

"RETURN TO THE ECHOWOOD"

The Sheridan Tapes - Postlude 3

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CONTENT WARNING: Discussions of death and grief including a car crash, loss of a parent, character betrayal, existential dread, and implied alcoholism

[The sound of wind howling through endless corridors]

[Echoing footsteps approach, then stop]

[Deep breath]

Amy Sterling

The Source. The infinite potential of all worlds. The roiling chaos that is the heart of all existences. The place where all space and time and realities meet and coexist as one. A place that is not a place, in a time that is not a time.

[Amy scoffs]

Time... time is one thing I've wished for most in all my endless wanderings. A way to mark how far I have traveled, how long I have searched in this trackless void. Perhaps that's just the human in me, longing for the familiar shape of the reality I was born into... but even so, it would be a helpful measure in this endless, timeless labyrinth.

[Echoing footsteps]

Memories of the worlds beyond the Source still line its walls, as they did from the start... but they've grown fewer and farther apart the deeper I delve into this unknown. Darker, too, have grown the shadows. With every set of eyes I've seen the Source through, it has been a lightless place... a sunless, moonless, starless expanse broken only by streaks of distant lightning or flickering fires. Yet somehow, I could always see the way. Here, though... here, darkness hides the path forward, as it never did before. Not that it matters, when there are only two ways my feet could take me... towards the truth, or away from it. And I intend to follow this road as far as it will take me.

[Footsteps continue, then stop]

What is... this shouldn't be here. This is not...

[Amy pauses, collecting herself]

The Source contains all worlds that are or were or ever could be... but not all worlds rise naturally from the churning of its energies. Some... very few, but some... were made by beings in the worlds beyond. Beings of unimaginable power and uncertain origin whose wills stretch the very fabric of reality to its breaking point... beings who make even the most powerful monsters and avatars of the Source's power look like cheap pretenders. And sometimes, they find a weakness in that weave of space and time and thought: a gap between the worlds that are where a new universe may be brought to unnatural life. A small universe, perhaps... a pocket dimension all its own, with only a tenuous link to the Source of all that was and was not and will be again. But a universe as real and solid as any other that stands upon the surface of the Source... and to those who live within it, perhaps the only world they'll ever know.

[Footsteps]

Here is one such place... a dark and twisting wood nearing its untimely end, and at its heart, an archway of stone and ancient wood which opens to many worlds. Sam visited it once, though he does not and cannot remember. A child of Amanita's Prophet was drawn just the same, and now waits for answers from their mysterious host. And that host... the keeper of the Inn of the Archway. A being whose winding path through the worlds is hidden, even to my eyes. A riddle whose answer I cannot begin to guess... and yet, I fear what it portends. Come close... and listen.

[The Source fades away to reveal the Inn of the Archway]

[Fire crackling in a stone hearth]

[The door creaks open, and Grael and The Traveler enter]

Grael

Home sweet home.

[Grael's wings flutter as he crosses to the bar]
[Bottles clinking]

Grael

You want a drink? It's the last of the fairhaven... last
there'll ever be, likely as not.

[Grael uncorks a wine bottle]
[The Traveler takes a step towards him]

The Traveler

Grael...

Grael

No? Well I certainly do. I think I've earned it, after today.

[Grael starts to pour himself a glass]

The Traveler

Grael, please... You said you'd tell me what's going on.

Grael

And?

The Traveler

And you haven't said a word since we left the arch.

[Grael scoffs]

Grael

Neither did you, for near on three months.

The Traveler

That wasn't my fault.

[Grael's wings flutter as he moves towards them]

Grael

No? Tell me: when did Maeven restore your voice? Tonight? After we went stargazing? Or did you always have it, and were just lying the entire time?

The Traveler

That's not fair-

Grael

Isn't it?

The Traveler

No, it isn't. You lied to me from the start. And Maeven made me promise not to tell you.

[Grael scoffs loudly, then picks up his wine]
[He downs the glass in one long go, then coughs]

Grael

I told you already, Traveler... I didn't lie to you. All of the stories I told you were true.

[The Traveler takes a concerned step forward]

The Traveler

Are you sure you should be drinking right now?

[Grael scoffs bitterly]

Grael

Now, later, earlier... What does it matter? My world is ending, and you seem to have made up your mind to let it. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow... Tomorrow, everything dies.

[Silence]
[Grael sighs]

Grael

No... You're probably right. Now isn't the time for drinking.

[Clinking as Grael replaces the bottle]
[Grael's wings flutter as he moves to a chair, sitting down]

Grael

You want answers? Then ask. I've nothing to hide anymore... You and the witch have seen to that.

