topic breaks down the creative symbolic choices found in *Rummage*'s premise, the setting, exploration into the monstrous, and more. As previously established, the ways in which liminality crosses over into childhood culture hinges

greatly on a disruptive development into growth or adulthood. In many ways, this passage into more “adult” concepts of growth emphasizes a sense of “becomingness,” “chaos and order,” and being “divested of status” (Joseph 138-9). There are many “disruptions” within childhood and Children’s Literature that signal this ritual of transition. In the case of *Rummage*, change and learning to cope with said change becomes a key factor in maturity and moving into adulthood. For the sake of Ram’s relationship with her family in *Rummage*, she must face a disruption found in her parents’ divorce, go on a “hero’s journey” of self-discovery, and ultimately come to terms with this change in her life and her place within her family dynamic. Thus, Ram’s premise journey marks that sense of change and development, going through the different stages of becomingness: she finds the point of separation or break in traditional family status (the divorce and first stage), she travels through ambiguity in her hero’s journey (using the land of Rummage to come to terms with her identity and second stage), and returns to society with a new elements of maturity (coming back from Rummage with acceptance regarding her family dynamic and the third stage).

Yet, Ram’s journey within *Rummage* is a mark of both my research into the liminal and how one *applies* those research results into screenwriting craft form. In fact, much of *Rummage*’s premise took inspiration and form through the ways significant pieces of Children’s Literature applied *their own* moments of childhood rites of passage. For example, Doctor, LeFauve, and Cooley’s work in *Inside Out* maps out very similar moments within its screenplay. *Inside Out* details similar beats of liminal development through the personification of Riley’s emotions who deal with a common childhood

disruption: moving to a new city or home and the complex emotions that follow.

Additionally, one can turn to Jonze and Egger's *Where the Wild Things Are* as its main character, Max, explores the childhood desire of wanting attention, especially in times of growth, development, and changes. His visit to the land of the Wild Things marks the route to his own path of discovery: he comes to terms with his family dynamics through the wild beasts and returns home to reenter the structure of the family dynamic. As a result, much of Children's Literature films reflect what Joseph emphasizes in his work concerning liminality: "postmodern liminality becomes a metonym of adolescent agency" (Joseph 138). In *Rummage*, and its various moments of research and inspirations, the premise requires this exploration of childhood-based disruption and agency into maturity.

However, the hero's journey through this displacement allows for a further exploration of how one can apply the liminal within Children's Literature. Specifically, I am interested in the use of space in both *Rummage* and within Children's Literature as a whole. After all, the concept of a hero's journey implies some element of movement, whether it be a mental/emotional development or a physical movement that *then* allows for the traditional rites of passage. Given the focus on childhood disruption and growth, writers, such as Suzanne Carroll, focus on elements of the home within the stages of passage. Within *Landscape in Children's Literature*, she emphasizes how, for children, "the home shares in physical and symbolic attributes of the sanctuary topos; it too is characterized by verticality, strict boundaries, and an intense interiorizing central focus" (Carroll 19). For children, the home is a space often associated with childhood nostalgia, structure, and safety. After all, the home "acts as a nexus between the world and the Self"

(Carroll 20). Therefore, several films delving into this hero's journey make use of the home as the starting point for this sense of growth and development. In *Inside Out* and *Coraline*, the screenwriters displaced Riley and Coraline's sense of home as an initial move into their journey; thus, the crux of their journey deals with their conflicting emotions towards their new situation and setting. Taking these moments into consideration, Ram's journey within *Rummage* had to start within the boundaries of the home. As a concept of her own personal disruption, the screenplay had the audience imprint not only on her original home, but how the home created her sense of identity and place within her family.

Of course, the space of the home resides in the first stage, creating the boundaries the child is forced to confront during the second liminal stages of development. Commonly, this exit from the traditional boundaries takes the form of a more abstract liminal space. Within this space, the protagonist is "projected outside society" and must pass through to "reenter structure" while also creatively projecting a sense of "interior state" (Joseph 139). The creative state of this liminal space turns set design into modes of character interiority and developmental representation. Often, screenwriters use fantastical settings as a means of both representing elements of the hero's developmental journey *and* to serve as the breeding grounds for this very development. For instance, *Inside Out* presents Riley's emotions living in the in-between state of Riley's inner mind, where many elements of her real world problems are given form and areas to interact. To represent Riley's fears and hopes for the future, writers specifically give space for her emotions to visually act *out* those very scenarios. Similarly, the writers of *Where the Wild*

*Things Are* grant Max the space to explore his own family dynamics in the land of the Wild Things. He must travel *from* the boundary of the home *to* the Wild Things' land, giving him the space and audience to act out his desires for attention and familial bonds. Yet, these films are not the only instances of liminal space within Children's Literature: from *Alice to Wonderland's* use of Wonderland itself to *Soul's* representation of the afterlife, we are granted elements of liminal space that represent real world elements/character interiority while giving these protagonist space to come to *terms* with these very elements themselves.

Building off research into liminal space and the creative examples that explore this concept, *Rummage* uses the secondary and fantastical setting to represent elements of Ram's emotional and family development. In many ways, *Rummage* stands for a *new* space of exploration now that Ram's sense of home and her place in it have been shattered. For Ram, as emphasized by Carroll's work, the home represents a space of boundaries: both the boundaries of societal structure *and* the boundaries of what she could expect from her family. The divorce forces that sense of disruption upon Ram, hurtling her into a stage of growth where her sense of self and family is lost. Thus, *Rummage* manifests that direct elements of loss, having Ram work through that second stage of development in a space that *embodies* elements of *being* lost.

Of course, Ram's interaction within this space is intentional *and* required if she is to properly complete her journey, find the element of *herself* that she has lost, and return to the structure of her loving family. In many ways, *Rummage* and its land allow for that exploration of space and memory. After all, Joan Aiken's work in *Storytelling Space*

emphasizes how places are often saturated with elements of memory. As a result, Aiken explains how through an engagement *with* space, “people develop a relationship with the world around them” (Aiken 356). In this liminal space outside the boundaries of her home, Ram is allowed to engage with elements of her world in a new way. She engages with the close relationship she has with her parents, she engages with the activities and items that she associates with her new disrupted family unit, and she engages with the idea that those elements might have changed but her family has not truly left her. For *Rummage*, the fantastical space of Rummage itself is a way to confront what is *lost* or changed within the initial home boundaries, and how one’s own feelings have developed alongside that change.

In many pieces of Children’s Literature, the lessons a hero must learn, even portions *about* the hero themselves, take on elements surrounding horror or the monstrous. The liminal passage of childhood development into adulthood is no stranger to the concept of the grotesque, of the creature (or commonly in development, the *person*) that does not quite exist within the realm of boundaries or structure. In fact, the symbolic development of children, as they move out of the boundaries of society, often evokes elements of “chaos and order, antistructure and structure.” As a result, the use of the monstrous within children’s literature often aids within the traditional movement of children to adulthood, having the child and the monster breach boundaries of what is considered standard (Joseph 139). We can see this at work within *Where the Wild Things Are* through the Wild Things themselves. In many ways, the Wild Things represent several elements of Max’s life as well as Max himself: Max’s relationship with his

mother, his struggles with a paternal figure, and his own fear for the future. Max interacts with these elements of the monstrous, of the horror that breaches boundaries, on their level by becoming that same liminal beast or “wild thing.” However, it is that exact interaction that allows Max to engage in elements of maturity. Catherine Lester’s work, “The Children’s Horror Film: Characterizing an “Impossible” Subgenre,” emphasizes that a child’s interaction with horror can be seen as a “mark of maturity.” In fact, in many monstrous-child relationships, there comes common themes of acceptance, redemption, and sympathy, especially towards those “monsters or others who do not fit within the ‘norm’” (Lester). After all, Max’s interactions with the monsters, in getting to know them, transforms his own beastly nature and allows him to reenter society. Max interacts with the monstrous, both symbolic and within, to reach that maturity and enter his final stage of development.

The monstrous elements in *Rummage*, from a craft standpoint, work in the same way as *Where the Wild Things Are* when it comes to Ram’s maturity and development. Our first introduction into *Rummage* as a liminal space also brings in elements of the monstrous through the amorphous black ink sludge. From a writing perspective, while this associates monstrous elements *with* the development that will happen within *Rummage* itself, the beastly elements are also directly herald by Ram’s *arrival* into the space. Thus, although the reveal comes later within the narrative, viewers already have a subtle association when it comes to the monstrous and Ram or, in other words, with the creature of breaching boundaries and the developmental child. As a result, Ram’s interactions with the monster equally hinge on this moments of development. The beast is

ultimately associated with the object that Ram mistakenly places on a pedestal. Similarly, every consequential action where Ram interacts with her misguided quest or elements of her family becomes associated with the distorted monster itself. Thus, the monster has not only breached the space of development, it has breached Ram's understanding of her relationships and familial associations. The monster *is* an embodiment of the truth Ram must face within her growth and maturity, the very thing she tries to distort when trying to "fix" her problems. As the monstrous within Children's Literature is redeemed as a mark of maturity, Ram fixes her toxic outlook of family life, coming to terms with change, and grows in her understanding of her place within the dynamic.

Ultimately, the screenwriting craft choices within *Rummage* align well with the way one studies Children's Literature: in the end, both elements are an ongoing practice *and* activity. After all, as emphasized by the very nature of turning to the screen and the writing elements that go into its production, the scope and accessibility of Children's Literature have evolved over the years. The introduction and increase in film and television have brought the element of screenwriting to a wider audience, both from an entertainment viewpoint as well as from an academic perspective. As Batty emphasizes within "Screenwriting Studies, Screenwriting Practice and the Screenwriting Manual," screenwriting itself, like Children's Literature, requires research both *about* and *for* the practice itself. For the purposes of my own interest in Children's Literature as a writer and a reader, the act of screenwriting perfectly encapsulates the work done for *Rummage* itself. Just as research must be completed concerning *how* liminality works within Children's Literature and *where* other works have utilized it previously, *further* research

must be conducted to see just how one might execute those findings on a craft level (Batty 63). Yet, just as the act of screenwriting is an active entity, the works of Children's Literature are always growing to produce symbiotic moments of research and craft. My ultimate desire, with *Rummage* and beyond, is to further search those breached barriers of the literature subject matter and to keep developing *with* those very works.

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## SCREENPLAY WORKS CONSULTED AND CREATIVE INSPIRATION

*Alice in Wonderland*. Directed by Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske,  
performances by Kathryn Beaumont and Ed Wynn, Walt Disney, 1951.

“Coraline” by Henry Selic and Neil Gaiman

“Finding Nemo” by Andrew Stanton, Bob Peterson, and David Reynolds

“Inside Out” by Pete Doctor, Meg LeFauve, and Josh Cooley

“Monsters Inc” by Andrew Stanton and Daniel Gerson

“Ratatouille” by Brad Bird, Jan Pinkava, and Jim Capobianco

“Soul” by Pete Doctor, Mike Jones, and Kemp Powers

“Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse” by Phil Lord and Rodney Rothman

“Sweeny Todd” by John Logan

“The Incredibles” by Brad Bird

“Where the Wild Things Are” by Spike Jonze and Dave Eggers

RUMMAGE

Clemson English Master's Thesis 2022

Screenplay by:  
Rebecca Glenn

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EXT. KEEPS GROVE LANDFILL - MORNING

The sun shines weakly against what appears to be black mountains. The sun continues to rise and the beautiful mountains are revealed to be trash piles.

A PAN across the trash. It PAUSES when a roach scurries out. Its crooked antennas twitch. It runs through the landfill. The roach stops by an old radio and picture book cover. It runs across the picture book, then the radio.

Its body squeezes through radio buttons and switches. Wriggling, it accidentally turns on the radio.

The radio comes to life with STATIC, and TUNING NOISES. Something like *On Treasure Island by Tommy Dorsey* plays.

The roach jumps back, surprised. It slams against an old TV's play button. More STATIC and light from the TV. The roach scurries ahead. The TV flickers, a black screen taking focus.

INSERT MONTAGE:

A SERIES OF SCENES, all to the MUSIC and parent NARRATION, detailing the childhood of RAM ROMERO.

- A black screen

RICHARD V.O.

Once, there was a kingdom in the hills.

- A man's face (RICHARD ROMERO) appears, lighting up as the camera turns on. In the background, a woman (REINA ROMERO) stands against a balcony railing.

Richard holds up a ring box, shushing the camera. He darts over to Reina, trying to be smooth, but trips. He faceplants, holding up the ring. They stare, then and burst out laughing.

REINA V.O.

Of course, at one point it was only a village.

- Richard and Reina stand at an altar: their wedding day. They lean in to kiss, but miss. They regroup, grin sheepishly and try again: success.

RICHARD V.O.

But from that hidden village grew a home full of wonders and riches.

- Richard smiles at the camera and spins it to Reina in a hospital bed. She is disheveled, but cradling newborn RAMONA "RAM" ROMERO.

- In the same hospital room, Richard is now goofily ZOOMING IN AND OUT on Reina and Ram. He captures her half-amused and annoyed expression.

REINA V.O.

Yet, this kingdom is not rich in gold  
in silver.

- Richard holds a baby Ram in his arms while he plays the guitar. He is "rocking out," with Ram wearing sunglasses in his lap. Reina sits, reading a book peacefully to the side.

- Reina feeds toddler Ram in a highchair. Everything's covered in baby food. The family dog tries to clean, licking scraps.

Richard places a plate of food in front of Reina. She nudges it aside, focused on feeding Ram. Ram notices, however, and grabs a handful of the food to throw. Chaos.

- A toddler Ram is at the playground, running around screaming gleefully. Richard chases behind, laughing.

RICHARD V.O.

Instead, the King and Queen valued the  
riches of art, of music, of life.

- Reina is curled up with Ram on her lap and the family dog. They read a picture book filled with dashing heroes. It is the same picture book from the opening. Ram looks awestruck.

- Richard reads Ram the same picture book. He overexaggerates his movements while telling stories, simultaneously playing his guitar in accompaniment.

- Ram runs around outside, covered in dirt and acting out the book. Yet, she is just as passionate and exaggerated in her movements as Richard.

REINA V.O.

Everyone in the village was filled  
with love and light. None more so than  
the littlest apprentice to the  
kingdom's fiercest knight.

- From a sneaky angle, we peer in Ram's room. She waves a wooden sword. Her audience in her storybook retelling: her stuffed animals. Reina peers in to watch, contemplative.

- Ram bounces impatiently while her mother sews. Richard leans over while eating, dropping crumbs. Reina scowls and brushes them off.

A quick BEAT. Then she lifts up her work: an altered hoodie with bunny ears to match the book's main character. Ram hugs Reina's legs in thanks, grabs the hoodie, and runs off.

RICHARD V.O.

Although she had never been on a quest, the littlest apprentice studied the legends of old...

- Richard, Reina, and Ram all sit on Ram's bed. The three read the story, yet they are surrounded by markers and pens. The three make doodles and funny notes in the books margins, making the book their own.

Richard reaches over and swipes marker on Reina's nose, causing her to scowl and Ram to LAUGH.

REINA V.O.

...practiced her bladework...

- Ram splashes through a creek with the dog barking at her heels. She hops on the stones to reach the other side.

- She runs through the woods with her sword. When she runs past a tree, her imagination manifests: a crudely drawn knight to have a swordfight with appears. She engages the knight in a play battle.

RICHARD V.O.

...and dreamed of the day she could prove her worth.

- Richard and Reina work in the garden side by side. Reina obviously looks frustrated with the work, to Richard's annoyance. Yet, Ram runs by to play, changing the mood. The three duel it out, acting out the book scenes in the yard.

REINA V.O.

Little did she know, her adventure was only beginning.

- A makeshift, crude stage sits in the Romero living room. The crayon sign above marks this as a "Ram Romero" show.

The MUSIC fades and we ZOOM into the Living Room scene.

END MONTAGE

INT. ROMERO FAMILY HOME LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Ram (7) bustles back and forth across her constructed stage. Each time she passes, she carries a new prop that seems grow in ridiculousness: a wooden sword, a foam helmet, the dog.

During the prep, Richard (39) and Reina (38) sit in front of the stage on the couch. Surrounding them are Ram's plushies.

Richard, a graying Latino man dressed in casual clothes, squints at a handmade programme in his hand. He turns to Reina, a Latina woman dressed business casual.

RICHARD

(in a faux fancy voice)

Don't you just love a night at the theater?

REINA

Of course. I've seen the Ram Romero production of Hansel and Gretel and I've never missed a show since.

RICHARD

Ah yes, truly inspired. Such a bold take on a classic! Can't believe the twist ending where Hansel and Gretel eat the witch.

REINA

You say that, but wait until you're the one cleaning up Hansel and Gretel's "witch casserole." I'll tell you: the stage magic is lost.

RICHARD

(gesturing to the programme)

Well, it looks like the production value of this theater has increased! Did you see they got the Shelby Romero to play the dragon this time? A dog acting prodigy, that one!

REINA

(humming in agreement)

Hmmmm. I wonder how stage management plans on getting Shelby in costume.

Ram runs by, a bag of dog biscuits in hand.

RICHARD  
Ah, bribery. This really is high-end show business.

REINA  
Mhmmmm.

RICHARD  
I just hope the upgrades are worth the ticket price!

REINA  
What are you talking about? I just gave her a piece of gum and a hug?

RICHARD  
What?! I had to give her an extra scoop of ice cream after dinner! And sprinkles!

REINA  
You had to give her what now?

RICHARD  
(suddenly nervous)  
Oh wow! Crazy how time flies! Looks like the show is about to begin, right Ram?!

