

AWAY, GET AWAY

Arsène

It's 1976, a 16 year old boy has gotten into an argument with his parents after accidentally coming out to them as transgender, and devised a plan to run away with his two best friends. They find themselves in a forest and all goes well for the first couple of days, but they then start to realise how hard it is to live alone in the wilderness. This scene takes place on day 4 in the forest. At this point, a storm has hit and flooded their site, leaving them stranded in the middle of nowhere with no supplies.

The static sound of rain pelting the ground echoes around me, the thunder a menacing rumble in the distance. Billowing, charcoal clouds rapidly crawl across the twilight sky like a splash of ink on a vibrant watercolour painting. As the fat, heavy drops cascade down my face, I adjust my grip on my friend's arm, slick with both blood and rainwater. As if in response, the injured boy stumbles on a protruding root and lets out a hoarse groan.

"Hold on Leo," I grimace. "Hold on."

I quickly scan the dense forest around us, looking for anywhere to take shelter from the storm. A shaky sigh of relief escapes my throat as I spot a particularly broad tree with a thick, almost umbrella-like curtain of leaves embellishing it.

I tug on my friend's arm and he follows with a reluctant huff but I'm soon lowering him to the ground, his back resting against the coarse trunk.

This is all my fault, I think to myself as I help Leo prop his misshapen ankle on a thick root jutting out from the damp earth.

All my fault.

"Ow! Careful!" Leo yelps, clutching his bleeding arm, shooting me an offended look.

"It needs to be wrapped up," is my pathetic reply as I continue to tie a piece of shredded material around the gash.



None of this would've happened if I hadn't been so selfish. This was a terrible idea.

Once the boy's wound is dealt with, as much as you could deal with a cut that deep with no supplies, I join him with my back against the damp bark and exhale.

This shouldn't have happened, I've camped here before, with father, and it's never flooded before.

I think back to what the site looked like all those years ago; the calm, twisting river that glistened in the early morning sun. The late nights spent talking and laughing around the blazing fire, followed by countless hours gazing up at the deep blue backdrop adorned with silvery diamonds, like dewdrops on a spiderweb. Lazy afternoons basking in the balmy summer heat.

Summer.

But never autumn.

Now I know why, I think gloomily to myself.

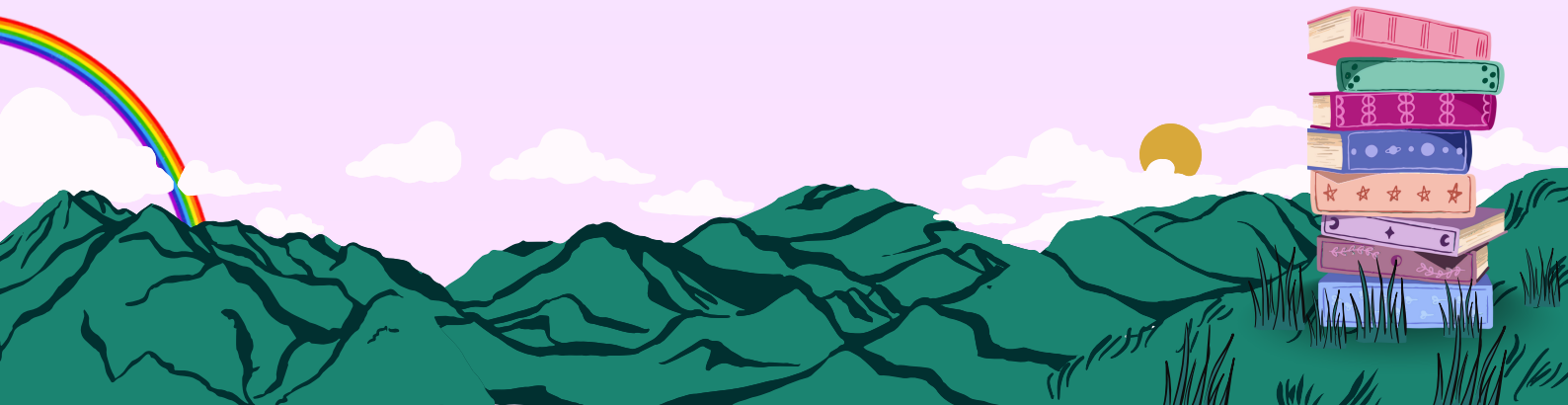
I find myself craving those warm summery days spent with my family, people who loved me. People that would never ever have even considered disowning their only child. Or maybe they had. How am I to know? How long exactly had they been planning this? A freak they'd called me. *Such a freak.* Had they been waiting for that moment, for me to slip up and confirm their suspicions since I was a child? Itching to be rid of me? *Away, get away...*

I shake the thoughts out of my head and try to think of something more cheerful. I have to stay optimistic, for Leo.

Think about summer, my father smiling at me from his station at his ancient barbeque, the small clearing where we would set up our tent, the same place every year...

My thoughts trail away as I compare that image to the one I had seen only moments earlier; deep, murky water flooding our tent, all of our supplies ruined, or drifting away, lost to the river.

We had only been there a moment, just returning from gathering dry firewood, I recall, when Leo had slipped down the muddy bank and twisted his ankle, earning a wicked tear in his left arm.



Iris sprung into action and raced in after him in an instant, meanwhile I could do nothing but stand and stare, thinking about how all of this was my fault. *That's what you get for setting up camp next to a river in the middle of autumn, I scold myself. Stupid stupid stupid.*

Then all at once, Leo was by my side again, clinging onto me for dear life, and Iris was saying something about a first aid kit before diving back into the muddy void.

We just left her, I think, suddenly filled with even more guilt.

We left her alone down there in a dangerous river in the middle of a storm, some friends we are! What if she doesn't make it out? What if the first aid kit was washed away with the rest of our supplies? No no, she asked us— she told us to get to safety. We just did what she told us to, right? And it's not like we could've said no, no-one says no to Iris! So if something happened to her, it couldn't possibly be my fault, could it? But it is.

She's not back yet, and it's all my fault.

It's all my—

“Harlow!?”

A voice splits through the labyrinth of trees, shattering my thoughts. A wave of relief floods over me so incredible, it threatens to drown me. But this flood was much more pleasant than the one we had just faced. The one I had so recently thought I had lost a friend to.

“Over here!” I shout, letting go of Leo to wave my arms, not quite having the strength to pull myself to my feet.

Within seconds, a red-faced, ash haired girl bursts into view, drenched with mud and filthy water, clutching onto a crimson red duffel bag.

“I've got it,” she breathed, dropping to her knees beside the injured boy and ripping open the first aid kit.

She looks up at her two friends and offers a soft grin of reassurance, water dripping from the tip of her nose as she pulls out the disinfectant.

“You'll be alright, Leo.”