[Hesitating slightly, The Traveler crosses and sits next to him]

The Traveler

Was what Silvia told me true? Did you... make the Echowood?

Grael

I, and a child from your world named Rowan Baumann, who I once called "Little-Ash." We made it together. A long time ago.

[Silence]

[The Traveler moves in their seat]

The Traveler

Tell me the story.

Grael

I thought you were done with me and my tales?

The Traveler

Just... One more. For old times' sake.

[Grael chuckles]

Grael

"Old time's sake." Fine. One more tale. One more story.

[Grael breathes in, then sighs]

[Music]

Grael

This story begins in the world you knew - beyond the borders of the Echowood, in a little house on the edge of an ancient broadleaf forest. It was a tiny thing: a ramshackle construction of old timbers and red paint peeling and cracked from the years of damp and cold and rot. The shingles on the roof were patched and worn, with wide swaths covered by nothing more than wood and

plastic to keep out the rain... But it was a home. For a child and her mother and her father, it was more than a house... it was a place to grow old, a place to grow up. A place to grow into.

But life is not a story... Not the stories we tell ourselves about the future, nor the stories others wish upon us, nor the stories that try to keep us safe from the dark and driving cold. And one late and rainy morning as winter turned to spring... the father was taken from the child. There was no reason for it - no warning, no portents, no way it could have been avoided. A drain had clogged with old leaves and overflowed, turning a dip in the road to a wide, flat puddle he couldn't see as he drove home from a late shift at the cannery. The tree his car struck was less than a mile from the old red house on the edge of the woods, and the mother heard the collision from her bedroom... But it was too late to do anything. His spirit had fled beyond the veil of all worlds, where even I cannot see nor reach.

[The sounds of the Inn fade away]

[A forest in the early morning - wind, birds, and a distant creek]

[A young child runs through the trees, panting and teary-eyed]

[She stops, sniffing]

[A branch breaks, and she goes silent]

Young Rowan

H-hello?

[Silence]

[Grael's wings flutter, and he emerges from the trees]

Grael

Little girl, little girl... why are you crying?

[Main Theme]

[Sounds of a crowd outside a countryside home]

[Someone coughs roughly, and the crowd goes silent]

[A pianist begins playing The Wedding March]

[The music grows muffled behind the walls of the house]

[Hurried footsteps rush down the hall, then stop at a closed door]

[Urgent knocking]

Mari

Rowan? Rowan, are you alright?

[She rattles the doorknob]

Mari

Oh for goodness sake Rowan, what are you doing in there? They're already...

[The door swings open, and a chair propped up against the handle falls to the floor]

[Mari cautiously enters]

Mari

Rowan? Sweetie, are you alright...?

[The music grows louder, and Mari notices the window is open]

Mari

Rowan!?

[Outside, the crowd's muttering grows more confused]

[The music fades into the distance as Rowan charges through the woods, crashing through branches]

[She stops]

Rowan

Oh my god. Oh my god. I... I did it. I finally did it.

Shit.

[Rowan slumps down against a nearby tree]

Rowan

Just... shit.

Grael

Little girl, little girl - why are you crying?

Rowan

I'm not... I'm not crying, Grael.

Grael

Really? My, then it must have been a very small rainstorm, to wet only your cheeks.

Rowan

Go away Grael.

Grael

Oh, but Rowan...

[Grael's wings flutter, and he hovers next to her]

I haven't seen you in a life-age.

Rowan

It's only been seven years.

Grael

Oh, you know how it is: sprite years are like dog years. I thought you were never coming back.

Rowan

Oh, shut up Grael. You're a thousand and two if you're a day.

Grael

My word! You should know better than to mention a sprite's age!

[Rowan laughs]

Ha! A smile! I knew you remembered how!

Rowan

Ha. Stop flying for a second and help me up.

[Grael's wings stop, and he helps Rowan to her feet]

Grael

M'lady.

Rowan

You're a gentleman and a scholar, Grael.

Grael

I resent that remark.

Rowan

Right. A rascal and a scallywag.

Grael

Just as you say, m'lady.

Rowan

Oh, stop groveling Grael.

Grael

Of course, m'lady.

Rowan

And stop calling me m'lady!

Grael

Yes, m'lady.

[Rowan laughs]

Grael

Oh dear. Old habits die slow, it seems.

Rowan

Tell me something I don't know.

Grael

The Large Magellanic Cloud is approximately 163 thousand light-years from the earth, and will collide with the Milky Way in just under 2.4 billion...

Rowan

Already knew that.

Grael

Oh. And I was so proud of that one, too.

Rowan

Been doing some reading?

Grael

Oh yes! We've expanded the library most excellently since you left. The astronomy wing, especially. We had to move it into the observatory to find enough space.