RAM (O.S.)  
The show will begin in 17 seconds.

RICHARD  
(avoiding Reina's hard stare)  
Oh thank god! Oh-ah I mean, hooray!

RAM (O.S.)  
We need music, Dad!

RICHARD  
Oh, right, right. Sorry.

Richard grabs his guitar. He strums AN INTENSE TUNE.

RAM (O.S.)  
Ladies and Gentlemen. Imagine: a kingdom stolen by a ferocious beast! Only the knight and his apprentice remain! What dangers await them? Where

does the travesty end?!

Richard exchanges glances with Reina, his MUSIC faltering for a quick BEAT. He mouths the word "travesty" in obvious confusion. She just gives a shrug and a knowing smirk.

RAM (O.S.)

But hark, who approaches?!

Ram pops out from behind the curtain, dressed in her custom hoodie and with her wooden sword.

RAM

It is I, your much anticipated hero returning to rescue the frankly trashed and destroyed kingdom.

Reina CLAPS politely. Richard loudly SLAPS the side of his guitar in the place of applause.

RAM

With the help of the kingdom's finest knight!

She gestures to a crudely drawn set of armor plastered on the wall next to her. The armor is empty.

RICHARD

(whispering)

Is the sidekick so invisible we can't see them in the armor?

REINA

(whispering)

Imaginary, Richard. Clap and smile.

RICHARD

Ah, right right. Wohooo! What a totally real and cool sidekick you have there!

REINA

Richard.

RAM

Hark! The heroes have traveled far to face the thieving dragon! Four stories tall and hunger in its eyes.

Ram points her sword to Shelby, the dachshund, sprawled on the floor. Dressed as a dragon, she doesn't move on cue.

RICHARD  
 (whispering)  
 Oh no, stage fright.

Ram takes it in stride, reaching behind her back. Hidden from sight is the bag of treats from earlier.

RAM  
 I said, Four stories tall and hunger  
 in its eyes!

Ram gives the bag a firm shake. Shelby jumps to life, her body wriggling. She BARKS and charges towards Ram.

Ram LAUGHS and dodges Shelby. They engage in a "battle."

RAM  
 The hero and dragon do battle  
 throughout the dragon's lair! Barely  
 missing each other! Alas, the  
 apprentice's magic sword can't hit the  
 dragon's magic-proof skin!

RICHARD  
 (An over exaggerated gasp)  
No way!

RAM  
Yes way! Luckily, our hero has a full-  
 proof backup plan to trick the beast  
 into a trap!

Ram runs over to a rope on a nearby table. She swings her sword, activating the "trap."

The trap is a Rube-Goldberg machine of household items. Ultimately, with a final push from a toy car, a laundry basket drops from where it was tied to the ceiling fan.

Unfortunately, the calculations of a 7-year old were off. The laundry basket misses Shelby, knocking into coffee table.

Shelby YELPS and runs off, getting tangled in the stage curtain blankets. Chaos erupts. Ram chases Shelby who only knocks over more things with the blanket dragging behind.

Ultimately, Ram slips, crashing into a bookshelf. A framed macaroni portrait of the Romero family wobbles before CRASHING to the ground. Shattered glass flies on the floor.

Ram winces, pausing for a BEAT. The room is in messy chaos.

Shelby sits in the middle of the stage, tongue lolling out her mouth and tail THUMPING on the ground.

RAM

Uh! Time for a brief break! Snacks are in the lobby! Just for a minute, don't worry! I can fix it! I can fix it!

Ram reaches towards the shards of glass. A quick hand wraps around her arm before she could touch it: her mother.

REINA

Don't touch that! Stop!

Ram looks up at her, wide eyed. Reina takes a DEEP BREATH.

REINA

Stop. It's okay, Ram. Let's get this cleaned up, yeah?

RICHARD

Okay?! I'll say! What a finale! The action! The drama! The-

Ram GIGGLES while Reina shoots an unamused look.

REINA

Richard. The broom?

RICHARD

Ah right, the broom. Let me grab that.

He runs out of the room, almost stumbling. Reina SIGHS at his antics. She turns her attention to Ram. A strained smile.

REINA

I think the show might have to close up early this time, Ram. Let's call it curtains for tonight, alright?

RAM

But I know I can make it work! I can fix it and make it all better and it will all be okay. I just-

REINA

Ram, we need to clean this up before any of that. Why don't you head upstairs? We'll be up soon after.

Ram lingers on the broken glass for a moment. Ultimately, she

heads for the stairs. As she walks up, nearing the top, a WHISPERED conversation catches her attention.

RICHARD O.S.

Found the broom! It was in Ram's prop box. Think she was using it for the witch? If not, I can't wait to see what she does next with it!

REINA O.S.

Richard, did you know about that "trap?"

RICHARD O.S.

Noooooo I definitely did not and I'm not just saying that because you are giving me that look that says I did something wrong.

REINA O.S.

(sighing)

Richard! You should have told me before you built a death trap in our living room!

RICHARD O.S.

Hey I can make choices too! And I chose not to build a death trap...It was a dragon trap and next time we will-

REINA O.S.

Next time?! Richard, that's what I'm talking about!

Ram walks to the staircase railing and peers out. Reina and Richard stand across from the broken glass. They argue, though the SOUND fades.

Ram flips up her hoodie up and trudges up stairs.

INT. RAM'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ram leans against her pillows in her room. She picks up a stuffed horse to analyze. She moves it around in the air.

In her imagination's perspective, there is a crudely drawn version of the book's apprentice riding the horse to face the dragon. Ram scowls at the sight and the drawings get scribbled out. She drops the horse on the bed with a SIGH.

A KNOCK on the door catches her attention. Richard and Reina walk into the room and sit on the edge of Ram's bed.

RICHARD

(as he flops on the bed)

Well, that takes care of that. It's no witch's casserole, but I would say the glass would have stopped a dragon.

RAM

I thought I could make it work.

REINA

Maybe run the dragon traps by us first. Then we can do it together.

RAM

(mumming)

I thought I could fix it.

Ram buries her face into her knees. Reina and Richard exchange looks over Ram's head. A BEAT. Then, Richard snaps his fingers and scrambles off of the bed and out of the room.

REINA

You know, it's okay if everything didn't turn out right this time. You'll find that things don't always go the way you expect them to. That's just a part of life, Doodle-Bug.

RAM

I hate that part then.

RICHARD

(laughing, reentering the room)

You and me both, kid.

REINA

Everything may not go right the first time. We not be able to fix it right away...but maybe all we need is to approach it from a new angle.

Reina taps Ram on the head. Ram looks up to Richard standing next to the bed, holding her picture book and guitar. Ram looks bewildered, but takes the book gently.

RICHARD

You left this downstairs. I know we got through the adventures through

forests, rivers, and magic, but we still need to see how it ends, right?

RAM  
I...I don't know.

REINA  
Just because this adventure didn't work out doesn't mean you should quit. Just find a new way tomorrow.

RAM  
Like the apprentice?

REINA  
Just like her.

RAM  
What if I mess it up?

RICHARD  
(with a big faux sigh)  
You're right. It might be a little tricky.

REINA  
(frustrated)  
Richard-

RICHARD  
I mean, not many mortals can deal with epic quests, kingdoms, and of course there's dragon. But I think I know some who can handle it.

RAM  
(completely buying it)  
Who?

A BEAT. Richard suddenly scoops Ram off the bed. She SQUEALS IN LAUGHTER as he playfully jostles her around.

RICHARD  
(while playing)  
Us, duh!

RAM  
You think we can beat a dragon?

RICHARD  
Of course! We've read this book cover

to cover before you could crawl! The next show will be the greatest one yet! I can see it now! The next big adventure! Pyrotechnics! Flamethrowers!

REINA

We might want to settle for some heavily supervised candles.

RICHARD

Maaaaayyyybeee.

Though his words agree, Richard shakes his head dramatically to Ram, getting her to LAUGH. Reina frowns, pulls the book onto her lap, and tugs Ram back on the bed.

REINA

As long as we're together, we will always give this story a proper ending.

RICHARD

(pulling out his guitar)

With some musical accompaniment!

Richard STRUMS his guitar as Reina opens the book. Simultaneously, light erupts from the book and swirls above. Bathed in gold, images like from Ram's imagination appear.

Reina reads the book, but her WORDS are MUTED. However, the images above reflect what is happening in the book: a daring face off and the trapping of the dragon.

Richard helps to narrate sections, strumming his guitar. He overexaggerates to Reina's displeasure and Ram's delight. Over time, Ram relaxes, looking more at peace.

Then, they reach the end of the book. The glowing yellow light fading as Reina shuts the book.

REINA

The King and Queen were saved and the Kingdom was restored back to the hills. All thanks to the apprentice who learned to be a knight. And they lived happily-

RICHARD

Ever-

REINA

After.

Ram snuggles between them sleepily. The parents lean in to give her a kiss on the head. Slowly, they leave the room, carefully closing the door behind them.

Ram sleepily closes her eyes, the last image she sees before falling asleep is her picture book on the night stand.

A BLACK SCREEN. A BEAT.

RAM V.O.

Ever after?

RICHARD V.O.

Well yeah!

RAM V.O.

What does ever after mean?

RICHARD V.O.

Well...It means that everything is going to be fine!

INSERT MONTAGE

A montage of Ram's family starting to drift apart. We can only hear the voice overs.

- Ram slowly wakes up, but it's still dark. She looks confused until she sees her bedroom door cracked, letting light in. She grabs her stuffed horse and crawls out of bed.

RICHARD V.O.

It's kind of a promise after the heroes have to do all the hard stuff?

- Ram peeks out her the room door. Shadows move on the walls from a nearby bedroom. She walks down the hall and peeks in the room. Inside, her parents argue. Ram looks concerned.

RICHARD V.O.

So you know that despite all the troubles, things are just going to work out.

- After Ram's concerned look, we get a series of various shots where she looks similarly concerned. Sitting at the dinner table while her parents stoically eat food, the cold way they pass in the halls, the way they work on opposite

sides of the garden now instead of together.

REINA V.O.

Everyone deserves a happy ending,  
sweetheart.

RAM V.O.

Like us?

- Ram runs around the playground happily with her stuffed horse. She looks around for her parents laughing. When she sees them arguing instead of chasing her, she stops. The horse falls from her grasp and she just walks away.

RICHARD V.O.

Well of course!

- Ram walks into her parents room. Moving boxes are piled in various corners. She looks to the dresser, finding her mother's wedding band discarded on its corner.

RICHARD V.O.

Just trust us kid, everyone in the  
story will have a happy ending.

- Ram and her parents read the book together, snuggled up.

RICHARD V.O.

Happily-

- The same scene, yet the parents are now on opposite sides of the bed.

REINA V.O.

Ever-

- The same scene, yet Reina is now gone from the room.

RAM

(quietly)

After.

- Ram is alone in her room now as she speaks her line. A BEAT. She looks down at her picture book, at the doodles and notes from her family. Then, she turns off the bedroom light.

END MONTAGE

CUT TO BLACK

INT. ROMERO FAMILY HOME LIVING ROOM - DAY

We return to the stage. Ram paces behind the curtains, nervous. She psyches herself up for the performance.

RAM  
 (under her breath)  
 You can do this. Give it a new angle!  
 You can fix this!

With all the dramatic flair she can muster, she leaps through the curtains and onto the stage.

RAM  
 Behold! Your knight is here! I will  
 travel the land to save you from the  
 despicable, fire-breathing beast.

Ram darts over and picks up an already lit candle crudely decorated to look like a dragon is breathing the flame. She points her wooden sword at it in her dramatic pose.

A BEAT. Silence.

Ram cracks open her eye. The living room is sparse, missing pieces of décor and furniture. Most noticeably, Reina and Richard are missing. Shelby is the only one in attendance.

Ram visibly deflates at the sight. She puts down the candle and scoops up her picture book.

INT. ROMERO FAMILY KITCHEN - DAY

Ram walks through the kitchen. Like the living room, the kitchen feels a bit sparse. A few moving boxes are scattered.

INT. ROMERO DINING ROOM - DAY

Ram looks around more intensely now. Just like before, the room is filled with moving boxes.

INT. ROMERO FRONT HALL - DAY

Ram runs into the room, clutching the book, and almost slides across the floor in her haste. Ram looks frantically. Seeing the space empty, she turns to go upstairs.

Shelby BARKS, catching her attention. Shelby sits at the front door, her attention focused outside.

Slowly, the faint sound of ARGUING bleeds into the silence.

Ram winces, takes a deep breath, and flips up her hoodie.

EXT. ROMERO FRONT YARD - DAY

Ram walks out to the sight of more moving boxes scattering the lawn. In the driveway, a moving van stands guard.

Reina and Richard put boxes in the van. Their expressions are tight with emotion.

REINA

Richard, I am telling you I can handle it. Don't worry about me.

RICHARD

I'm just trying to figure out what goes where. What are you taking, what are we keeping, and what are we giving away.

REINA

I told you last night. I didn't touch your stuff and the stuff we are getting rid of will go to a Rummage Sale or something. The boxes have labels remember.

RICHARD

Ah, yes, more labels. My favorite part of this divorce- Heeeeyyyyy kiddo!

Reina and Richard finally notice Ram. They visibly try to perk up, though their expressions are stiff. Ram frowns.

RAM

You weren't there at the show. I had a real fire-breathing dragon.

RICHARD

What?! I missed the fire?!

Reina elbows Richard, shooting him a look. She turns her attention back to Ram, starting to load up the van.

REINA

We're sorry, Ram. Don't you remember? We're starting to bring stuff over to the new house tonight.

RAM

Oh, right. I forgot that was today.

REINA  
 You doing okay? Excited to see the new place?

RAM  
 (strained smile)  
 Yeah! Of course.

REINA  
 There's a creek in the back, just like here at your Dad's.

RAM  
 (perking up)  
 In the woods?

REINA  
 Well, no. We don't have a woods per say.

RAM  
 (visibly deflating)  
 Oh.

RICHARD  
 Don't worry. Those woods behind the house aren't going anywhere.

REINA  
 Right, every time you visit your father, you can spend all the time in the world in the woods!

RICHARD  
 Speak for yourself, I need some to get caught up on my Ram Romero shows too!

They all LAUGH. For a BEAT, things feel normal. Ram smiles, hopeful. Then, the BEAT lasts too long and its visibly obvious. Reina tucks a piece of hair behind Ram's ear.

REINA  
 Listen, we are heading over tonight to start unpacking. You don't have to grab everything from your room, but get the stuff you want for this weekend, okay?

RAM  
 Right.

Ram crosses the yard, pausing at the door. She looks back. Her parents have stiffly, started to pack the van again.

INT. ROMERO LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ram passes the stage. She blows out the dragon candle.

She pauses by the picture book, flipped open on a page full of notes from the family. Ram gently traces the doodles.

After a BEAT, tension builds, Ram clenches her fist. She scoops up the book and storms off.

She passes a box labeled "RUMMAGE SALE" and pauses. She glances up, noting the happy Romero family portrait above. She scowls and throws the book into the box. She doesn't look back before storming to the stairs.

INT. RAM'S ROOM - DAY

Like the rest of the house, Ram's room is sparse. She storms around the room. Like any child who can't process big emotions, she lightly kicks and punches at things.

This tantrum culminates with Ram flopping on her bed. She stares at the ceiling before glancing out the window.

Ram's parents pack the moving van. The image shifts and to focus on Ram's forlorn reflection in the window.

She rolls over in bed, stopping when she hits something. Digging under the covers she pulls out the plush horse. It is worn and obviously well-loved.

She stares at it before dropping it over the edge of the bed. She pauses at an unexpected THUNK.

She leans over the bed to see the horse half laying on a wooden picture frame that is tucked under the bed.

She flips it over. It's a picture of the Romero family. Reina and Ram sit on the bed, reading her favorite picture book. Richard, taking the picture, peeks into frame, smiling.

Ram hugs the photo frame to her chest for a BEAT. When she looks up again, she is determined.

RAM

We can get happily ever after.

She tosses the photo frame on the bed before running out the

door. Unbeknownst to her, the photo slides down the sheets and falls into her open backpack.

INT. ROMERO FAMILY HOME LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ram jogs to where the Rummage Box was sitting only to find it missing. She skids on the hardwood floor, crashing into the nearby wall out of frame.

A PAN shows Ram upside down in a heap. From her upside down perspective, she sees Richard walking outside, the box in hand. The picture book peeks out from one side.

Ram scrambles to her feet and darts after him.

EXT. ROMERO FRONT YARD - DAY

Richard walks over to the moving van. Reina finishes putting her box in the back and catches sight of Richard. She blocks his path with her arm.

REINA

Hold it. That's a Rummage Sale box. It stays here.

RICHARD

What? No it's not.

REINA

Yes, it is. I can read the label from here.

RICHARD

Reina, I think I can read.

REINA

Says the man who took us to the wrong city for Ram's Parent-Teacher conference.

RICHARD

It was one time. Greensburg and Greentown are too similar. The state knew what it was doing when naming those.

REINA

(reaching for the box)  
Forget it, let me just put this back.

RICHARD

No! I can do it! Don't worry about it.

They start pulling the box back and forth. Ram runs up, watching in alarm as the book jostles in the box. She tries to reach for it, but her arms are too short.

RAM

Wait! Mom! The book! I need to just-  
Dad! Let me-

Just as it looks like she might grab it, the pulling causes the book to fly out of the box. The trio watches as it sails through the air and lands in a puddle of water. A BEAT.

RAM

No, no, no!

Ram runs over to the book. She uses her wooden sword to flip the book out of the puddle. She opens it, the pages soaked.

RAM

It's ruined!

Reina and Richard approach, crouching behind Ram. They exchange winces. Richard quickly scoops up the book.

RICHARD

Wait, no! It's fine! Just need to let  
it dry! It will be alright!

He shakes the book. Unfortunately, due to the water damage and book's age, the pages fall and scatter across the yard.

RICHARD

Or maybe not...

INT. MOVING VAN - DAY, A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ram carefully places one water soaked page of the book on the rear dash of the van, amongst the other soaked pages.

She arranges them to dry. Reina watches from the driver's seat while leans in from the backseat window.

RICHARD

I'm sure it will dry, bud. No worries.  
It will be right as rain. Here, I  
brought your backpack.

She takes the beg, downtrodden. Suddenly, Richard hums

exaggeratedly. He carefully takes Ram's face into his hands, making her look up surprised.

RICHARD

Hold on, it seems you got something on your face. Let me check...Yep, just as I suspected. You got that Sad Schmutz on your face. Let me just-

Richard blows a raspberry on Ram's cheek causing her to SQUEAL in LAUGHTER. He pulls away, ruffling her hair.

RICHARD

It's just for this weekend, bud. You'll be back here before you know it! And we can do whatever you want! A Dad-Daughter day!

RAM

(glancing at her mom)  
Yeah...A Dad-Daughter day.

Richard steps away, allowing Reina pull out of the driveway.

EXT. ROMERO DRIVEWAY - DAY

As car pulls away, Ram turns around to watch Richard disappear from view. He waves at her, his figure ultimately getting smaller the further they get.

INT. MOVING VAN - DAY

Reina watches from the mirror as Ram turns forward. As she drives, she reaches back, patting Ram gently on the leg.

Ram looks up, smiles, but clutches her backpack to her chest.

EXT. KEEPS GOVE ROADS - DAY

The moving van twists and turns down the various roads and streets. It passes through rows of trees and fields. Ram watches everything pass by.

Before the van drives into the distance, it passes by the Keeps Grove Rummage and Landfill. We linger on this shot, peering from behind a mountain of garbage.

EXT. KEEPS GROVE LANDFILL OUTSKIRTS -DAY

The roach from the opening scene skitters up the mountain of garbage sitting by the winding road. Its antennas twitch as

the van disappears from sight, like it's watching.

The roach turns and then scuttles over the steps of a detailed, yet older dollhouse. Antennas brush a dirty rabbit plushie. It scurries in the house.

FADE TO:

EXT. REINA'S HOUSE - DAY

The scene fades to an establishing shot of Reina's house. It eerily similar to the previous dollhouse. The moving van sits in the driveway.

Reina jogs down the front steps, grabs a box and goes back inside.

INT. REINA'S HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Reina walks into a sparse kitchen. A LOUD WHIRRING fills the air. Reina puts the box down and looks over to the table.

Ram stands on a chair. She has taped down the pages of her book to the table. Concentrating hard, she tries to dry the pages with a hairdryer.

REINA

(teasing)

Geeze Ram. We haven't been here five minutes and you're already running up my electric bill.

RAM

I'm gonna fix this. Just like the knight.

REINA

Alright Miss Knight. Care to see the rest of your kingdom? The pages will dry on their own.

Ram pauses. With a SIGH, she flicks off the hairdryer.

INSERT MONTAGE

A quick montage of Ram's exploration of her new home, some moments are more exaggerated in her childish mind than others. She is less enthused with each passing scene.

- Ram enters the living room, the large bookshelves loom overhead. She swings her sword, figuring out the perfect

stage placement. She accidentally smacks a bookshelf. Her mother shoots her a look as she unpacks a box.

- Ram peers into her bedroom. The space appears dark and endless. She grimaces and backs away from the room slowly.

- Ram stands outside, glaring down. We ZOOM OUT to see the promised creek. However, it's more like a trickle of water. She hops over it , giving a faux CHEER.

- A bird searches for food in the backyard and gets distracted by a beam of light. Ram pops out from a bush. She creeps closer. She lets out a BATTLE CRY and charges, startling the bird, and runs out of frame.

RAM (O.S.)  
Face me, dangerous beast!

A BEAT. Another scream, one of fear.

Ram runs back in frame, dodging nuts and rocks. A flock of birds chase after her.

RAM  
Okay, I'm sorry! Wrong beast!

- Reina unpacks in the kitchen and looks out the back window. From this angle, Ram sits forlornly in the grass. Reina frowns and glances at the table where Ram's pages are drying.

END MONTAGE

INT. REINA'S HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

All is quiet. Suddenly a CRASH. Ram slides into the room in her pajamas. She stumbles, but catches herself.

She darts to the table, clambering up into a chair. When she reaches the top, the table is empty. Her book is gone.

The reaction is immediate; she frantically searches all over the kitchen, even in drawers and cupboards

RAM  
(frantic)  
Mom?! My book! It's missing! I can't  
find it.

REINA O.S.  
Ram! In your room!

Ram darts out of the kitchen.

INT. REINA'S HOUSE, RAM'S ROOM - NIGHT

Reina sits on Ram's bed. The room is obviously still coming together, boxes filling the space. She is holding something behind her back when Ram runs into the room.

RAM

Where is it? Did you find my book? I left it on the table to dry!

REINA

Well, I didn't find your book. I have something even better.

Reina pulls the hidden item out from behind her back. It is definitely a copy of Ram's book, but not the same version. The cover is fresh, not worn with the age.

Ram grabs the book and flips through frantically. The pages are crisp and new, not covered in little doodles and notes.

RAM

(while flipping)  
This isn't mine!

REINA

Well, the other one was water damaged, hun. The pages were warped and wrinkled. I thought you could use something new.

RAM

No, no, no! Where's my book? I want the one you and Dad gave me.

REINA

Sweetie, I...I already threw it away.

Ram reacts to her words like she had been slapped.

RAM

You what?! Why? You can't just get rid of it! The apprentice didn't get rid of the magic sword she pulled from the magic tree just because it didn't work on the dragon!

REINA

Well, I thought it might be nice to

have a fresh book with a fresh start!  
So, I threw it away. I'm sorry  
sweetheart.

Reina tries to gently cup Ram's face, but Ram flinches back.  
She darts to a trashcan sitting in the corner of the room.

RAM

We just have to get it back! It's in  
here somewhere right?! Where is it?

REINA

Ram, I already called the dump to pick  
up a load of old furniture and boxes.  
It's gone, in the landfill by now.

A BEAT. Tears well in Ram's eyes to Reina's distress.

REINA

(handing over the new book)  
Hey! It's okay, at least we still have  
this one! It will be alright.

Ram's shoulders shake as she stares at the new book. Her  
expression darkens and her tiny body vibrates in anger.

RAM

(yelling)  
No! I don't want that book. I want my  
book. The book we read. I want the  
book you and Dad read with me. Where  
we read about the knight and the  
apprentice. I want to go home. Not  
this home!

REINA

Ram, you know your father and I are...  
separated now. This is home now too.

RAM

Well I hate this home! I hate the  
living room with its stupid shelves!  
There's no room for anything! I hate  
the tiny yard and the dumb creek! I  
hate this room! I hate being here.

Ram looks at the new book with disgust, snatches it, and  
throws it across the room. It hits the wall with a CRACK. The  
vibrations cause a picture of the Romero family to rattle.

RAM

I hate this book and I hate this  
stupid divorce!

Ram's tantrum takes its toll. Reina gives Ram a pained look. She goes to brush a strand of Ram's hair, but Ram backs away.

A BEAT. The air is tense. A stare-down showdown.

Eventually, Reina breaks. She gives Ram a watery smile and walks out the door. She pauses in the doorway.

REINA

It's...been a long day. I'll give you some time to get settled in and cool down. Things will look better in the morning. Goodnight, sweetheart.

INT. REINA'S HOUSE HALLWAY - NIGHT

Reina slowly closes the door with a CLICK. She stands in the hall, hand still on the knob. She takes a few deep breaths, tears threatening to form.

She turns back to the door. Her desire to go back inside is obvious. However, she walks away.

INT. REINA'S HOUSE, RAM'S ROOM - VERY EARLY MORNING

Ram lays in bed, face covered in tear-tracks. She turns over to see her toy sword. She scowls, throws it across the room.

A CLANG makes her look up. The sword has knocked over the nearby trashcan, spilling trash on the new picture book.

Slowly she walks over the garbage pile to analyze the mess.

RAM

The book's at the landfill, hmm?

A BEAT. She looks up, staring down the crooked family portrait on the wall.

RAM

I'm going to fix this. One more show together and I can fix this.

Ram darts around the room scooping up her backpack.

She runs into the closet. After a few BEATS of CLANGS AND CRASHES, she comes out fully dressed in her hoodie.

Ram marches to the door, slinging her bag on her shoulder. In one move, she scoops up her sword and uses it to fix the crooked family portrait. Then, she's out the door.

INT. ROMERO HOME HALLWAY - EARLY MORNING

The hallway is dim with morning light as she tiptoes to the stairs. She pauses before turning towards a door nearby.

She opens the door. Reina's figure is asleep on the bed. Ram SIGHS at the sound of SOFT SNORES.

RAM  
(whispers)  
I'll be back soon.

She closes the door, gives it a pat, and turns to the stairs.

EXT. REINA'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

The worn door cracks open, Ram squeezing through the gap. The dawn's light barely peeks through the clouds. Ram spins on her heel to face the street.

From the street angle, Ram jogs down the steps. She pauses on the sidewalk and looks back up at the house.

She looks at the upper window and sees the familiar figure of her mother. Ram steels her expression and flips her hood up.

Sword in hand, she darts down the street and offscreen.

EXT. KEEPS GROVE NEIGHBORHOOD - EARLY MORNING

Ram's bunny ears fly in the wind as she darts past houses.

She's in her element. She's slapping street signs, hopping over sidewalk cracks, trailing her sword against fences.

She pauses at the edge of the neighborhood. She backtracks to read a sign. In big letters and an arrow pointing: KEEPS GROVE LANDFILL AND RUMMAGE.

Ran grins and runs in the direction of the arrow.

EXT. KEEPS GROVE MAIN ROADS- EARLY MORNING

Ram runs down the road. Her feet thud on asphalt. She looks up, noticing another "Landfill and Rummage" sign on a telephone pole. This time, it points away from the road.

She grabs the pole, spins, and launches herself in the direction of the arrow.

EXT. KEEPS GROVE FIELDS - EARLY MORNING

Ram's boots transition from pounding against asphalt to grass. From a BIRD'S EYE VIEW, Ram wades through tall grass. Occasionally, she pops her head up like a meerkat.

RAM

There!

She points her sword at an old sign, marking the Landfill's direction. She weaves through grass and runs after it.

EXT. KEEPS GROVE OUTER NEIGHBORHOOD - EARLY MORNING

Ram runs along a fence. She glances at the fence briefly, and double takes. She LAUGHS and trails a hand along the posts, noting the painted on arrows on the boards.

Eventually, she gets to a loose board in the fence. She skids to a halt. The arrows seem to stop after the loose board.

She carefully pokes her head past the loose board and pauses.

EXT. KEEPS GROVE OUTSKIRTS - MORNING

From behind Ram, we see the land is vast and empty. Instead, a plain of dying grass leads to mountain-looking trash.

Ram looks over her shoulder. She pushes the loose board, and steps through.

For a BEAT, Ram walks in the empty plains. The MUSIC is EERIE. She looks left and right.

Nothing. Empty. Silent. She is unnerved, but pushes on.

Ram squints and the trash piles come into focus. She picks up speed. Soon, the Landfill looms over her. It seems endless.

Suddenly, something catches her eye. Ram looks down and we see a paper sign: "Keeps Grove Landfill and Rummage."

She takes a deep breath, schooling her features.

RAM

If the Knight can face the dragon, I  
can find my book!

She repeats her phrase like a mantra and darts in.

For a BEAT, we stay and watch her run off. As she disappears from sight, the paper signs flutters with a breeze. The wind curls the sign, only making the word "RUMMAGE" visible.

EXT. KEEPS GROVE LANDFILL - MORNING

Ram walks, trash looming above. All is silent. She is uneasy. As time passes, her feet slowly come to a stop. She twists her head, looking for something specific.

RAM

(annoyed)

At least the Knight could find the dragon. This places is huge!

The sun, now stronger, shines directly in her eyes. She blocks it with her hand and squints to look. She chuckles, nervous. Her free hand lowers and she holds her sword up.

RAM

(overexaggerated)

Yet this maze of junk and refuse is no match for the cunning might of the King's finest warrior!

Ram closes her eyes in a fake sense of bravado. A PAN to the right. A large black crow sits on a broken pipe next to her. The crow CAWS loudly.

The silence, and Ram's cool demeanor, are broken.

Ram SHRIEKS, leaping away from the noise. She slips on a loose can and lands in a heap, limbs sprawled. Ram scowls.

The crow gives a haughty look, but flies off when Ram hops up and runs after it with her sword. The sound of CAWING sounds suspiciously like LAUGHTER. She throws the sword after it.

RAM

That's right! You better run!

A BEAT passes and her inner fire dies down.

RAM

(more dejected)

At least it wasn't a dragon. How am I supposed to fix anything if I can't even beat a bird.

Ram flops on her back. A BEAT. She glances to the side, looking at her wooden sword on the ground where she tossed it. She scoots over to inspect it.

There's an inscription near the base with her name. Below, there is a heart with a "Mom and Dad" carved messily by hand.

Ram brushes the inscription before gripping the sword tight. She hops to her feet.

RAM

I will complete my quest! I just have to fix this! No matter what it takes!

She lifts her sword in a heroic pose. She points the sword down and in front. She runs off, picking up the pace.

She runs for a few BEATS, until she sees a pile of garbage bags. She makes a beeline for them.

RAM

No matter the obstacle!

She reaches the pile and starts to climb. She flounders to find her footing, but reaches the top. She look, decides on a direction, and starts down.

Ram slides carefully on her feet and inches along.

RAM

No matter how steep!

Her boots hit the ground and she rushes ahead. Ram approaches a small river of liquid streaming from an old bathtub filled with water. She runs and leaps over.

RAM

No matter the raging rapids!

She jogs, but small movements make her pause. She turns in time to see a roach emerge from an old dollhouse. It scuttles for a BEAT and her eyes narrow with a grin.

She flips up her hood.

RAM

...And no matter the beast!

With a BATTLE CRY, Ram runs at the roach with her sword. The roach darts away. Ram watches it go, satisfied for a moment.

Suddenly, the sun reflects off a surface, getting in her eye. She squints to see where it is coming from.

Right below the dollhouse is the corner of a familiar looking book. Ram frantically digs the book up. She flips open the cover, but her smile drops. The pages are missing inside.

RAM

No! Where are all the pages?!

Ram frantically looks around. Again, movement catches her attention. The same roach sits on a loose book page. Its whole body seems to wiggle as Ram notices it.

Ram scrambles after and the roach scurries ahead. Ram picks up the page. It is only the title page, but it's something.

Ram looks up and the roach is still there, content to watch.

RAM

How did you...?

The roach darts off, crawling over garbage.

RAM

Hey! Wait a minute!

This continues for a few BEATS with the roach and Ram darting around loose trash. However, the game ends as the roach reaches a piece of wood and burrows its way under. Gone.

Ram runs up to it. She's confused as she looks up.

The piece of wood is actually a wooden door. Large and ornate, it looks odd standing against a garbage pile. The pile itself forms around the door, creating an archway.

Ram walks over hesitantly.

RAM

A door? Out here?

She looks down, only to do a double take. The first book page sticks out from underneath the door. She pulls it out, giving the door a calculated look.

Ram grabs the doorknob. She takes a deep breath.

RAM

(determined)

I can do this, I can do this.

To avoid hesitation, she flings open the door. She peers inside the darkness. She takes a step forward, then another.

The third is her downfall as she trips on a piece of wood. She SHREIKS as she tumbles forward. She disappears from sight and the door slams shut behind her, seemingly on its own.

Ram is gone. Silence. We linger on the door.

EXT. RUMMAGE PASSAGE - DAY

A faint glow softly illuminates a darkened tunnel. All is still. Suddenly, the same roach skitters out from a crack in the tunnel wall. It runs to and along the ground.

It pauses near Ram's hand on the ground. It clambers up and over, making it way down the arm until it reaches Ram's face. Its antennas brush her face.

RAM  
(still half-asleep)  
Five more minutes, mom.

Another brush of antenna. Ram's nose scrunches and her eyes open. A BEAT. She scoots back and swings her sword down.

RAM  
Keep your distance wretched thing! How dare you break into my room and-

Ram finally looks around. The tunnel she's in is large, the walls made of squishy mounds of dirt and trash. She walks to the wall and touches it. Lodged in the walls, are various knick-knacks, appliances, toys, scraps, etc.

RAM  
Alright, so this may or may not be my room. But still!

A BEAT. Ram looks uneasy.

RAM  
Where is this? I was...in the Rummage and Dump...looking for...wait!

Ram looks around frantically. On the ground behind her is the empty picture book cover. She grabs the book, clutching it to her chest. A SIGH of relief.

RAM  
My book! Well, what's left of it.

Ram looks up and takes a startled step back. The wooden door from earlier sits in front of her. She approaches cautiously.

RAM

I came through this door...

Ram tries to open the door. Nothing: locked. She tries, more aggressively this time. No budge. She glares. She charges at the door. She bounces off and lands in a heap on the ground.

RAM

I think the door might be stuck.

The roach scuttles onto her chest.

RAM

Rub it in why don't you!

The roach turns in a circle. It hops, then runs off of Ram and down the tunnel. She stares, scrambles up and after it.