Rowan

And the knowmes didn't mind?

Grael

Oh, they complained loud enough to wake the dead. Had to give the zombies all a glass of milk to put them back to sleep, but we managed in the end. By then the knowmes had calmed down enough to help us move the books.

Rowan

Could I... could I see it?

Grael

See? But - My child, you haven't gone into the Echowood since... since...

Rowan

Since graduation, I know. It just got so hard to come home after...

Grael

What are you wearing, child?

Rowan

Oh. Um, it's a... it's just a dress.

Grael

A wedding dress. And a very nice one, if I do say so myself...

Rowan

Don't. Just - don't. Look, will you take me back or not?

Grael

Goodness! To the Echowood? Sweet child, you know it isn't meant for... I mean, now that you're...

Rowan

Look, I came back here for one reason, and if you're not going to help me...

Grael

M'lady, wait!

[Rowan storms off, disappearing into the trees]

[A small bird alights on a nearby branch, chirping]

Grael

Tell the Lady Little Ash... she's here.

[The bird chirps in reply, then takes flight]

[The forest fades away, replaced by a bubbling mire of mud and grey mist]

[Wet, squishy footsteps carry Rowan forward]

Rowan

'...you know it isn't meant for...' Isn't meant for what, Grael, hmm? Grown-ups? Adults? Boring people? Well I tried being all those things, and guess what? It didn't work out. And if you won't let me into the Echowood, I'll just have to...

[Rowan gasps as her foot sinks in a particularly deep and wet patch of mud]

Rowan

Oh, great.

[Rowan grunts, trying in vain to get free]

No good. Um... Grael? Hello! I'm stuck in the bog! Help? Anyone?

[No reply]

Rowan

Right, no one else wants to be out here. That does make sense.
So how badly am I...

[The mud bubbles louder, and suddenly the bog begins to pull her down]

Rowan

Grael! Help!

[Still no answer]

Rowan

Okay. Think. The Fog-bog. What do you remember about it?

Oh, how did that poem go... 'Grael of the wooded night... come and set the day alight...' No, that's not it. Um... oh!
'Fog-bog, warm and hungry earth, give us now our... our...'
Ugh...

Grael

Now this is one fine mess you've found, child.

[Fluttering wings approach]

Rowan

Grael! Is that you?

Grael

I should certainly hope so! My my, m'lady. You're up to your elbows in it.

Rowan

And I'm about to be neck-deep in it!

[Grael chuckles]

Grael

Soon you'll say you've had it up to here.

Rowan

You can make all the puns you want later, just get me out!

Grael

Is that a deal?

Rowan

Just help me!

Grael

Your wish is my command.

[Wings flutter and mud squishes and slurps and he pulls Rowan free]

Rowan

Thanks.

Grael

Don't thank me yet. Gwards?

[Heavy footsteps tramp forward in a quick march as low, muffled voices grunt with each step]

Rowan

What is this?

Grael

The lady Little-Oak has requested your presence at Castle Caraway. We're to give you a police escort.

Gward

Yah, an' to make sure you don'n escape.

Grael

...and to make sure you don't escape. Thank you, Reginald.

Gward

Y'welcome boss!

Rowan

Why would I want to escape?

Grael

No reason at all! And that's why we don't even need to think about it, do we?

Do we?

Rowan

Um... No. Of course not.

Grael

Castle Caraway then! Double-quick!

Gward

Yessir! Alrigh, march out! One two three four, one two three four...

[Footsteps and fluttering wings as Grael and the gwards march away, leaving Rowan alone with her thoughts]

Rowan

'Fog-bog, warm and hungry earth, give us... give us...'

Grael

M'lady! Are you coming?

Rowan

What? Oh, yeah, yeah, I'm... I'm coming.

[She hesitates, then follows]

[Music]

[A warm fire crackles in the fireplace of a small but cozy room]

[The door creaks open, then shuts]

[Rowan crosses, then collapses into the bed, exhausted]

Rowan

Ugh... God I'm old.

[Rapid knocking on the door]

Rowan

Ughhh... Yeah?

Grael

M'lady?

Rowan

For the love of... Come in!

[Door opens, Grael flies in]

Rowan

What do you want Grael?

Grael

Want? Why nothing, dear child... I simply came to ensure m'lady was satisfied with her accommodations.

Rowan

The accommodations...? They're fine, Grael, just fine.

Grael

Fine? Fine? M'lady, peanuts are fine. Broiled asparagus is fine. A parking ticket with only a moderate fine is... fine. This is the Castle Caraway! I should say it's a good deal better than fine.

Rowan

Exquisite! Extraordinary! Five star review. That what you want?

Grael

No, I want you to be more than fine, m'la...

Rowan

Grael, you're my best friend, but if you call me m'lady one more time I'm going to put you through that wall!

[Awkward silence]

Grael

Did... did I say something wrong?

[Rowan sighs]

Rowan

No. It's not you. It's... it's just... this.

Grael

This?

Rowan

This. All of this.

Grael

The castle?

Rowan

The castle, the observatory, the bog... Everything.

Grael

Now what could possibly be wrong with everything?

Rowan

Well... Nothing. Not really. It's just...

Grael

Just what?

Rowan

It's just not what I expected. What I remembered.

Grael

Not how you remember? Dear child, nothing here has changed.
Nothing here ever changes!

Rowan

'The Echowood just echoes on, where nothing lost is ever gone.'

Grael

Oh thank the stars, you do remember!

Rowan

Some of it. Most of it.

Grael

And... the rest?

[Silence]

Rowan

I guess it's not really important, is it?

Grael

Nay child, 'tis not. All you need know is that this is your home, and it always will be.

Rowan

Right. Home.

[Wings flutter]

Grael

Sweetest dreams, m'lady.

Rowan

Don't call me...

[The door closes behind Grael]

[Rowan sighs]

[Silence]

Rowan

I'm supposed to be married by now.

[Silence]

[Rowan stands, pacing the room]

Rowan

How did that poem go...? 'Fog-bog, warm and hungry earth...
Fog-bog... earth... Give us now our...'

[Heavy bells begin to ring from a distant tower]

Rowan

'The hour chimes of Caraway, struck by the queen herself, they
say...'

[Rowan freezes]

No, that's not right... that can't be right. Who's...

Lady Little Ash. Who's Lady Little Ash?

[Rowan rushes to the door, only to find it locked]

Gward

[From behind the door]

Er'rythin' okay, m'lady?

Rowan

What? Fine! Everything's fine!

[She hesitates, then backs away from the door]

Rowan

Why would there be a gward - or a lock... unless...

'The castle great has cells above, with beds as soft as
feathered doves.' Grael, you son of a...

[She rushes to the window and opens the shutters]

Rowan

Okay, that's pretty high, but I might be able to climb down
if...

Gward

Even'n, M'lady!

Rowan

Why are they all calling me... Evening!

[She steps back from the window]

Rowan

Great. Now what?

[Heavy wingbeats suddenly approach the window]

Owliver

Who who who...

[Chuckles]

Now this is a fine mess you've gotten yourself into.

Rowan

Owliver?

Owliver

The one and only! So good to see you again, Rowan!

[Rowan approaches him]

Rowan

What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be back at the great tree?

Owliver

I'm a visiting dignitary for the feathered folk now. Imagine that! Owliver Crumbwell, ambassador to Castle Caraway.

Rowan

You're staying here? In the castle?

Owliver

Don't be crass. I wouldn't stay indoors if they offered me the rooms of the queen herself. Though I must say, the trees in the garden are far preferable to your quarters.

Rowan

Don't remind me. Do you know the way out of here?

Owliver

What, beside the locked door and the decidedly fatal drop out the window?

Rowan

Besides those.

Owliver

Oh child... did I really teach you nothing?

Rowan

What?

[Owliver sighs deeply]

Owliver

'Echowood has paths unseen...'

Rowan

'...known only by the mind that's keen...'

Owliver

'To pass yourself the walls between...'

Rowan

'...just look for stones of jade-like green!'

Owliver

Ha! I knew I taught you that one!

[Rowan rushes over to the far wall, examining the multi-colored stones that make it up]

Rowan

Red, purple, yellow, orange - ha! Gotcha!

Owliver

Who Who! Who!

[A flash of magic, and Rowan is suddenly on the other side of the wall]

[Water drips and howling wind]

Rowan

Ha! Take that Grael! I... I... Where am I?

Little Ash

[Carrying through the wall]

Then why did you bring her to the castle?

Grael

[Carrying through the wall]

She was stuck in the Fog-Bog, lady Little Ash! Would you rather I left her to die?

Little Ash

[Carrying through the wall]

Yes I would!

[Rowan gasps]

Grael

[Carrying through the wall]

Did you hear something...?

Little Ash

[Carrying through the wall]

Don't try to distract me, Grael! This is about you, bringing that - that...

Grael

[Carrying through the wall]

Grown-up?

Little Ash

[Carrying through the wall]

Don't say that word! You know I hate that word!

Grael

[Carrying through the wall]

Forgive me, your worship. What should I call her, then? An adult? A woman?