RAM

Wait! Don't leave me here though!

Ram runs down the tunnel. The deeper she goes, the items in the wall increase. The glow around everything strengthens.

The roach stops. Ram almost trips. The roach sits on a scrap paper half buried in dirt. Ram pulls it out: another page.

The roach runs ahead. Ram stares at the page. When she looks up, a new light blinds her. She shields her eyes to see. The roach runs to another door in the distance, light underneath.

RAM

(following)

Hey! You didn't tell me you knew a way back to the dump!

Again, the roach wiggles under the door. Ram pauses at the door. She looks back to take in the darkness behind her. A deep breath and a hand on the doorknob. She twists it open.

EXT. RUMMAGE OUTSKIRTS - DAY

The door swings open, bringing in bright light. Ram slowly steps through. The light fades and Ram's expression falls. The roach climbs up on Ram's shoulder. Ram glances at it.

RAM

Oh, okay. So this is not the dump.

Like the dump, mountains of items scatter the land. However, the sky is dotted with similar floating islands of trash. The colors are vibrant. In fact, the colors on some objects and clouds appeared colored in like children's drawings.

Ram explores the area around her. The door behind her creaks shut. She looks so small in such a big space.

RAM

Is this a dream? I'm dreaming right?

A loud LAUGHING CAW echoes. She smirks and turns towards it.

RAM

Nice try, bird! Dream or not, I know-

Expecting the same crow, Ram is met with three eyes. The thing is bird-shaped, but with neon feathers. The creature is flat, like the other hand-drawn elements of this world.

RAM

Alright, a nightmare. This is definitely a nightmare.

The crow hops along a pipe. It pauses and picks at a piece of paper sticking out of a pile. It pulls it out with its beak.

RAM

Hey! Wait a minute! That's mine!

Sure enough, the bird creature holds a book page. A showdown. Ram brandishes her sword at the creature.

RAM

Alright you foul beast! Return my book page or face the consequences.

The bird gives an unimpressed look. It flies off. Ram immediately gives chase.

RAM

Hey! You can't just run from the consequences.

Ram keeps pace with the bird on the ground below, weaving between trash piles and junk.

The bird eventually lands on the top of a junk pile. Ram darts towards it, hand outreached, but is interrupted with something sails overhead. It lands and rolls at her feet.

It is a small metal ball with a black screen. In blue, digital text, it reads: ANTI-GRAVITY INITIATED. It suddenly BEEPS and the ground nearby RUMBLES.

The items around her and the bird slowly rise. A chair shoots up near Ram's crouched figure. Before the tremors cause her to fall, the chair scoops her up and rises.

Ram whips her head around, the ground growing distant. The bird just flies off. Ram looks on horrified as the ball attracts more items to it: a new floating island is forming.

The bird is getting further away. Ram looks down to see a rickety old slide flying up. A deep breath.

RAM

Please work, please work, please work!

Ram jumps off the chair and freefalls. She slides down the slide. At the bottom she pushes up. The floating objects, boxes, and bricks create steps for her to descend. She slides down a wooden board and hits the ground with a THUD.

Ram takes a BEAT to recalibrate. She looks up at the garbage island and LAUGHS HYSTERICALLY.

RAM

Another daring victory!

Another CAW snaps her out of it. The crow disappears over a mountain. Ram runs towards the same direction.

RAM

Oh no you don't!

Ram frantically searches the area, tossing items over her shoulder. As she goes, her searching gets more frantic. Another BEAT. Then A FRIGHTENED CAW, noticeably different.

Ram immediately runs towards the noise and around a corner.

EXT. RUMMAGE OUTSKIRTS, ALCOVE - DAY

Ram rounds the corner and its met with an alcove made of garbage. It is dark, and hard to see. She cautiously enters and the roach descends her shoulder to scurry ahead.

All is quiet. A total tonal shift from the bright world. Ram steps further, anxiety clear on her face. The roach skittering ahead makes her pause.

It runs a bit further and stops at the book page sitting on the ground in a puddle of black liquid. Ram scoops it up, shaking of the liquid. She hugs it.

RAM

(to the roach)

Oh thank god. You know...you aren't such a bad beast after all.

It wriggles in place. Cheer is diminished, though, at the steady sound of dripping. Ram leans further into the alcove and more black liquid on the ground catches her attention.

She touches it and rubs her fingers together. Black, like the darkest ink. Suddenly, there's movement from the alcove.

What was once shadow is revealed to be an amorphous, bird-like creature. It shifts, slowly snapping open its beak while its entire body drips black goo to the floor.

The creature stalks to Ram who backs away. She raises her sword threateningly. The roach races up her shoulder again.

RAM

Leave us be! Or taste the might of my blade, you wretched creature!

It gets closer. Ram swings her sword at the monster. It just sinks into the creature's gooey body. Ram yanks hard to pull the sword free. When she does, its covered in the goo.

She grins nervously and shakes the goo off the sword.

RAM

Did I say taste? I meant a nibble! But if you're not hungry we can just run!

She runs out of the alcove. The monster SCREECHES after her.

EXT. RUMMAGE OUTSKIRTS - DAY

Ram skids across the ground in her haste to escape. She bobs and weaves around trash to get away from the monster.

Her running continues for a BEAT, allowing for more of the new world to be shown in its weirdness and design. Ram suddenly darts around a corner, but smacks into someone.

Both Ram and the mystery figure CRASH to the ground. Ram groans and shakes her head, her hood obscures her face.

REEVES O.S.

Hey! Watch it, why don't you!

RAM

Hey! I was just- Wait! There are other people here?! I thought I was the only one, listen I-

Ram looks up. A person or creature sits on the ground surrounding by a wide variety of items, including a basket.

He has the body of a man in casual, worn clothes. Yet his limbs are clothed differently from superhero leotard, knight's armor, and even a firefighter uniform. His head was even that of a dragon.

RAM

Well...I think. What are you?

The man shakes his body. The clothes transform until they are all worn. His head turns into a human male with tired eyes and unkempt facial hair. This is REEVES (thirty years old).

REEVES

What am I?! Figures. It figures this happens. "Go to the Outskirts Reeves! it will be fun!" I go out to the outskirts to do some scavenging for once and I attacked and questioned by some-

He finally looks to Ram. He only takes in the bunny hoodie.

REEVES

Rabbit? That's a new one. I don't think no rabbits have any room to talk. "What are you?" Please.

RAM

(yanking off her hood)  
I am not a rabbit!

REEVES

Hmph. I almost prefer the rabbit.

RAM

Hey!

Reeves walks past Ram and starts collecting his items into his basket.

REEVES

Let me ask the proper question. What is a reckless little kid doing all the way out here in the Outskirts? It's no place for whiny little rabbits.

RAM

Hey! I'm not whiny! And I'm a knight!  
On a mission!

REEVES

(sarcastically)

Oh a knight! Well, that changes everything. Well then, where's your steed?

The roach crawls out of Ram's hoodie collar and hops on her shoulder. Reeves immediately leaps back. His body mutates, quickly running through different forms like before.

He settles back on his original form, looking woozy.

RAM

(amazed)

How did you do that? Are you a monster too? Get back!

She swings her sword out, taking out Reeves' knees. He doubles over in pain. She goes to swing again.

REEVES

Okay! Okay! Enough of that! You don't need to beat every lost imaginary friend out there to get them to change forms! It happens naturally and at my own pace!

RAM

Imaginary friend?

REEVES

Yes! Not a monster. Well...some are animals, creatures, whatever. But the real monster is whoever imagined you up, yeesh!

RAM

But I'm not an imaginary friend! I'm a...reality friend!

REEVES  
Reality friend? You're not imaginary?

RAM  
No! I'm from Keeps Grove! You know,  
just outside the dump!

A BEAT. Reeves stares heavily. He visually deflates and walks off to pick up more of his stuff.

REEVES  
Alright, I don't have time to unpack  
all of that.

RAM  
You just gestured to all of me!

REEVES  
Listen kid, I don't know where you  
come from whether it be Sheep's  
Groves-

RAM  
Keeps Grove. And my name is Ram, not  
kid.

Reeves pauses pointedly at the name, glances over his shoulder, then carries on.

REEVES  
Yeah, sure whatever, Ram. But this is  
Rummage. not a little dump.

He picks up a broken toy train. Ram arches an eyebrow in response. He rolls his eyes and shoves it in the basket.

REEVES  
Alright, maybe it is a little. Not  
everything is garbage. Just lost.

RAM  
Lost?

In the background, a black shape shifts unseen by the two. Ram jumps at faint rustling, but can't see anything.

REEVES  
Yeah, yeah lost. Like you lose a  
stuffed animal? A toy? A shoe? Washer  
eat your sock? It ends up here.

Reeves picks up items corresponding to his speech. He looks around for more. He turns to Ram. She stands closer, holding a black folder with a cheeky grin. He frowns and takes it.

REEVES

And drawings too. Rummage is home to everything and everyone lost. It appears here in the Outskirts first and goes from there. I would go home before you get lost.

Ram watches Reeves thumb through the folder's pages. Simultaneously, she gets an idea and pulls out the empty cover of her picture book with her own loose pages.

Reeves walks off, leaving Ram behind. She chases after him. Behind the two, a dark shape slinks by.

RAM

Wait! But I have lost something! I'm looking for pages of my book! I thought they might be in the dump, but I walked through a magic door and keep finding them here.

REEVES

Cool, kid. And so what? It's just a picture book. I've seen plenty during my stint as a kid's playmate. Just get a new one when you get back home.

RAM

I don't want a new one! This is from my parents. It has a dragon that steals an entire kingdom! And a knight and his apprentice who go on a quest to save them! And they get everything back to normal and live happily every after!

REEVES

Ah, real original.

RAM

And its here! I have seen the pages! This must be my quest! Every knight goes on a quest to see if they are worthy and can save the day! This must be mine! I have to find the pages in Rummage. When I do, everything will go back to normal.

Reeves SNORTS to Ram's annoyance. He struts ahead smoothly.

REEVES

Listen, kid: a picture book is nice and all, but Rummage is huge. It's not your little stroll through the park. It's not like Creeps Grove.

Reeves moves fluidly past all obstacles in his way. He easily dodges loose objects, slides down inclines, and hops over barriers. Meanwhile, Ram struggles to make it past all the odd objects and shapes in Rummage.

Another metal ball sails over head. Reeves ducks, sidestepping floating items. Ram floats upwards, trapped on a box. He plucks her up like a stray cat and sets her down.

REEVES

See, can't even dodge the Outskirts' clean up crew. You'd end up lost the minute you stepped out of the Outskirts.

RAM

Then help me!

REEVES

Excuse me?

RAM

Please help me on my quest! You know this place. More than me! And Imaginary friends help kids, right? Every knight needs a sidekick!

REEVES

(deadpanned)

Oh wow a tempting offer. Don't you have the roach already?

RAM

(looking at it)

He said he's willing to share the glory with you.

REEVES

Oh gee, how kind. Listen, Ram, I have a schedule to keep. If you don't mind.

He tries to sidestep, but she jumps in front of him, sword drawn. This repeats for a BEAT, but Ram keeps one step ahead.

RAM

Reeves, you leave me no choice but to enact the fullest extent of my knightly training.

EXT. RUMMAGE OUTSKIRTS - FIVE MINUTES LATER

Reeves walks through the Outskirts with a scowl and seemingly a limp. A quick PAN DOWN reveals Ram latched onto his leg. She smacks the other with her sword.

The roach crawls off Ram, up Reeves' arm, to his shoulder. It headbutts Reeves' own head, helping out.

REEVES

You know, aren't knights supposed to be courteous and chivalrous?

RAM

Aren't imaginary friends supposed to be friendly?

REEVES

Who raised you?

RAM

My parents! Who I am trying to help if you would just help me get this book together.

REEVES

I'll help you get home and out of my hair, starting now.

The door Ram came through appears as they round a corner. Reeves drags his leg and Ram over to the door.

REEVES

This your magic door?

RAM

Definitely not.

REEVES

Uh huh, sure. Well, whatever it is, you're going back to Leap's Grove.

RAM

Keeps Grove!

REEVES

Whatever! Time to go home-

He opens the door. However, there is nothing on the other side. Only a wall of junk and garbage. He opens and shuts the door repeatedly. He glares down, shaking Ram off his leg.

REEVES

Do I need to say a cute little phrase or something? What am I missing here?

RAM

Open Sesame!

REEVES

I feel like you're mocking me which is impressive for a toddler.

RAM

I am not a toddler! I'm seven!

REEVES

Still little enough to need me to get you around though?

RAM

(scoffing)

Well, yeah! You live here and you're like a bajillion feet tall-

REEVES

A bajillion?

RAM

You'd probably spot the goop monsters way before I could from all the way up there.

REEVES

I don't think I like the way you said "all the way up there" and-wait. Did you say goop monster.

RAM

Yeah!

REEVES

Kid, I told you there are no monsters in Rummage. Not in Rummage, not in the Outskirts, not-

A piece of black goop drips on Reeves' hand. He pauses to analyze. Another drip. Ram and Reeves slowly look up.

The bird-like goop monster sits perched above the magic door. It's gaping maw opens, dripping black liquid like an overflowing faucet. Ram and Reeves stare in horror.

RAM

So, that's an imaginary friend and not a monster.

REEVES

I may need to recount the monster population in Rummage. Let's do that later and run!

He darts off, but Ram stays behind. She rushes forward to do damage with her sword.

RAM

Well, I'll put the count back to zero!

Before Ram can get far, Reeves grabs her by her hood and pulls her back. Ram runs in place, struggling against him. He ultimately scoops her up and runs off. The monster SCREECHES.

REEVES

What are you nuts?! You ain't gonna get back any book pages if you get eaten by a sludge monster!

RAM

So you will help me?!

A black sludge bomb narrowly misses them, making Reeves drop Ram. She lands on her feet, stumbles, but he pulls her along. They look up to see the sludge monster overhead, following.

REEVES

I don't think now is the time to talk about this!

They rush under a tilted couch for cover. The sound of SCREECHING remains overhead.

RAM

(whispering)

You believe me about the monsters now?

REEVES

(whispering)

Well, yeah! Hard not to when one is trying to make you its lunch. I haven't seen anything like that in Rummage before. Doesn't look like an imaginary friend or lost drawing.

RAM

(whispering)

Wait! You're an imaginary friend? Can't you do that transform thingy? You know, like before? Get us out of here to vanquish the beast?

REEVES

(sheepish, whispering)

It's not that simple. I...I haven't had complete control over my transformations in a while. It's harder than it looks!

Reeves' hiss is cut off by a THUMP and black talons. The bird creature clings to the sofa the two sit under. It stalks around the area, CHITTERING and dripping goo.

Suddenly, the roach skitters down Ram's arm. Ram watches it scuttle to a broken mirror shard. It nudges it. Light bounces and reflects to a nearby junk pile.

The bird cocks its head and investigates the light, curious. Ram watches intently. The image of the bird in her mother's yard flashes in her mind.

She looks around, spotting a large wooden sign, almost sled-sized. She looks pointedly at Reeves' arm.

RAM

(whispering)

You may not be able to control it, but we can get out of here.

EXT. KEEPS GROVE OUTSKIRTS, GARBAGE PILE - FEW MINUTES LATER

On the ground, the goop monster prowls. Reeves and Ram sneakily climb up a trash pile. Reeves makes it look effortless while Ram stumbles along. Both make it to the top.

Ram lays out the wooden sign and climbs on. Reeves joins. Ram grabs a can, preparing to throw it over.

REEVES

So, have you ever done this before?

Ram grins confidently.

RAM

Nope! But a true knight is ready for everything!

REEVES

Brat, if you kill us, I'm going to kill you...Wait, that doesn't make-

RAM

Here we go!

Ram throws the can hard at the monster. It immediately looks up and at the two on the junk pile. It flies towards them.

REEVES

Alright, this would be a good time to enact your genius knight plan, kid!

Reeves, paying attention to the creature, did not notice Ram's sword lift towards his face. The roach sits on the end. Reeves turns, sees it, and bugs out with transforming.

Ram watches the arm near her takes different forms before landing on a shiny bit of armor. She slams her sword down, stopping the transformation and holding it steady.

REEVES

Ow! Remind me to not let a child make our next plans!

RAM

Hang on!

The creature gets closer, but Ram leans forward just as its claws brush their heads. The sled falls and the two SCREAM. The sled bounces off the junk pile and flies down.

The bird comes in close, snapping its jaws and talons at the two. Ram concentrates on steering, glancing up at the pursuing bird monster. She looks back and ducks her head.

RAM

Duck!

REEVES

What?!

Reeves barely misses a pipe whizzing by. He turns to look.

REEVES

Geeze! That could have taken my head off!

RAM

Duck!

Reeves ducks, only to watch a small rubber duck go over his head. He glares at it and at Ram.

REEVES

Really?

Suddenly, an open chest drawer slams into his head.

REEVES

(dazed)

Oh. That duck.

RAM

Crow Monster!

REEVES

Duc-Crow Monster?

Another clack of talons barely miss Reeves' head. Ram glances back and angles Reeves' armored arm. She uses the light bouncing off metal to produce a reflection.

The creature is immediately distracted. It follows the light. Unfortunately, the two are reaching the bottom of the pile. Reeves looks up and sees a broken fridge on a nearby hill.

REEVES

Let me do it!

He angles the light to the inside of the fridge. The bird flies into it, sending the fridge tumbling over, and the door shuts behind it. SCREECHES and CLAWING comes from inside.

Ram and Reeves just sled on past.