Little Ash

[Carrying through the wall]

She's a traitor, Grael. A traitor to everything Echowood means. And I want her destroyed.

[Rowan gasps louder, then tries to run]

Grael

[Carrying through the wall]

Someone's here!

Little Ash

[Carrying through the wall]

Behind the fireplace!

[Another flash of magic, and Rowan is dragged out from behind the wall into a large throne room]

[She groans in pain]

Grael

What have we here, then? A little bird trapped up the chimney flue?

Little Ash

Looks more like a rat in the wall, to me.

Grael

Now, let's not be too hasty in our judgements...

Little Ash

And do you know what we do to rats, traitor?

Rowan

What... who are...?

Little Ash

We burn them. With fire. So that no one has to smell their stinky filth ever again.

Grael?

Rowan

No, wait...

Grael

Your grace, don't you think that may, perhaps, be a trifle extreme?

Little Ash

I want her dead! I want her destroyed, so I can never turn into what... she's...!

[Little Ash trails off, realizing she's said too much]

Grael

Whoops...

Rowan

Turn into... hold on. Who are you?

Grael

Really Rowan? You still don't get it? And here I thought you grown-up types were supposed to be smart.

Little Ash

What did I say... about using that word?

Grael

I... oh. Dear.

Little Ash

Gwards!

[The doors burst open and a dozen gwards rush in, grunting in step]

Grael

[Whispering]

I'm afraid I must admit I didn't see this coming.

Rowan

[Whispering]

What, you thought betraying me would end well?

Grael

[Whispering]

My dear child! Betrayal is such a strong word...

Gward

Yea, Lady Lil' Ash?

Little Ash

Call the kitchens. Have the elves light the ovens, extra hot.
We've got a pair of rats to burn.

Grael

On the other hand...

Rowan

You can't do this! I'm a guest of the castle!

Little Ash

And you could've been the queen, if you just didn't leave.

Rowan

What?

Grael

Yes, what?

Rowan

Who are you?

Grael

Yes, who are you?

Rowan

Stop that!

Grael

Yes, stop that!

Little Ash

SHUT UP!

[Little Ash takes a steadying breath]

You really don't know me, do you?

Rowan

Should I?

Little Ash

Of course you don't. I can barely recognize you. I almost thought Grael found the wrong person when I first saw you.

Rowan

Found? You were looking for me?

Grael

When am I not? After all, that's how I found you both, alone and wandering in the w...

Little Ash

Stop it!

Rowan

You found... both of us?

Oh, god.

Grael

Ah! I know that light in your eyes. Finally figured it out, did you?

Little Ash

Grael! I order you to be quiet!

Grael

Too late, your majesty. She knows.

Little Ash

Gwards! Take them to the kitchen! Take them now! Put them in the ovens while they're still heating! I want to see them cook alive!

Grael

Um... Lady Little Ash?

Little Ash

And gag that stupid sprite, I don't want to hear him anymore!

Grael

My supreme, I'm only trying to tell you that... HMMPH!

[A gward steps up behind him and wraps a cloth around his mouth]

Little Ash

Much better. Now the other...

Rowan

Little Ash.

[Rowan moves towards her with slow, deliberate purpose]

Little Ash

What are you doing!? Stop her! Gwards! Somebody grab her!
Now...!

[Rowan places a hand on Little Ash's shoulder, and she flails to get free]

Let me go! I order you to let me go!

Rowan

Little Ash. That's what Grael used to call me. To call us.

Little Ash

Help! Someone shoot her or something!

Gward

Uhhh...

Little Ash

Oh, you're all useless! Useless! Grae!?! Grae!?!?

Grael

HMMPH?

Little Ash

Do something you stupid sprite!

Rowan

What are you? A copy? A doppelganger?

Little Ash

I'm Lady Little Ash of Castle Caraway, and you'll let me go right the frick now!

Rowan

Rowan. I am so sorry.

Little Ash

My name isn't Rowan, it's... what are you doing? No, no, don't do that, don't...

[A ringing, unearthly noise rises, then crescendos with a crash like thunder]

[Both versions of Rowan cry out, their voices mingling and merging]

[Grael cries out through the gag]

[After a moment, all is silent again as only Rowan remains]

Gward

What the bleedin' heck...

Grael

[Removing his gag]

Dear child, dear child, what have you done!?

Rowan

What... what I should've done... a long time ago.

Grael

And that is?

Rowan

Moved on.

I need to go.

[Rowan moves towards the doors]

[The gwards block her path, drawing swords]

Rowan

What are you doing?

Gward

You et' the queen. You ain't goin' nowhere.

Rowan

I didn't "eat" anyone, you stupid ogre...

Gward

Hey, that's razist.