EXT. RUMMAGE OUTSKIRTS EDGE - DAY

The two crash into a junk pile at the bottom of the hill. They are buried underneath. Suddenly, Ram bursts out, cheering.

RAM

Did you see that! We just vanquished

that beast! We kicked its butt! We were like pshew! on that sled! And the bird was like ahhh don't smite me! And we were like-

REEVES (O.S.)

Alright kid, I think we get the synopsis.

Reeves pops out of the junk. A piece of paper covers his eyes and items cling to his jacket. He pulls off the paper.

REEVES

Ah great. This will take forever to get clean again.

Ram glances at the paper and gasps. She grabs it, holding it up for him to read.

RAM

Wait! Look! It's another page! I told you my book page was here!

The page shows the knight, the apprentice, and their steed. Ram lowers the page with a mischievous grin. She slides next to Reeves, holding up the page and roach.

RAM

Looks a lot like us on our epic quest!

REEVES

This again, kid? Alright, we escape one monster, that don't make it a quest.

RAM

Not like I can get home! The door won't open! Maybe I have to find my pages first!

REEVES

These are beginning to sound like ploys to get me to help you.

RAM

Lost things go here, right? If I find my pages, they can't be lost! So then I can leave! Ta-dah!

REEVES

No amount of ta-dahs is going to

convince me, you know.

RAM

Then what will? We're a great team!

REEVES

I don't like kids and I don't like quests. I have a lot of errands to run. I wish I could help, but I can't.

Reeves turns, as if to leave.

RAM

(smaller, quieter)

...Please. I need to get this book back. It's important for my family. We need to stay together. Please.

Reeves runs through every emotion at once. He sighs and looks at Ram who appears even smaller than before. A little kid, all alone. Reeves rubs his face in annoyance.

REEVES

I'm going to regret this. Fine! I'll do it! Got to make sure you're out of here and out of my hair. Just this once.

Ram immediately perks up. Almost like emotional whiplash. Reeves stares almost suspiciously as Ram darts ahead.

RAM

Thank you! Now come on, Pip and I are ready to go!

REEVES

Pip?

Ram holds up the roach and Reeves flinches back.

REEVES

Hmmmm. Did you just make up that name on the spot?

RAM

Definitely not he's a valued member of the group who gets to travel with us.

REEVES

Suddenly, my decision is seeming more and more unappealing.

RAM

It's going to be great! The best quest yet! We'll find everything in no time!

Ram runs over a hill, Reeves behind her. She suddenly stops in awe right at the edge of the Outskirts. Reeves grins.

REEVES

What? You didn't think Rummage was just the Outskirts did you?

The land of Rummage is sprawling in front of them. The colors are even brighter, almost fantasy-like. From here, they can barely see the edge of great forests, winding rivers, and looming towers. The Seussian nature of the space is clear.

REEVES (O.S.)

People lose more than just junk you know.

RAM

Really?

REEVES

Well yeah! You're lucky you got me kid, you'll make it through just fine.

Ram darts ahead in excitement, Reeves trailing behind. We linger on the scene PANNING until the fridge trapping the beast is in frame.

The fridge shakes once, twice. Suddenly, black goo pours out the sides of the fridge. The door opens and the cartoon, hand-drawn bird from earlier emerges, disoriented.

The goo slinks away, following Ram and Reeves' direction.

EXT. RUMMAGE FIELDS - DAY

Ram and Reeves walk through a valley filled with cartoon and real flowers. Ram runs around, swinging her sword wildly and acting out scenes from her book. Reeves watches her play.

RAM

And so the Knight's apprentice is smart, right? She swings her sword like this and activates the trap for the dragon! She saves every kingdom that the dragon ever stole and everything goes back to normal! It's crazy!

REEVES

Ah yes, so crazy. How does everything go back to normal? The dragon stole so many kingdoms. Seems unrealistic.

RAM

Psh, no! It just does! With moves just like this!

Ram runs around wildly, attacking the tall grass.

REEVES

(amazed and horrified)

I'll never understand how children have so much energy.

RAM

Did you see!?

REEVES

It was a bit hard to miss, kid.

RAM

Now you know the story! It'll make looking out for the pages a lot easier.

REEVES

This book means that much to you kid?

RAM

Well, duh! It's my family's favorite book! We read it every night! It's been our thing! It's my favorite part of that day! Well that and when we get to play-

REEVES

Let me guess, you put on a little play and you get to act everything out with a cardboard stage?

RAM

No! Well...it was a wooden stage, but still! How did you-

REEVES

Trust me kid, I've seen it all before and this is no different. We'll get your little book back and everything will be fine and you'll be back in

your old house and out of here.  
Problem fixed.

A beat. Ram looks more serious, a change in tone.

RAM

Yeah. I'm going to make everything  
fine! Everything is going to fixed!  
I'll make sure of it!

REEVES

Glad to hear of it, kid. Now keep up!  
We're burning daylight.

RAM

Daylight?

Ram looks up at the sky and jumps back.

RAM

Daylight?! It can't be daylight! I had  
to get back by morning!

REEVES

Might have missed the mark on that  
one.

RAM

Well come on! We got to hurry! I got  
to fix this now!

Ram darts ahead, the roach on her shoulder clinging for dear  
life. Reeves blanches and swiftly follows.

REEVES

Whoa there! I appreciate the quicker  
pace but remember: I'm the guide here!  
Slow down!

RAM

I can't! I've got to find these pages  
and get back before it's too late to  
fix everything!

REEVES

And how do you expect to find the  
pages without me, remember? It's not  
like you're going to find any clues  
just running by here-

A blur catches their attention. It pauses, revealing an oddly

familiar plush horse, identical to Ram's at home.

RAM

Whoa!

REEVES

That's just a lost stuffed animal.  
They're a dime a dozen here. You know  
how many playgrounds and field trips  
result in tragedy each year? Yeesh.

RAM

Wait, I know that horse! That one's  
mine! It's Twinkles! My mom put my  
initials on the leg, just like that!

It runs off again. Ram chases with Reeves not too far behind.

RAM

Hey! Wait up!

REEVES

Of course! The one stuffed animal we  
run into and she happens to know it!  
By name no less!

After a chase, the horse dips into the under brush. Ram skids  
to a halt, looking around frantically.

RAM

Hey! Twinkles! Where did you go!?

Reeves finally catches up, wheezing.

REEVES

How are you so fast on such little  
legs!

RAM

I can't find it! Where did Twinkles  
go?

REEVES

My guess? Where all lost stuffed  
animals end up...

He pushes brush to the side and Ram's eyes widen.

EXT. TOY TOWN OUTSKIRTS - DAY

REEVES (O.S.)  
Welcome to Toy Town.

Toy Town looks more like a play village. The buildings are smaller and constructed out of kiddie play equipment and school room supplies. Yet, everything appears cheerful with various plush toys milling around.

Ram takes a step forward toward the town.

REEVES  
Hey, you sure you want to go in there?

RAM  
I've got to hurry and Twinkles is the only thing I really know from home.

REEVES  
Maybe we shouldn't rush into things. The toys here can get a little- And she's gone.

Reeves is alone watching Ram run into town.

EXT. TOY TOWN - DAY

Ram approaches Toy Town and catches the attention of its citizens quickly. Toys pause, in shock, at her appearance. She waves. The roach hops off her shoulder and scuttles off.

RAM  
Hello citizens! My name is Ram and I've come from a distant land to find-

RANDOM TOY  
A child!

The toys clamber to Ram. Soon, she is swarmed by toys and fighting to get away. Her sword swings back to defend herself, yet the toys appear happy to see her.

RAM  
Reeves! I'm being attacked!

REEVES  
(walking up)  
I tried to warn you!

PUDDLES (O.S.)

Now wait a minute! Is this not how we  
treat a new friend!

A small toy dog, PUDDLES, shoos the other stuffed animals off  
Ram and helps her up. The dog is clearly well loved and worn.

PUDDLES

Sorry about that, miss. It's been a  
while since some here have seen a  
child. They just get a little excited.

A THWACK in the background. The trio turns to see a group of  
rougher, meaner looking toys lurking in the corners. Another  
THWACK goes the purposeful chop of the plastic knife on a  
cutting board full of play food. The group glares out.

PUDDLES

Well, some of us too excited.

RAM

Yeah, no kidding. Wait you can talk?!

PUDDLES

We may have been lost, but here, we  
find a little voice. My name is  
Puddles, I look over everything here.  
Yet, I'm surprised. We don't see  
actual people here very often. No  
offense to your friend there.

REEVES

None taken, fluff bag.

PUDDLES

Hmmm. What are you doing here, child?

RAM

Well, we were on the way trying to  
find my book when I thought I saw-

A blur slams into Ram's side knocking her over. It's Twinkles  
the horse. Ram laughs and hugs Twinkles to her chest.

RAM

Twinkles! I knew it was you!

Pip the roach scuttles back up Ram's arm. She looks at him.

RAM

Did you find her for me? You're really

good at that, you know? But what are you doing here Twinkles? I thought you were back at home?

Twinkles shakes her head and opens her mouth: nothing.

RAM

(to Puddles)

Wait, why can't she speak?

PUDDLES

It's so nice to see a toy reunited with their person. I just wish it was under better circumstances. As of late, it seems many of us have lost their voice.

REEVES

Lost their voice? What caused that?

PUDDLES

Not quite sure. Some toys have seen movements around the town. Something like...what did you call it Billy Bear?

BILLY BEAR

Unspeakable horrors.

PUDDLES

Right, unspeakable horrors. They showed up right when toys started losing their voice. We would go check around the town, but we can only get so far.

She lifts up her stubby plush legs.

REEVES

Of course not.

RAM

Ah man, I wish I could help, but I'm on this noble quest and I just don't have time...

The toys begin to wallow in despair, crestfallen.

RANDOM TOY

Left behind again!

## RANDOM TOY 2

When will the endless cycle of loss  
end?!

Ram looks at Twinkles during the chaos. Suddenly, flashes of her memories fly by: her parents gifting her the horse and the horse's place in her story. Ram winces and backs away.

## RAM

I just can't. I have to hurry or else  
I can't fix anything. I can't-

Ram bumps into Reeves, causing her book to fall out, pages falling to the ground.

## PUDDLES

Oh! If it is book pages you are  
looking for, I think I may have seen  
them around town.

Pip hops down from Ram's arm and skitters a little ways away.

## PUDDLES

Your little friend can help with  
finding that.

Ram gathers her pages and a shadow stops her. She looks up to see Twinkles with a page in her mouth. Ram slowly takes it.

## RAM

...Alright. This quest might have a  
moment to search for pages here.

The toys immediately perk up again.

## PUDDLES

Wonderful! Good luck and do be  
careful!

## BILLY BEAR

Careful of the Unspeakable Horrors.

## REEVES

Yes! Thank you, Billy Bear.

Ram and Reeves follow Pip. Something shifts in the shadows.

EXT. TOY TOWN OUTSKIRTS - DAY

Reeves lounges on a nearby rock watching Ram search for pages. Pip runs around in circles, seemingly confused.

REEVES

Did you check under that rock?

Ram scowls as she lifts up the fifth rock in a row. No luck. Even Pip collapses, worn out and lost. She strikes her sword against the rock, angered.

RAM

I've been looking here forever!

REEVES

It's been fifteen minutes, kid.

RAM

We are wasting time! We don't even know if there are unspeakable horrors or my pages! I mean, Pip can't even find anything!

REEVES

Glad you're taking directions from a roach.

RAM

Well at least he is helping me! What about you?

REEVES

I'm the directions guy and information guy! And look, I'm directing you to check over there.

A beat. He points to a nearby collection of toy houses.

REEVES

Those are houses, for your information.

RAM

Ugh. You're crazy! You must hate kids.

REEVES

I do not! I'm just...ready to get back to my scavenging, that's all.

RAM

Right. I'm going to go check over there. Not because you directed me to. Because that's where I want to go and I think pages will be over there.

Ram walks away and Reeves sighs. Rubbing his eyes, he misses two black shapes slink after Ram.

EXT. TOY TOWN ALLEYWAYS - DAY

Ram and Pip creep down the alley. Trashcans are filled with play food and items. Ram peers into some as she moves along.

In the back, two black shapes dart between alleyways. Ram turns at the THUD of a trashcan, but sees nothing. She walks over to the overturned can, searching through it.

RAM  
(to Pip)  
See anything yet?

Pip scuttles around the emptied can, pausing at a puddle nearby. It is a puddle of black goo. Familiar black goo.

Ram leans in to analyze it further, but is interrupted.

SCRATCHED VOICE  
(Wispy and broken)  
Ram.

RAM  
What was that?

A beat. Nothing. Silence. Then-

SCRATCHED VOICE  
Raaaaam!

Pip hops and runs down an alley. Ram quickly follows, running down various alleyways after the voice. Meanwhile, the voice keeps CALLING to her.

Ram doesn't notice, but puddles of black goo keep showing up and growing in size as she gets closer to the voice.

Eventually, she hits a dead end. The alley is dark, hard to see past the shadow.

RAM  
In there?

Ram and Pip walk forward, but pause when Ram's boot hits a black puddle. She touches the puddle and recognizes the goo.

RAM  
Wait, this is just like the crow.

A drop of black sludge hits the back of her head.

SCRATCHED VOICE

Raaaaaaaaaam!

Ram slowly looks up. The shadows of the alley shift.

RAM

Ah. Unspeakable horrors.

The alleyway was never shadowy, the dark creature made of goo was really the source of the shadow. It's larger than before.

It looms over Ram, form shifting. It takes the form of various creatures: a dog, a cat, a bear, and lastly a horse. A very familiar looking horse.

SCRATCHED VOICE

Raaaaaaam!

RAM

Twinkles?

When it speaks, its body bloats with light. Almost like something is trapped inside. A CACAPHONY OF SCREECHES AND SQUEALS erupt with light before settling back down.

Pip jumps and runs away, leaving Ram alone.

RAM

The voices! You've been taking them!  
Whoa!

The creature lunges forward, snapping its teeth. Ram dodges, swinging her sword to smack it. It HISSES and bares its fangs. The fangs, however, look awfully familiar. They are papery: Ram's book pages.

RAM

And my book pages!? Alright, that's it! You're just a rotten beast to be brought to justice! And I'm the one to do it!

Ram smacks the creature again and it HOWLS moving back. She LAUGHS and prepares to charge it.

Ram rushes forward, but the creature is ready this time. It quickly transforms again into a cat. It smacks Ram back with a clawed paw. She falls, pinned under the beast.

Her sword is knocked away. She tries to get it, but can't reach. The beast rears back, ready to strike.

A LOUD CLANG stops the lunge. Reeves steps in last minute, his arms transformed into armor with a shield. He struggles under the weight. The roach runs back and up Ram's arm.

RAM

Whoa, nice armor.

REEVES

Thanks, kid. So, unspeakable horrors?

RAM

Looks like it.

REEVES

Right. Can't leave you alone for a moment, kid.

Reeves heaves upwards, sending the creature stumbling. He grabs Ram's arm and pulls her along.

REEVES

Come on! Let's go! Let's go!

INSERT MONTAGE:

Ram and Reeves' battle with the goo monster through the town.

- The two run down an alley. The monster crawls after along the walls.

- They run, knocking garbage cans in the way. The monster just plows right through them.

- They enter into a backdoor slamming the door behind them. They are relieved until black goo drips from door cracks. They rush onwards, the monster forming behind them.

- They run through a little toy diner filled with fake food and plush toys. Ram swings her sword as the creature barrels through tables and chairs. She smacks it, giving them time to get away and out the front door.

- They rush into Toy Town Town Square, an open quad.

EXT. TOY TOWN TOWN SQUARE

Reeves stumbles over a fleeing toy and falls. Ram notices his fall and the creature gaining on him. She runs back to fight.

Before the creature can pounce, the real Twinkles slams into the creature, sending it off balance. In fact, the force of the hit sends the book pages flying out of the beast's mouth.

Ram runs over to the pages about the pick them up. She looks up to Twinkles and the creature standing off against each other. She looks between the pages and Twinkles.

REEVES

Come on! We got to move!

RAM

What about the monster? The toys-

A BEAT. She looks to the toys all around the quad watching. She looks back to the monster again.

RAM

The toys!

She darts to the monster, away from the pages, and dodging its strikes. She raises her sword, but throws it aside. A leap and she's wrapped her arms around the beast.

RAM

(to the toys)

Wow! I sure could use a hug right about now! Just me, this human child!

The toys CHEER and rush the quad. They hug Ram and, consequently, the monster as well. The monster thrashes and SCREECHES, but can't quite escape.

Ram, however, wiggles free. She races past her book pages, snatches her sword, and slices the monster's side. Light pours out. A FINAL SCREECH and light over takes the creature.

Pulses of light fly back towards various stuffed animals. When it dies down the monster is gone. The stuffed animals cheer and surround Ram again.

RAM

(as she's knocked down)

Ah, I should have expected this!

During the celebration, unseen by all, more black goo slithers away.

REEVES

Not bad work, kid. Could have arced that last swing.

RAM  
 (laughing)  
 How would you know?

PUDDLES (O.S.)  
 Well I thought it was wonderful!  
 Wonderful!

Puddles runs in, shooing away the stuffed animals crowding Ram. She gives her own hug.

PUDDLES  
 What a show! Oh you were fantastic,  
 truly! Thank you so much!

RAM  
 Ah, well. It's nothing really.

PUDDLES  
 Well, I'm sure not all think so little  
 of it.

Puddles gestures to the side. Twinkles walks up, book pages in her mouth. Ram gets down on her level and takes them.

TWINKLES  
 I think these belong to you.