Rowan

...Little Ash was a part of me. A younger version of me! Some kind of... What was she, Grael?

[Heavy silence]

Grael

She was the queen. And the queen is dead.

Gwards

Long live the king!

Grael

And as King of Castle Caraway...

Gward

Long live the king!

Grael

Yes, thank you. As King of Castle Caraway...

Gward

Long live the...

Grael

Keep it up, and I'll bake you all into a pie.

Gward

Long live the...

[Thunder crashes, and one of the gwards is thrown backwards,
groaning as his flesh sizzles]

Grael

Anyone else!? No? Good. Now, M'lady?

Rowan

Grael?

Grael

Since you killed the queen, the only fitting punishment is that
you take her place now. Forever.

Rowan

Grael, I... I can't. I need to go home. I'm getting married...

Grael

You lost that chance when you decided to come back here.

Take her.

[The gwards rush towards her]

[Heavy wingbeat as Owliver suddenly rushes in through the
window]

[Owliver screeches, getting between Rowan and the gwards]

Rowan

Owliver!

Owliver

Who, who, who called for a rescue?

Rowan

No one!

[Rowan rushes over to him]

Owliver

Oh. Right. Well still, you don't mind if I...

Rowan

Just go!

Grael

Stop that owl!

Owliver

Hold tight!

[Owliver takes flight with Rowan on his back]

[The night air rushes over them as arrows fly past]

[Bows twang uselessly from the castle walls]

Rowan

What took you so long?

Owliver

Well, I couldn't follow you into the secret passage, and by the time I figured out where you went it was already too late, and I just... what... what are you doing?

Rowan

Giving you a hug, you big lump!

Owliver

Oh. Right. Um, well, keep doing it, cause it might get a bit bumpy along the way... AHHH!

[An arrow finds its mark, stabbing into his flank]

Rowan

Owliver!

Owliver

I'm fine, I'm fine... just... hang on tight... hang on tight...!

[Back in the throne room]

Gward

Oh, well shot, m'lawrd! Got 'em righ' 'tween the ribs, y'did.

Grael

Thank you Rupert. Come along: we've a bird to catch.

[Wings flutter]

[Music]

[Back in the fog bog]

[Weak wing beats carry Owliver into a crash landing, throwing Rowan a few feet from where he lands]

[Both grunt with the impact]

[Silence]

Rowan

Owliver? Owliver?

[Finally spots him]

Owliver!

[Rushes to his side]

Owliver? Owliver, please come on, talk to me here. Please.
Please! Please?

Owliver

Remember...

[Owliver falls deadly silent]

Rowan

I'll remember you.

[Wings flutter close by]

Grael

And what good will that do him, child? He can't remember you.

[Rowan tries to run, but her foot gets caught in the sinking mud]

[It begins to pull her down again]

Rowan

Oh you've got to be kidding me...

Grael

What's the matter, little one? Forgot where you were standing?

Rowan

Just go away Grael. I mean it this time.

Grael

Go away? And let you drown? No, no, nonono... Not while you have a job to do yet.

Rowan

Job...?

Grael

Queen of Castle Caraway! Lady of the Echowood and the isles beyond the sea! Mistress of the wild shores and newborn green!

Rowan

Oh. That.

Grael

Don't... don't you want that?

[Silence]

What are you saying? You'd rather have what they offer? Skies full of smog and paved-over forests? A job that steals all the best parts of your days? Dying in a hospital bed once you're too old and too weak to carry on?

Rowan

Life.

Grael

What?

Rowan

I want... life. A real life. I have to grow up sometime.

Grael

Pah! Who says? Just ask Lady Little Ash... oh wait, you can't.

Rowan

You really think that was living? It might be hard for you to understand, but life doesn't go on forever. And it sure as hell doesn't stay simple.

Grael

Of course it does! I mean, goodness child, look at me!

Rowan

And look at me. I'm sitting in the mud in my wedding dress, pretending I'm back in the Echowood.

Grael

Is that what you think this is? A dream?

Rowan

Maybe. Maybe I just snapped. I wouldn't be surprised.

Grael

What?

Rowan

Alecks.

Grael

Oh.

Rowan

Yeah. I saw them at my Bachelorette party, just sitting there at the bar. Alone. We tried to ignore each other. Made it almost the whole night before Susan decided to open another bottle of champagne. Of course we both turned to look at the same time, and... and...

Grael

You kissed them.

Rowan

What? No! No, god no!

Grael

Oh?

Rowan

No!

But... but I would've. If they'd asked me to.

Grael

Oh.