Ram looks down at the pages. It contains the Knight and the Apprentice riding horses across the fields. There are notes on the pages, plans from Reina to construct a plush horse.

Ram gulps and hugs Twinkles tight.

TWINKLES  
 Thank you for finding me.

RAM  
 I'm going to fix everything.

TWINKLES  
 I think you're on the right track.  
 Remember, I'm not at home, just at  
 your Dad's house.

RAM  
 Wait, what do you-

Twinkles walks away and Ram looks on, confused. She looks down at the pages again, hand brushing against the different notes from the entire family.

RAM

Huh.

Suddenly, Pip darts onto the pages causing Ram to grin.

RAM

There you are! Was wondering where you've been!

PUDDLES

Oh! Are those the book pages you've been after? No wonder you've been keeping that little one with you.

RAM

You mean Pip?

PUDDLES

Those critters are good at finding things from both worlds. Easy for them to slip through the cracks. You follow that little one and you're sure to find your pages if they are from outside Rummage.

RAM

You hear that Reeves? It's a good thing we brought Pip along.

REEVES

(grimacing)

I'm practically leaping for joy.

PUDDLES

You've imagined yourself a...colorful imaginary friend, haven't you dear?

REEVES

She did nothing! I'm no child's plaything. Not anymore! Come on, kid. Didn't you say we were burning daylight?

Reeves storms away. Ram lingers, staring at him then back and Twinkles who is talking with various stuffed toys.

RAM

Yeah, I guess so.

PUDDLES

You better get going dear. Keep to it,

and you'll find what you are looking for. We'll keep your friend safe and sound until you find her again.

RAM

Thank you.

PUDDLES

Not everything stays lost forever.  
Good luck on your quest.

Ram waves goodbye one last time before rushing after Reeves.

She runs through the grass, but doesn't notice the puddle of black sludge by her feet.

EXT. RUMMAGE FIELDS - DAY

An empty field. Pip rushes by followed by Ram and Reeves. A few childish doodle animals race across the field.

Reeves' posture is tense, matching his dour look. Ram just watches Pip scurry ahead of them.

RAM

(finally catching up to him)  
Hey! Slow down! You're moving so fast!

REEVES

Weren't you the one who wanted to keep moving forward and hurrying along?

RAM

Well yeah, I guess. It was good to see Twinkles again though. And I got more pages all by myself.

REEVES

What am I? Chopped liver? And what about those fuzzballs back in the town?

A BEAT. Ram ponders.

RAM

I guess so. But I'm going to finish this quest strong! I'll fix everything back home myself.

REEVES

Ah yes! The might of a drooling

toddler. I can't wait to see it.

Ram scowls and rushes ahead, even further than Pip. He watches her go and scurries around in panic.

RAM

You'll see! I can do this! You're just grumpy because you don't like fun or kids! I'm a great knight with her trusty crew and will save everything and-WHOA!

Not watching where she's going, Ram almost stumbles off an unforeseen cliff. Pip runs over and tries to to push her leg back, but she tumbles over the edge.

Just before she falls over completely, Reeves grabs her arm.

REEVES

I don't hate kids.

He pulls her back over the edge.

REEVES

I just...like to keep to myself. And I'm not grumpy.

He starts walking again. Ram follows behind.

RAM

Well you look like you're in a a grumpy mood. Were you imagined that way?

REEVES

No.

RAM

Seems like it since we left Toy Town.

REEVES

And I'm telling you I'm not grumpy. That's just my face.

RAM

Are you sure? Why would a kid imagine a friend that's such a big, mean grouch-

REEVES

She did not!

Reeves' shout stops them in their tracks. A BEAT of wide eyed stares. Reeves breathes heavily before SIGHING.

RAM

She?

REEVES

I meant I. I am not grumpy. Look, let's just keep going, alright? Get your dumb book back. Looks like your bug found something anyways.

Sure enough, Pip stands poised at the edge of a hill, hopping to get their attention. When he has it, he scuttles forward.

Reeves storms ahead leaving Ram behind. Ram watches him for a moment. Images of her parents fighting flash through her mind. She lets out a shaky SIGH and slowly follows.

EXT. HILLS OF LOST TALENTS - DAY

Reeves and Ram stand on a hill at the edge of a large clearing. Below sits a large amphitheater, complete with a cracked marble stage.

Scattered throughout the amphitheater, leaning against columns are various instruments, art supplies, sports equipment, and more. Its a treasure trove of hobbies.

RAM

Whoa. Did a school program throw up in here?

REEVES

Close, but not quite. More like, the hills of lost talents.

He walks down hill, maneuvering between various objects and items. Ram follows after.

RAM

Talents? Like actual talents. Like singing?

REEVES

Yeah. People leave behind hobbies all the time. Sports, music, acting, collecting, you name it. People don't just lose objects, you know.

RAM

I guess I never thought of it like that.

EXT. TALENT AMPHITEATER - DAY

Ram walks up to a guitar sitting against a pillar. She tries to pick it up many times, but it doesn't budge. It's almost like someone has bolted it to the ground.

She eyes a soccer ball. She runs up, tries to kick, but it doesn't move, sending her flying over and to the ground.

RAM

Did they lose a tub of cement too?!  
This thing weighs a ton!

REEVES

Nice try, kid. You can't just pick up a skill again so easily. At least not without the desire to do so.  
Everything here is a bit finicky.

RAM

(trying to pick up a paintbrush)  
You don't say.

Ram and Reeves look up at the sound of PIANO KEYS. Pip runs along the stage where keys are ingrained into amphitheater marble floor.

Pip rushes across the keys to the back of the stage where there is a heavy door. In the doorframe's crack, half a page flutters in the wind.

RAM

A page! Nice one, Pip!

Ram rushes up the stage, Reeves moseying to follow. She tries to reach the page, but it's too high. She CLEARS her throat. Reeves SIGHS but tries to pull the page out.

The page is stuck tight. Reeves pulls harder. Eventually, the tinniest tear starts at the bottom of the page.

RAM

Wait! Stop! You're going to tear it!

REEVES

Then what do you want me to do!?

RAM

Isn't there a way to open the door?  
Where's the knob?

Ram searches for the knob.

REEVES

(scoffing)

There isn't a knob here. It's a  
backstage door. It only opens when the  
curtains close and the performance is  
done.

He gestures wildly around him. He tries to nudge a nearby  
instrument.

REEVES

And take a look around! There isn't  
much performing to be done!

Ram frowns and looks around the area. She notices Pip sitting  
on the floor piano. He hops on one key. A slight CREAK. Ram  
looks back at the door.

She slowly walks next to Pip. Watching the door carefully,  
she puts weight on a few keys. The door CREAKS again. It  
wiggles in place, as if wanting to open.

RAM

That's it! We can put on a  
performance!

REEVES

What? We?

RAM

Yes, we! If we put on a show then the  
door will open! I do this all the time  
back at my dad's house and-

A BEAT. A small frown.

RAM

No, at my house. My family's house.  
This is something I can do, come on!

REEVES

This should turn out well.

Ram drags Reeves over to one portion of the floor piano. She  
hesitantly jumps around, trying to find a melody. She finds

one she likes and turns to Reeves.

RAM

Now you!

Reeves looks at the keys and steps, making a HORRID noise.

RAM

Close enough.

She slings her bag off her shoulder and digs around in it.

RAM

Maybe I can find something of a  
costume for you to wear! I might have-

She pauses. A BEAT. She slowly pulls out the family portrait that had fallen in earlier. She cradles it gently. Reeves looks over her shoulder. He looks serious and focused.

REEVES

Your dad missed a few buttons on his  
shirt.

RAM

(strained laughter)

Ha, yeah. He hates those kinds of  
clothes. Mom had to fight him to get  
him into those clothes....they had to  
fight for a lot of things.

Reeves looks at Ram confused then back to the picture. He lastly focuses in on the broken book in her bag.

Ram shakes off her gloom and bounds towards the audience. She places the picture down, as if to seat them for the show.

RAM

It doesn't matter! Cause when I'm  
getting home, I'm going to fix it all!  
I just have to!

REEVES

Kid, I'm not sure-

Ram runs up and past him to center stage.

RAM

Ladies and gentleman! Feast your eyes,  
if you dare, on this epic quest!  
Danger lurks at every corner for the

Knight and apprentice as they face the dreaded beast.

Ram gestures to Pip. He hops in place before puffing himself up, trying to looker bigger and more intimidating.

She gestures to Reeves and he SIGHS before trampling on the piano keys, making more HORRID sounds.

The door behind them CREAKS in appreciation. The items around the amphitheater do the same.

Ram hops on a few piano notes. A TUNE starts to play. One that is awfully similar to the one her dad plays. This causes her to pause, yet she tries to shake it off.

RAM

The beast approaches! No matter how far we must travel we will save the day and-

She keeps trying to play the TUNE, but she keeps stuttering and messing it up. She looks to the audience seating. Her family portrait sits, but it seems further and further away.

RAM

We will....we will...

Ram slowly halts. For the first time, she has stage fright.

Reeves watches her and she appears so small on the center stage. He glances out at the portrait. A BEAT. He sighs.

Ram looks up, startled, at the SOUND of REEVES' MELODY being played correctly. She looks over to him hopping on the piano keys, gesturing to her.

REEVES

We will save the day together, young apprentice! But we must battle the ferocious beast before we can claim victory!

Ram grins. She hops on the piano keys more confidently this time. She plays her FATHER'S SONG perfectly.

RAM

I'm ready when you are, noble knight.

INSERT MONTAGE

A quick montage of Ram and Reeves' performance on the stage. They twist and dance over the stage, pretending to duel blades and fight the "beast" together.

All the while, they hop on the piano keys. The only thing heard is the song they are playing.

The items in the amphitheater and the door seem to vibrate with the energy from their performance.

END MONTAGE

At the last note of their performance, Reeves's body seems to shift. When the shifting ends, Reeves is in a full knight's armor. Ram looks on in awe.

RAM

Whoa! You look like a real knight!

Reeves notices the change. His form twists out of control until he is back to normal. He looks sheepish.

REEVES

Ah, well, not really. Forget about it.

A LOUD CREAK catches their attention. The door slowly opens, sending the page fluttering to the ground.

RAM

(racing over to it)

Ha ha! We did it!

She scoops up the paper. The page contains a segment of the story where the heroes entertain and outwit a magic sword.

Ram smiles at the sheet music Richard doodled in the corner.

REEVES (O.S.)

Ah geeze, kid. You better come over here.

Reeves stands at the doorway looking out. Ram joins him. Beyond the doorway sits a raging river of different colors. The river moves very fast and is extremely wide.

RAM

Whoa.

REEVES

Agreed.

RAM

Is there any way across? Like a bridge or something?

REEVES

People don't lose bridges very often. At least, not big enough bridges for this. Besides, I don't think we are supposed to cross this one.

Ram and Reeves track Pip's movement as he scurries down the narrow strip of land. It's too narrow for the two to walk, but a roach moves just fine. He paces up and down the bank.

RAM

I don't suppose we could just try to swim down?

A child's drawing of a frog hops down the bank and in the water. A BEAT. It hops out, seemingly going through every emotion at once: laughing, crying, getting angry, etc.

REEVES

Yeah, I don't think so. You know the phrase "drowning in emotions?" This is what they are talking about. Sometimes people get so focused on one emotion that they forget all about the others.

RAM

So happy, sad, angry?

REEVES

All of those stirred into a cocktail of emotional overload.

RAM

What's a cocktail?

REEVES

Nothing you need to worry about for a long time. Maybe forever. What we do need to figure out is how to get out of here.

A BEAT. Ram suddenly looks down at her page. She flips it over. It shows the heroes crossing a river of tar in a raft.

RAM

I think I might have an idea. Come on!

Ram runs back across the stage and to the items scattered in the amphitheater. She stops by the soccer ball again. She runs up and gives it a swift kick. This time it flies off.

She searches through the items. She picks up a large wooden sled and turns to Reeves.

RAM

How are you at sailing?

REEVES

Not very good. You?

RAM

(cheerfully)

Not a clue how it works! Let's get building!

INSERT QUICK MONTAGE

A quick montage of Ram and Reeves gathering supplies to build a makeshift boat.

They grab long art boards, roll tires from cars, and grab old quilts from forgotten sewing projects. To tie things together, they find old jump rope and bungee cords.

END MONTAGE

The two stare at their completed product: a makeshift boat that, given the materials, looks fairly decent.

RAM

Think it will work?

REEVES

The good news is I'm tall, so I'll probably won't drown if it doesn't.

A BEAT. He looks at her and grins smarmily.

REEVES

You on the other hand, I'll have to carry.

Ram smacks her sword against his knee.

REEVES

Alright, I get it, kid. Let's finish tying the sails.

They start messing with ropes. Just as they near the end, there is a faint DRIP. Ram pauses, but carries on. Then, a black drop lands in front of her. Then another. Then more.

RAM

Oh no.

Black sludge drips down like rain. More sludge starts to drip down the amphitheater steps, pooling around the objects.

REEVES

Oh no?

He looks around then jumps up. He starts pushing the boat.

REEVES

Oh no!

Ram and Reeves push the boat towards the shore as the sludge rises. Suddenly, a breeze causes the sails to flare out. Similarly, a page from her bag catches, flying away.

Ram runs after it, against Reeves' CRY. She barely catches it before it flies off stage.

She squints at the small specks of goo on the page. She shakes it, but they don't seem to come off this time. She shakes it again, this time noticing the family portrait still sitting in the auditorium.

REEVES

Kid, come on! There's not much time!

Ram takes one step forward.

REEVES

Kid!

RAM

I can't leave them behind. I'm going to fix it.

She runs towards the portrait. Sludge piles up at her feet. She trudges through the sludge, the substance now waist deep.

REEVES

Ram!

Ram reaches the photo and grabs it. However, as soon as she does, black sludge latches on her arm and portrait.

Ram looks on in horror as the sludge morphs in front of her. Slowly, the sludge takes the amalgamated form of her mother and father. The sludge beast pulls the portrait, but Ram holds it steady.

RAM

No! I don't care if you look like my parents! I'm not letting you take this away from me!

She plays tug of war. Suddenly, the sludge on her arm slowly turns into a misshapen hand and arm. Slowly, a sludge version of Ram is forming. It blinks its eyes at Ram. They look sad.

RAM

No!

She swings her sword, slicing through Sludge Ram before it fully forms. Sludge Ram melts back into the goo. Another swing of her sword and the sludge parents fall. A BEAT.

She looks at the portrait in her hands, wiping away the sludge remaining, and heads back to Reeves and the ship.

As she heads back, black tendrils from the goo try to pull her down. With a swing of her sword, she knocks them away.

Just as she's climbing the amphitheater stairs, one black tendril reaches out and latches onto her ankle. She falls with a CRY, sword flying from her grasp. She reaches for it, but the tendril drags her back towards the sludge below.

She clutches her family photo to her chest, tears building. Suddenly, a real sword slashes through the goo. A hand grabs her own and she looks up: Reeves.

His body is transformed with his knightly sword and fireman boots. He hauls Ram to her feet and pulls her along.

The sludge, sensing their escape, flows faster. They barely make it on the boat, the sludge lapping at their heels.

They climb in the boat where Pip is waiting. He nudges his little body against the makeshift steering wheel. It pushes just enough to set sail.

The sludge almost WAILS angrily as the ship sashes down the river. Black muck laps at the banks edges, but can't reach.

EXT. RIVER OF EMOTION - DAY

The boat sloshes unevenly down the river. Ram and Reeves sway from side to side, trying to stay balanced. The wheel spins wildly, adding to the chaos. Ram notices and grabs at it.

RAM

The boat!

Ram tries to spin the wheel, but Reeves grabs it, expression unreadable. Ram tries to turn the wheel, but his grip is unshakable. Instead, he turns it to get the boat steady.

RAM

Reeves! Let me do this! I can do it! I can fix-

REEVES

You don't have to fix everything!

RAM

What?

REEVES

What were you thinking back there?!  
Going after that stupid picture! That sludge could have eaten you alive!

RAM

But it didn't! I'm fine!

REEVES

You shouldn't have though!

RAM

Why not! It was important! I had to!

REEVES

You're more important!

RAM

But-

REEVES

(heated)

No buts! I won't lose another child!

Silence. The boat slowly steadies. It floats listlessly down the stream. Ram stares wide-eyed. Reeves looks manic.

REEVES  
 (soft, almost broken)  
 I...I can't lose another child.

Another BEAT. Reeves slumps to the floor. Ram looks at the book page in her hand, crumbled under her clenched fist.

Ram looks to Reeves sitting on the boat's edge. She puts the page away and sits next to him. A BEAT of silence.

RAM  
 ...I'm sorry. I didn't know-

REEVES  
 You couldn't have.

A BEAT.

REEVES  
 (with a sigh)  
 Her name was Erica. And she...

Reeves looks down at Ram. He smiles.

REEVES  
 She was a lot like you.

RAM  
 Really?

REEVES  
 Yeah, kid. Annoying, loud, stubborn.

RAM  
 Hey!

REEVES  
 And one of the most imaginative people I know. Every day she made up new games for us to play. One minute I was a fire fighter, the next I was...well...a knight. She would always have me put out the fire or save the princess. And I would. I had to.

ANOTHER BIG SIGH. A BEAT.

REEVES  
 At least, I thought I could.

RAM

What...what happened to her?

REEVES

She...she was a bit sick. A lot sick actually. Still, I tried to make her smile. I thought if I could I could fix everything. I could make it better....but then...I lost her.

RAM

Lost? Is she here? Can't we find her?

REEVES

(tired)

Heh...I appreciate it, kid...but it's not that kind of lost.

RAM

Oh.

REEVES

Turns out, I was the one who ended up lost in the end. Maybe even before I ended up here...Listen, kid: sometimes, things happen. We would love to fix it, but not everything needs to be fixed right away.

They watch all the bright elements of Rummage pass. Ram is pensive. She looks at the portrait. A crack runs through the center, but the picture itself: undamaged.

RAM

Maybe, I don't know.

REEVES

You'll see kid. Just roll it around in the giant noggin of yours.

RAM

Hey! It's not giant!

REEVES

Sure kid, whatever you say.

The moment ends with shadows passing over. They look up. Their boat sits at forest's edge. The trees seem impossibly tall. Balls of light hang like fruit all over the trees.

RAM  
Whoa! What's this?

REEVES  
The Memory Grove. Didn't realize we  
were heading here.

They look back at Pip who hops excitedly on the wheel.

REEVES  
And it looks like this is where we  
need to go.

They float into the forest's entrance.

EXT. MEMORY GROVE RIVER BANKS - DAY

The forest blocks out most sunlight, casting it in dark greens and soft blues. The only light comes from the low glowing balls of light within the trees. Peaceful.

RAM  
The trees are so...tall!

REEVES  
Yeah, they have to be. They store the  
forgotten memories of everyone.

RAM  
Forgotten memories?

REEVES  
Yeah, of course. Everyone forgets at  
least something. You're telling me you  
remember what you had for lunch two  
months ago?

RAM  
Well...

REEVES  
Exactly, squirt. Here-

They float near a tree branch with a ball of light. Reeves gently pulls down a leaf, revealing the leaves to be strands of film tape. He pulls the film towards a ball of light.

The film is pulled inside. A BEAT. The ball of light jumps to life and flickers. Then, an image starts to appear like a TV.

A MIDDLE AGED MAN sits at a table. He slowly eats his

breakfast while his WIFE reads the newspaper. A CHILD doodles in a coloring book nearby. A peaceful morning.

The image fades and the tape recedes. The boat floats on.

RAM

Whoa!

REEVES

Yep, it's full of moments like these.

RAM

But how are we going to find my pages in all this?

Pip scurries down the wheel and runs in circles on the deck. He scurries up Ram's arm, up her sword, and points out towards the forest.

REEVES

Did you forget already? We have a little tracking device.

Ram gently raises her sword, letting Pip run on the grass. He darts away immediately, turning to check that they'll follow. The two tie the boat to a nearby tree and walk after Pip.

Ram pulls out a piece of chalk out of her bag. She marks a tree before following Reeves and Pip further in.

EXT. DEEP MEMORY GROVE - DAY, A FEW MINUTES LATER

The three walk in the forest, Ram marking trees with chalk.

REEVES

Why are you doing that?

RAM

There's a lost of trees. Don't want to get lost.

REEVES

I don't think we'll get lost. I know where I'm going, remember?

He pats a tree trunk. Ram looks unimpressed.

RAM

We've already passed by that tree.

Reeves lifts his hand. Sure enough, a chalk mark is there.

REEVES

I knew that.

Pip runs back, catches their attention, and runs to a specific tree. They follow. At the base of the tree, they look up. This tree is a bit smaller than average, but still tall. The film leaves dangle in their faces.

Ram catches a glimpse into one. She grabs it and holds it up to the light. Her own face smiles back at her.

RAM

Hey! It's me!

REEVES

What?

RAM

I'm in this one. Are these, my memories?

REEVES

Only one way to find out, kid.

Ram slowly feeds film reels into a glowing ball of light. It flickers harshly, with STATIC, and slowly begins to play.

An image of of the family appears on the screen. The Real Ram gasps, leaning in further.

REEVES

Your parents.

Movie Ram is putting on a show for her family. Movie Ram takes a bow and her movie family applauds wildly.

MOVIE REINA

(slightly exaggerated)

Bravo! Excellent work Ram!

MOVIE RICHARD

(equally exaggerated)

Way to go, kiddo!

Movie Ram runs to her family for a group hug. Over her head, the movie parents exchange a kiss. Suddenly, the entire film GLITCHES in BLACK with HARSH STATIC. The effect is brief.

REEVES

(confused)

Wait, what was that.

RAM

What are you talking about?

REEVES

That...thing at the end?

RAM

Wait! The next one is starting.

A new memory. Movie Ram plays in the park with her family. Movie Richard chases her. While she is distracted, Movie Reina swoops to snatch her up. They all LAUGH.

While they LAUGH, the film GLITCHES AGAIN. The black streaks becoming a little more prominent.

REEVES

There it is again! You see! Kid, I think there's something wrong here.

RAM

What are you talking about? There's nothing wrong! I remember this one now! I can't believe I forgot it! This is exactly how it happened.

REEVES

Ram-

Another memory cuts him off. Another happy scene with Movie Ram and her parents. The GLITCHING comes back, cutting the memory short. The process repeats over and over again, getting faster and more distorted.

REEVES

Ram! Something is wrong here.

RAM

No there's not! These are real! They are fine! It's just how they should be! Look how happy they are?

REEVES

But this isn't normal, it's-

The GLITCHING finally leads to another memory. Movie Ram runs into her room where her parents sit, waiting on the bed. They all have big, overexaggerated smiles. Something is off.

The GLITCHING is interrupting the memory. The three are sitting on the bed, supposedly reading a story. They are

curled together in an overly happy embrace and scene.

The GLITCHING worsens distorting the scene. Movie Ram's parents may or may not be tucking her in for bed. Ram leans in, practically shaking the glowing orb.

RAM

No! No! No! It's just a bad connection is all! We can fix it!

RICHARD

Ram! It's something else! There is something wrong here. The glitching isn't normal. This isn't normal!

RAM

How would you know!?

RICHARD

I've seen it all before! Something is distorting the memories! This isn't right!

Ram looks at the memory with teary eyes. The lasting image of her overly happy family burns on the screen. The screen itself seems to fill with black, glitching liquid.

RAM

(shaking her head in denial)  
No! I can't! It has to be real!

REEVES

And if it's not? Come on, we need to figure this out. It could be something to do with the pages.

Ram slams her fist on the screen. It jostles, disturbing the film branches and leaves above.

RAM

It's not! We'll find the pages and I can make us like this again. It will be perfect!

Small drips of black are pouring from the film leaves. Ram does not notice. Reeves does. Reeves grabs her arm and tries to pull her away. She fights back, raising her sword.

REEVES

Come on! This isn't going to help anything, remember? You don't have to

fix this!

RAM

(finally breaking away)

What would you know!? You're not even real! Erica was and you watched her leave!

Silence.

Ram and Reeves stand apart. Ram's sword is raised, on the offense. Reeves, however, looks hurt, shoulder sunken in.

A COUPLE BEATS. Things seem to settle.

REEVES

(steeling resolve)

Yeah. I did. I couldn't fix it. And it was the hardest thing I had to do.

Ram's expression falters. She opens her mouth, but suddenly takes note of the dripping black sludge as it increases.

All the lights on her tree appear to flicker with GLITCHING AND STATIC. The branches rustle, some drooping with weight and effort. Sheets of paper are imbedded between branches.

RAM

My...my pages?

They ARE pages, but they're dripping in sludge. Suddenly, all the light screens glitch to black. A BEAT. Then, they flick onto the same image of Ram and her family. However, movie Ram is distorted, as if she is made of sludge.

Movie Ram's soulless white eyes flicker to the two, making them jump. Slowly, sludge floods out of each memory sphere.

Ram and Reeves back away as one sludge Ram crawls out of the closest light sphere, the one they were watching.

Its movements are erratic and when its body hits the ground with a sickening SPLAT, the raining sludge increases. Noticeably, the sludge seems to lift off the pages themselves, feeding the Sludge Ram as it regains form .

Sludge Ram slams a hand into the tree for support, sending the pages to the ground with the force.

Ram slowly pick them up. She watches the text from the story fly up, the ink feeding into the monster. The ink monster.

Ram shakes the pages and the ink stops flowing, the words distorted.

The Ink Ram watches in interest, now noticeably larger than previous versions. Ram looks at the page, noting the image of the vicious dragon stealing the entire kingdom.

The monster slinks across ground, morphing as it moves. Soon, its appearance has changed into a vicious dragon. All that's missing are the wings.

Ram is frozen as the beast approaches. Its poised to strike when Reeves snatches the back of her hoodie, pulling her away. The beast ROARS in frustration as they run back.

REEVES

Come on! Move it! Move it!

They run through the forest, the creature snapping at their heels. Ram checks the trees for her marks, leading Reeves back to the boat.

Then, Ram trips, the pages flying out of her hands and bag.

RAM

No!

She tries to collect them, but the dragon gets too close. Reeves keeps pushing her along. She looks over her shoulder. She watches the dragon crouch over her pages.

They rise, ink pulling them to the beast. Ink from the monster latches the pages to its back. Ram turns and runs.

EXT. MEMORY GROVE RIVER BANKS - DAY

Reeves clambers onto the boat and helps Ram into it. He frantically tries to untie the ship from its anchor, but fumbles in his attempts.

Suddenly, the SOUND OF FLAPPING WINGS grabs their attention. They look up. The dragon has fashioned wings out of the book pages and has taken flight.

The beast fires off sludge blasts, causing Ram and Reeves to duck out of the way. It SCREECHES in outrage and dives down.

Reeves notices it heading for the boat. He fumbles with the knot tying the boat, but the beast gets closer, claws bared.

In a last ditch effort, right before the dragon hits, Reeves

shoves Ram out of the way. The beast rams into the boat, claws tearing the boat in half.

Ram stays on the half of the boat tied to the dock, threatening to slip into the water. She watches in horror as Reeves is sent down the fast-moving river on his half.

RAM

Reeves!

She's horrified as the beast resurfaces. It looks around, HISSING when all the nearby lights flare up. Ram looks up to see Pip activating nearby lights on the memory trees.

The lights blind the beast and it is unable to see Ram still by the shore. However, it sees Reeves floating down the river. With a SCREECH it follows after him, leaving Ram.

With a flick of its tail, however, the beast knocks into Ram's half of the boat. It tilts enough where Ram tumbles in the water. She flounders around before breaking the surface.

She scrambles up the riverbank, soaked and already going through every emotion. She looks around and for the first time in a while, she's alone.

RAM

(voice small)

Reeves? Reeves?!

She looks around for him, only seeing her bag sitting next to her, spilled open and contents on the ground. The hardcover of her book is soaked, colors starting to bleed. The family portrait sits next to it, glass gone and photo waterlogged.

Tears build in her eyes. She LAUGHS HYSTERICALLY. She SCREAMS. She CRIES. She pulls the book cover to her chest like a lifeline.

RAM

(like a chant)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

A BEAT. The SOUND OF SCUTTILING catches her attention. Pip sits near the water-damaged portrait. She pick it up.

RAM

(broken)

I'm sorry. I thought I could fix it. I thought it was enough. If the knight's apprentice could bring the kingdom

back to normal...If I could get the book back...I thought things could go back the way they were before.

A BEAT.

RAM  
Happily Ever After.

Her hysterics start to wane.

RAM  
I guess that's not real.

A BEAT. Movement catches her attention. Pip is scurrying in circles, bumping between her and her sword. When he has her focus, he darts on ahead, back into the forest.

Ram watches him. Slowly, she stands up. She gathers her things, clutching the book cover and picture to her chest.

EXT. DEEP MEMORY GROVE - DAY, A FEW MINUTES LATER

Pip retraces all Ram's chalk markings, leading her back to her memory tree. She winces at the sight of it covered in ink. Some branches have broken off, leaves scattered. She wipes away some sludge, revealing a dimmed light screen.

Pip runs around the side of the tree. Ram leans forward, noting a piece of paper crumpled into a ball. She picks it up, noting how it is tangled in loose film leaves.

RAM  
Another page? I thought the dragon took them all.

She hesitates, but unfurls the page. It depicts the Knight's apprentice embracing the King and Queen within the dragon's hoard of kingdoms, the dragon trapped in the background. In fact, the entire collection looks like a new kingdom itself.

Some text is obvious blurred and missing, thanks to the ink dragon, but the words "A New Happily Ever After" are still legible. Ram traces those words with her fingers.

She messes with the film tape previously wrapped around the page. Quickly, she plugs it into the nearby light. Though it hesitates and is dim, the image becomes clear.

We revisit the first memory of Movie Ram's performance to her family. Everything plays out like before, GLITCHNG and ALL.

Ram, however, frowns, glancing back down at her page.

RAM

This...this isn't right.

Suddenly, the SCREEN GLITCHES AGAIN. This time the memory plays differently. Movie Ram still gives her performance, but instead of the completely happy scene, her movie parents sit apart from each other, WHISPERING QUIETLY.

MOVIE REINA

Did you take out the trash?

MOVIE RICHARD

Not yet, but I'll do it.

MOVIE REINA

Richard! Today was garbage day! What was so important that you couldn't take out the trash for two minutes?

MOVIE RICHARD

I was busy, Reina! I couldn't help it!

MOVIE REINA

You always say that.

Though the argument is WHISPERED at a volume where Movie Ram is not supposed to hear, her expression says she can hear everything. The performance abruptly ends, Ram losing steam.

The parents APPLAUD and bring her in for a hug. Ram, however, just looks a bit nervous at the interaction.

RAM

(sighing)

Yeah, that's how it happened.

A BEAT. She looks to Pip.

RAM

They...fought a lot, didn't they.

STATIC. Then the next memory appears of them playing at the park. Ram shakes her head, as if to clear it.

RAM

No...this isn't right either. Dad wasn't there...well he did play for a while...

Another GLITCH. The real memory appears. Movie Ram plays with her sword, running around. She runs into Movie Reina's arms like before. However, Richard isn't in sight.

Movie Reina looks up to see Movie Richard chatting with nearby parents and on his phone instead of paying attention.

MOVIE RAM

Come on, Dad! I need a dragon to fight!

MOVIE RICHARD

Just a few more minutes, sweetie!

Movie Reina SIGHS, shaking her head. Movie Ram notes the frustrated expression on her face and frowns. Movie Reina walks and speaks with her husband, a heated conversation starting. Movie Ram goes to play by herself instead.

RAM

Right. They never could play at the same time and the same way...

ANOTHER GLITCH. The last memory of them curled in bed appears. However, instead of curled together, the Movie parents sit further apart, expressions strained.

MOVIE REINA

And the Knight's Apprentice tricked the dragon, saving all the kingdom's trapped within its hoard.

MOVIE RAM

And they lived Happily Ever After! Right? Everything went back to normal.

MOVIE RICHARD

Well, let's see kiddo.

A page turn.

MOVIE RICHARD

Even though all the kingdom's within the dragon's hoard were stolen, they found something new together: a new home.

MOVIE REINA

A new Kingdom was formed, banding together during times of hardship. Thanks to the apprentice who learned

to be a knight, everyone found a new happily ever after.

The memory ends with Ram staring at her teary eyes in the screen's blank reflection. Tears drip down on the page. She looks down, unfolding the last piece of the corner.

In both Richard and Reina's handwriting: "Love you always and forever, our little knight."

Ram clutches the page to her chest for a BEAT. When she looks up again, her face is determined. She looks at the darkened memory film. She gathers up a bunch in her bag.

She stands up, slings her bag over her shoulder. She flips up her hood, grasps her sword, and marches back towards the boat. Pip is hot on her heels.

EXT. MEMORY GROVE RIVER BANKS - DAY

Ram drags the boat out of the water. Luckily, it still looks like it will float. She works quickly, mending the sail and wheel with strands of memory film pulled from her bag.

Before she puts her bag back on, a water bottle catches her attention. She pulls it out and side eyes the water below.

CUT TO:

A BEAT later, she's putting the water bottle away. Determined, she shoves the boat back into the water. She climbs aboard, grinning as Pip scurries up her arm.

RAM

Looks like we have a dragon to defeat after all on this quest. Where to, trusted steed?

Pip's antenna's twitch. He scurries to the side of the boat. Ram leans to look, spotting black sludge dotting the riverbank and trees, making a trail.

RAM

Alright. Let's slay this beast.

The boat rides down the riverbank until its out of sight.

INSERT QUICK MONTAGE

- A small montage of Ram riding down the river, following the various black ink smudges on the trees and riverbank.

- She encounters rough waters in a few spaces, but uses the steering wheel and her pushing against the riverbank or trees with her sword to get her out of any situations.
- The black ink seems to increase, covering more of Rummage. The river passes by Toy Town dotted in sludge, the amphitheater of talents submerged, the grassy plains coated.
- Eventually, the scenery starts to look even more familiar. Pip hops frantically on the boat, causing Ram to look.

RAM

Oh my god.

END MONTAGE

EXT. RUMMAGE OUTSKIRTS, BY THE RIVER - DAY

Ram's boat floats, the Outskirts in sight.

Well, what used to be the Outskirts.

The floating islands of junk have been disrupted. Instead of many small islands, they have been pushed together to make one big island. Almost like a hoard.

Various smaller pieces of junk float alone, suspended and disturbed. Black ink absolutely coats everything in sight.

RAM

Looks like we found the dragon's den.

She shakes off any doubt and docks her boat on the bank.

Ram walks through the fields, stepping over and wading through black ink. A MUFFLED CAW catches her attention. She spots the cartoon crow from earlier weighed down in ink.

She darts over, brushing off ink where she can, scraping some off with her sword. Soon, the ink is gone enough for the bird to take flight.

RAM

There you go. No hard feelings?

The bird seems to stare into her soul. It perches on her arm for a BEAT. Suddenly, it pecks her head.