Rowan

And... And I couldn't stop thinking... I brought Alecks here so many times, showed them everything, tried to get them to see what I saw, but... but everything was black and white to them. And sometimes I wondered... you know, what if? What if some part of Alecks really did believe it? What if...?

[The mud bubbles more loudly as she begins to sink faster]

Grael

Come child, there's no need for this. Give me your hand, and I can help you. Perhaps we can even convince Alecks to come back, if only we work together?

[Rowan scoffs]

Rowan

You still don't get it, do you? I love Alecks... but I'm not going to marry them.

Grael

Wh-what?

Rowan

That's the thing about life. It doesn't make much sense. It never did.

I finally remembered. The car crash. Running away from home. Meeting you. Writing the world, the poems. All of it.

Grael

Rowan, you're still sinking...

Rowan

I just didn't think what it meant to write myself into them.

How did that poem go again?

Grael

Rowan...!

Rowan

'Fog-bog, warm and hungry earth... give us now our second birth.'

Grael

Rowan!!

[Rowan is pulled below the surface, vanishing from sight]

[Heavy heart beats and gurgling mud]

[Slowly fade to a heart rate monitor beeping in a small hospital room]

[Rowan groans awake]

Mari

Rowan? Rowan sweetie, are you awake?

Rowan

Ugh... yeah, I guess so.

Mari

Oh saints alive, I could just kiss you to death!

[Rowan chuckles softly]

Rowan

Thanks Mom. What happened?

Mari

Oh, you passed out in the garden just as the band started playing. Now, you musn't feel ashamed about it, I mean, all that pressure you put on yourself, it's really no surprise that you... oh, but that doesn't matter now, you're okay. I'll go get the doctor!

Rowan

No mom, I'm really..

[Her footsteps are already retreating into the hall]

[Silence]

Hello, Grael.

Grael

Hello Rowan.

[Rowan scoffs]

Rowan

You never used to call me that.

Grael

Huh. I guess times change.

Rowan

Yeah. Times and people.

[Silence]

Grael

You know, I'm really not sure what happens now.

Rowan

You'll be fine without me, Grael. Aren't you like, what, a thousand and two?

Grael

A thousand and five next week.

Rowan

Well. Happy birthday then.

Grael

Thanks.

You know, funny thing is, I don't feel it.

Rowan

What do you mean?

Grael

I know I'm a thousand and four. I know I'm old, but all that time before we met feels... I don't know, kind of... fuzzy.

Rowan

I could say the same thing about you.

[Silence]

Grael

Are we enemies now?

Rowan

No Grael. And we're not friends, either.

Grael

I'm sorry about Owliver.

Rowan

Me too.

Grael

You know, there's still a lot to do around the Castle. The library needs another expansion, and the knowmes are all warmed up for another fight!

[Rowan sighs]

Rowan

You're just going to have to manage without me. For now, at least.

Grael

Yeah. For now.

[Silence]

[Mari's footsteps approach]

Mari

...The nerve of that doctor! She's stable, he says. Just look at her! Does she look stable to... Oh I'm so sorry dear, I didn't mean to shout. He's busy right now, but Laurel's just outside.

Rowan?

Rowan

Hmm?

Mari

E-everything alright?

Rowan

Yeah. Everything's fine.

Uh, go ahead.

Mari

Laurel dear? Your fiance's back with us.

Laurel

[From out in the hall]

Oh thank god. Hey, can you tell her that I'm going to kill her for ruining my wedding?

Mari

Laurel says she loves you more than the earth and sky, sweetie.

[She kisses Rowan's forehead]

I love you, Little Ash.

Rowan

Love you mom.

[Mari leaves the room as Laurel enters]

[She stands in the doorway for a long moment]

Laurel

Welcome home, stranger.

[Music]

[The sounds of the Inn of the Archway slowly fade back in]

Grael

There is a poem, writ long ago in your world by a poet touched by the green in much the same way Rowan was. "Come away, o human child! To the waters and the wild, with a faery, hand in hand, for the world's more full of weeping than you can understand."

When I sang those words to Rowan on that lonely, mournful evening so long ago, I thought they spoke only of the world she knew. I believed that here, in the world we made, she could live forever beyond the reach of grief... the reach of death. But I was wrong. We built this world from our own memories, from our own cracked and wearied souls... And death takes all worlds, in the end. It can be delayed, ignored, plastered over and laughed at... But everything that has a beginning has an end. And I've found mine here.

[Silence]

[The Traveler makes several false starts]

The Traveler

So you brought me here to... What, try and stop the world from dying?

[Grael scoffs]

Grael

If there was a way to stop it, I missed it half a lifetime ago. No. You're not here to save the Echowood. I might have told myself that at first, but... That time is past. The rot has gone too deep, the foundations too worn down. Maeven was right - this world has to die.