RAM

Ow! Okay! All the hard feelings I guess.

It blinks. It reaches under its wing and pulls out a piece of fabric. A very familiar piece of fabric.

RAM

Reeves' jacket! Is he okay? Have you seen him?

The BIRD CAWS and takes flight towards the Outskirts. Ram quickly follows behind.

EXT. RUMMAGE OUTSKIRTS ALCOVE AREA - DAY

The bird weaves through floating trash, Ram doing the same on the ground below. They round corners until the bird suddenly perches on a nearby pipe.

Ram slowly approaches, peering over a broken television.

RAM

(with a whispered gasp)  
Reeves!

Sure enough, Reeves sits in a garbage alcove. He is held back by harder, more solid black bars of sludge. He looks up at Ram's voice, almost excited, but settles on annoyed.

REEVES

(talking to someone else, unseen)  
You see, I told you. Out of all the kids to get trapped here, we got stuck with the most stubborn and reckless one. Imagine running towards the dragon.

RAM

(running to the bars)  
I wasn't going to leave you behind!  
And you said we?

A shadow shifts. Twinkles hobbles forward, weighed down by ink.

RAM

Oh no.

REEVES

It's getting everything, kid. Keeping us all locked up tight.

Now that Ram is closer, the alcove is littered with scraps of shredded film. Scattered stage equipment and costumes fill

the space as well.

RAM

A dragon's hoard...Reeves, about what I said. I am sorry, I didn't-

Reeves gives her a hug through the bars: the first one she's had all day. She stiffens and melts into the hug.

RAM

I'm so sorry Reeves. I'm ready to go home. To both homes. I can't fix everything, but I'm getting you out of here.

REEVES

Listen, I've always worked with a squirt like you. You think I haven't experienced my share of temper tantrums? What kind of imaginary friend do you take me for?

RAM

I'm not a little kid, Reeves!

A BEAT. He smiles.

REEVES

Well, maybe not so little.

A SCREECH. A shadow passes overhead. Ram scrambles to hide behind a junk pile. Just after, a dragon's claw pierces the TV she was hiding behind earlier.

The dragon GROWLS as it paces the clearing. It SNARLS into the alcove, but doesn't spot Ram hiding. Slowly, it prowls around the corner.

REEVES

(whispering)

See? It's always on the prowl. It's always looking.

Ram glances at her bag and at her sword. She grins wickedly.

RAM

Then let's give it something its looking for.

EXT. RUMMAGE OUTSKIRTS ALCOVE AREA - DAY, A FEW MINUTES LATER

The dragon prowls through the junk piles. A RUSTLING catches its attention, whipping its head.

REEVES (O.S.)  
 (obviously fake)  
 Ram! What are you doing! Run away  
 before that beast finds you!

The dragon SNARLS and darts towards Reeves' prison. It flaps its wings and skids around the corner. It rushes the prison bars, snarling at Reeves. Reeves, however, wears a smug look.

REEVES  
 You might want to look down.

The dragon does. A snare loop made of the memory film sits around its ankle. Before it can move, Ram appears, yanking on the other end of the snare.

The dragon is hoisted into the trap with a SCREECH. It flails around while Ram runs to her bag. She pulls out the water bottle. Without hesitation, she tosses the water on it.

The monster appears to LAUGH, CRY, and SNARL at the same time. Ram nods, running to the prison bars with her sword.

REEVES  
 Where did you get good at that?

Ram quickly flashes her last page. The other side has an illustration of the Knight's Apprentice trapping the dragon. On the side of the page, in glitter pen, is childish scrawl detailing various types of traps.

RAM  
 After reading the book, I got  
 interested in traps. Dad helped.

REEVES  
 You have an interesting family.

RAM  
 Thank you. Where did you get bad at  
 acting?

She starts hacking away at the bars with her sword.

REEVES

(offended)

Excuse me, I'm an excellent actor:  
that's what imaginary friends do.

RAM

Right.

REEVES

I may be a bit rusty but who wouldn't  
be?

The bars start to crack, giving way. At the same time, the dragon begins calming down. It SNAPS at the trap, trying to reach the film with its fangs. Reeves notices.

He focuses and with effort manages to transform his arm into armor and a sword. He joins in on the hacking. They make better progress, but the dragon gets closer as well.

Soon, the dragon has snapped through the film. It lands on its feet. Immediately, its wings flap and it launches itself towards the alcove.

REEVES

Kid! When I say so, jump.

RAM

What?! I'm not leaving you!

REEVES

Trust me.

She hesitates but nods. The dragon grows close and closer.

REEVES

Jump!

She does. The dragon misses her and hits the weakened bars. They snap, freeing Reeves and Twinkles. Reeves scoops up Twinkles, climbs over the dragon, and runs out of the cage.

Meanwhile, Ram sits up quickly and the dragon attempts the same, struggling. The dragon gets out first, spotting Ram. It crawls to her, only to pause, SCREECHING IN HORROR.

Ram looks down to see her only remaining book page. The dragon refuses to get near it, HISSING AND SNARLING. She scoops it up and runs alongside Reeves out of the area.

The DRAGON ROARS and takes flight.

EXT. RUMMAGE OUTSKIRTS - DAY

Ram and Reeves run through the Outskirts, dodging and weaving through junk. The dragon soars overhead, tracking them.

The dragon dives, claws stretched out and ready to strike. Ram notices. She quickly holds up the book page. It SHRIEKS and pulls up at the last moment, as if repelled backwards.

It circles overhead, agitated. The three duck for cover.

REEVES

Why isn't it getting closer?

RAM

I think its the page!

REEVES

You're telling me that a dragon is scared of paper. Its wings are paper. It's made of ink!

RAM

Maybe not the paper.

Ram traces the words left on the paper. The only words the dragon has yet to take.

RAM

The words on the paper.

A BEAT. Ram SIGHS. She looks up at the dragon who settles in its nest. She pulls out the book cover, sword in hand.

RAM

I have to try something.

REEVES

What!?

RAM

I have to. This all started because of me and I'm going to finish it. But I can't without my sidekick.

A BEAT.

RAM

Can't get lost without a sidekick, right.

Reeves scoffs.

REEVES

Of course, but you know: you're my  
sidekick, right?

Another BEAT.

REEVES

I got you, kid. What you need?

RAM

Cover me!

She immediately darts into the open to Reeves' panic.

REEVES

I meant what plan did you have! Come  
on kid!

He rushes after her.

Ram runs towards the dragon's nest. It flies up, HISSING. She holds up the missing page and book cover.

The dragon SNARLS. It immediately fires off a blast of black sludge. Ram dodges the attack. She rushes forward as the dragon continues to blast attacks.

She reaches a tall pile of junk that leads towards the dragon. She starts to scale it, swinging out of the way of blasts as the dragon circles the pile.

At one point, she stumbles, hanging on by one hand. The dragon senses the opportunity and gets in closer, charging up a blast. Ram struggles to regain her footing, time dwindling.

The dragon fires, Ram winces. Instead of impact, a CLANG is heard. Ram looks to see Reeves in complete knight armor for the first time. His shield blocks the attack.

RAM

Whoa.

REEVES

Told you I got your back, kid! Now  
let's get a move on.

Twinkles stands above Ram. She nudges her hand back to a handhold in the junk. Ram regains her footing and they press on. Reeves knocks away attacks, making the dragon irritated.

It charges up one last blast.

EXT. DRAGON'S NEST - DAY

They make it to the base of the nest, pulling each other up. Ram surfaces first, eyes wide as she notices the blast about to be fired. She rolls out of the way.

Unfortunately, Reeves pokes his body up at the same time. The blast catches him in the chest, sending him backwards. Ram runs to the edge to look for him.

RAM

Reeves!

He hangs onto the side. He gives her a shaky thumbs up.

REEVES

Keep going, kid! You can do this!

Ram nods. She turns back to face the beast. It stands defensively on the other end of the nest. It GROWLS AND SNARLS. They circle one another.

RAM

You've been terrorizing everyone too long, you beast! Now I know exactly how to bring you down.

She suddenly charges, the dragon meeting her. They exchange blow for blow, Ram blocking attacks with her sword and swinging out. She keeps trying to get closer, but the dragon doesn't allow for an opening.

RAM

You keep tryin to drown everything!  
You're destroying it all!

The dragon limps back at a harsh attack. Ram notices its leg appears more melted than before, less like it is holding its shape. She presses forward, swinging wildly with her sword.

RAM

See! Even yourself! You don't care if you're hurting anything or anyone! You know what I think?!

She raises her book cover and missing page. The dragon SCREECHES and leans back, avoiding it. Ram pushes forward, sending the beast back.

RAM

I think you're scared!

In the back, Reeves slowly clambers into the nest. Ram makes eye contact and she nods.

RAM

You're scared of this! You're not scared of this book though! Not the story as a whole.

She waves the pages. For the dragon, this is the final straw. It swings its tail, sending Ram to the floor. Her sword is knocked away.

Reeves starts forward to help, but Twinkles stops him. The dragon crouches over Ram, head reared and ready to strike.

It lunges forward, but Ram just holds out the page and book.

RAM

You're scared of change!

It stops mid-strike.

RAM

You tore out the page, right? You don't want a new happily ever after. You want a story you can fix.

A BEAT. The dragon leans back. Ram SIGHS, eyes teary.

RAM

It's not up to you to fix it. It's not your fault. Sometimes stories end differently and that's okay. You don't have to be a knight, an apprentice, or a dragon.

Ram holds out the page again. The dragon hesitates.

RAM

It's time to write the next story. Your own story.

The dragon stares for a BEAT. It SIGHS. It leans forward and Reeves puts his hand on the hilt of his sword. However, the dragon just takes the page from Ram's hand.

Immediately, the dragon morphs, growing smaller. The book pages suspend in the air, moving around to get in order. They

slowly drift into a pair of small inky hands.

The dragon has turned into a ink version of Ram, one that is not distorted or melting. The real Ram grins and holds out a hand to shake.

RAM

Our own story.

Ink Ram pauses, but takes the hand. They embrace for a BEAT. Then, Ink Ram hands the real Ram the book pages. It closes its eyes and slowly disappears back into the pages, filling them up with words and pictures once more.

Ram stares at the book pages for a BEAT. Reeves walks up next to her while Pip crawls on her shoulder. Ram eyes them and slides the book pages back into her hard cover.

She eyes the section labeled "This book belongs to" before she closes the book. She smiles at her and her parents' signatures. She shuts the book.

RAM

The end...for now at least.

EXT. RUMMAGE OUTSKIRTS - DAY

The sludge slowly drains from the Outskirts. Items and floating islands go back to their proper place. Everything is slowly going back to normal.

Ram and Reeves hop down to the bottom of the junk pile.

RAM

Look! The door!

Sure enough, the sludge is draining enough to reveal the wooden door that started it all. Ram takes a step forward towards it, but hesitates. She's nervous.

REEVES

What's wrong?

RAM

What if it still won't open?

REEVES

After all that? How could it not acknowledge the deeds of the bravest knight in the kingdom, kid? Come on, I'll give you the royal escort.

He bows, offering his hand. She takes it and they slowly walk to the door. They stand in front of it. Ram puts a hand on the knob, A DEEP BREATH, and twists it.

The door swings open easily, showing the complete tunnel.

RAM

Yes!

REEVES

Told you, squirt. Now get out of here, get home.

She takes a step forward. Pauses. She launches back into Reeves' legs, sending him stumbling.

REEVES

Geeze, kid! Why do you always aim for the knees?!

RAM

It's just-It's all so sudden! I wasn't expecting to say goodbye so soon. I just...I'll miss you.

REEVES

Don't worry about me, kid. I think I got things handled from here. If anymore reckless, stubborn kids stumble through that door, somebody needs to be here for them. Besides...

He nudges the book in Ram's hand closer to her chest.

REEVES

You have so much more to say hello to worry about any silly old goodbyes.

They embrace. Even Pip climbs up Ram's shoulder. Finally, they part and Ram walks to the door. She scoops up Twinkles and she smiles over her shoulder.

REEVES

For what it's worth, I think the next story will be even better, Ram. Make it a good one.

She nods and walks through the door. It shuts behind her, allowing for a quick:

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. KEEPS GROVE LANDFILL - LATE AFTERNOON

The door in the Keeps Grove landfill opens slowly. Ram steps through, shielding her eyes at the setting sun. She looks around frantically before scaling the nearest trash heap.

Reaching the top, she sees Keeps Grove and sighs in relief. Pip on her shoulder does the same. She holds up Twinkles towards her mother's house, the horse now a plushie again.

She glances down at her book and immediately runs back down the trash heap. As she runs, she brushes by the old radio from the opening. Her movement flicks it on. Once again, something like *On Treasure Island* by Tommy Dorsey plays.

Ram runs through the dumping grounds, determined. After dodging and weaving through trash, she reaches the entrance.

She's about to run through when Pip hops frantically around on her shoulder. She pauses to look at him. She looks back at the dump. Slow understanding and a smile.

She lets Pip scurry down her arm to sit on a nearby trash pile. His antenna's twitch as she leans down.

RAM

Guess I have to find my own way home now, huh?

He hops, brushing antenna against her cheek.

RAM

Alright, I get it. Take care of yourself, Pip.

She runs through the entrance. Pip watches before scuttling away. Once more, he scurries through the trash, up a garbage pile, and into the old dollhouse from before.

FADE TO:

EXT. REINA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Pip disappearing into the doll house TRANSITIONS directly into Ram running along the fence right outside her house. The MUSIC still plays. She pauses, out of breath and hesitant.

She peers around the corner to look in the front yard. Everything is quiet, yet the house seems to loom over Ram, intimidating, despite everything.

Yet, the tone changes as Reina darts out the front door. Everything seems brighter and more welcoming, Ram's body language more relaxed.

Reina looks disheveled and distraught. She paces in front of the house on the phone, practically yelling into the receiver, yet we can't hear it over the MUSIC.

A THUD catches her attention though. She looks up. At the start of the driveway stands Ram. Her book sits in the yard, forgotten. Her eyes fills with tears.

They immediately match the tears Reina has in her own eyes. The two look at each other for a moment before rushing in to meet in the middle.

Reina clings to her daughter desperately. Tears flow freely. Soon, Reina is checking Ram for injuries or marks. She tries to straighten Ram's disheveled clothes. Ram pushes her hands away and laughs.

Motion from behind the two catches their attention. A car swings into the driveway. Richard climbs out of the car, holding "Lost Child" posters plastered with Ram's face. He looks just as tired and worn as Reina.

He looks up from his posters, finally noticing Ram and Reina in the yard. He throws the papers down and darts over. In his haste, he slips on the fallen papers.

He skids across the lawn towards them, collapsing just in front of Ram, pulling her into a clumsy hug. Ram grins into the hug, especially when her mom joins in.

Slowly, the hug breaks apart. Richard picks up the picture book on the grass. He holds it up, exchanging knowing looks with Reina.

He opens it up, and the pages fall out, water damaged like before. Reina and Richard wince while Ram watches the pages fall. The two desperately try to get the pages together.

Ram takes one step forward. Another. She crouches, like she is going to fix the pages. Instead, she pushes them aside.

She wraps her arms around her parents' necks in a hug. They look, surprised, but smile, leaning into the hug.

The MUSIC slowly comes to a stop as we:

FADE TO:

## INSERT MONTAGE

A SERIES OF SCENES, narration, detailing the future childhood of RAM ROMERO.

- A black screen

RAM V.O.

Once, there was a kingdom high in the hills that was stolen by a dragon.

- Ram sits in her room, obviously the one at her mother's house. It is now more decorated than before, homey. She is winding down for bed, doodling pictures in a book. A picture of Reeves and Ram stands out.

RAM V.O.

Sure, at one point it was only a kingdom full of riches and wonder, but it has grown since then.

- Reina walks into the room and smiles. Ram returns the gesture. She shows Reina her drawings. They then settle down to read a book: her new picture book. They make new notes in the pages.

RAM V.O.

In many ways, the kingdom is different. The riches have been shared amongst the others and the land itself has changed.

- Ram and Richard run around in the backyard back at Richard's space. They play an overexaggerated game of knights and heroes. They are obviously having a blast.

RAM V.O.

Yet, after the knight defeated the dragon, she noticed something interesting.

- Richard and Ram sit on the bed in her first bedroom. They read the book, Richard playing his guitar. They make even more new notes within the book's pages.

RAM V.O.

Although much has changed and the kingdom has grown, one thing stayed the same.

- Reina and Ram are in Reina's house, gathering craft

supplies and an overnight bag for Ram. Before they run out of the house, Ram stops by a frame on the wall.

She brushes it and we notice it is the older version of the picture book. She then runs out, after her mother.

- Reina and Ram pull up to Richard's house. Richard meets them at the front door. He gives Reina a nod and a smile which she returns. Ram playfully smacks both of them with her sword and they pull Ram into a group hug.

RAM V.O.

Everyone in the village was still filled with love and light. None more so than the littlest apprentice, the knight in the brand new kingdom.

- Ram puts on a performance in the backyard on her makeshift stage. Richard and Reina watch appreciatively, surrounded by a stuffed animal audience.

However, the performance is something new: it is obviously a recreation of Ram's adventures in Rummage, complete with Twinkles on the stage.

- Ram finishes her performance and her parents clap. Ram takes a bow. While she is looking at the ground, she notices a familiar cockroach sitting by the stage.

She grins and gives a small wave right before her parents come up to hug her.

RAM V.O.

And everyone in the new kingdom could finally live their new Happily Ever After.

- Pip watches the three in their loving scene before scurrying away and going back towards the dumping grounds.

END MONTAGE

THE END