The Traveler

Then what am I here for?

Grael

You're here because I was lost in grief and could not see the truth. You're here because I was a fool who thought he knew what was best for his friend, and tried to force it upon them. You're here because after 300 years, I couldn't stop myself trying to find another, even when I knew it was hopeless.

The Traveler

Another what?

Grael

Another... Rowan. Another human to take away into the waters and the wild. Someone who could imagine a new Echowood alongside me, and remake it before the old one has breathed its last. For centuries, I've pulled strangers through that doorway, drawn them out of the last moments of their lives, from places they would not be missed. But I've found no one who chose to stay at my side. A few came close, but... None have come so far as you.

The Traveler

What do you mean... The last moments of their lives?

[Grael sits forward, looking more closely at them]

Grael

How much have you remembered? About your life before the Echowood?

The Traveler

Not much... I've had a few dreams, but - they're all just... images. Feelings. I can't make sense of them.

Grael

And what do you see?

[The Traveler takes a deep breath, remembering]

[Low, echoing drone rises]

[Whistling wind, a creaking door, and a rhythmic noise]

The Traveler

A tunnel. Some... underground place. It was dark, I couldn't see much, but... I felt like I wasn't alone. And then there was a sound... And pain... And then - nothing.

[Thunder crashes, then fades]

Grael

Nothing?

The Traveler

I guess that's when I woke up in the woods.

Grael

And can you remember anything else? Who you were, where you came from - your name?

The Traveler

No. I think it started with an H, but... That's all I can remember. Do you know what it was?

Grael

Me? No, I - I don't know any more than you do. The archway chooses who it calls - I just told it where to look.

The Traveler

And you told it to look for people who were about to die.

Grael

Yes.

[Long silence]

[The Traveler sighs]

The Traveler

All those people you brought here before me... What happened to them?

[Grael takes a deep breath]

Grael

Some remained in the Echowood, though they have not returned to the inn. Others tried to attack me, and I... I defended myself.

The Traveler

You killed them?

Grael

A few. Yes.

The Traveler

And the rest?

Grael

The rest I sent back through the archway, into the worlds they came from.

The Traveler

You sent them home?

Grael

I sent them to their deaths... Back to the moments they came from.

[Silence]

The Traveler

Oh.

[Silence]

The Traveler

That doesn't leave me with a lot of good options, does it?

Grael

No. It doesn't. As far as I can see, it leaves you with only two.

The Traveler

And those are?

[Grael laughs ruefully]

Grael

Well, I suppose this started with an offer, didn't it? An offer to tell and teach you all you needed to know, until your voice returned. Why shouldn't it end with one?

[Grael sits forward]

Here is your choice, such as it is: I can send you back to your world through the archway - not to the moment I took you from, but to another time, another place. You can start fresh, and perhaps your memories of who you were will return in time. You can live the rest of your life in whatever way you choose: a dull, plain life, lost in the fading of another world. I cannot say it's the path I would choose - but it is open to you.

[Music]

Alternatively... You can remain here. Continue to learn the history and nature of the Echowood, hear new tales and see new sights as winter turns at last to spring. And when summer comes and all life rises to meet it - you and I will sing a new song of creation. The old shall pass away, and the new Echowood shall rise in its place: a world reborn from its own ashes. Those within will perish, but their souls will endure, echoing on into

the new world we create in story and memory and life renewed.
And you will stand by my side, ruling over what we made
forevermore. Apotheosis, at the cost of the world that is. That
is what I can offer - nothing more, and nothing less.

[Grael picks up his glass, extending it to The Traveler]

Grael

What say you?

[Silence]

[The Traveler pushes back their chair and begins to pace]

Grael

You don't need to answer right away, there's plenty of time left
to-

The Traveler

Shut up, Grael.

[The Traveler continues pacing, then stops]

[The Traveler sighs]

The Traveler

Just tell me one thing.

Grael

Anything at all. I've never lied to you, and I don't intend to
now.

The Traveler

Did the other Travelers all lose their voices too? Did the
arch... really do that to me?

[Long silence]

Grael

No. It didn't.

The Traveler

Then I don't think I can stay. If you want me to help you make a new world... If that's even possible... How do I know you won't just ignore my voice when the time comes? I don't think you really want someone to add new ideas - you just want someone to go along with yours.

Grael

You're right. Of course you are. I was too close - I couldn't see it.

[Grael rises from his chair, wings fluttering]

Very well... Let's go back to the archway. I doubt you have anything to pack, and I can send you through tonight if-

The Traveler

No Grael, I... I don't want to go back either.

Grael

You... What do you mean?

The Traveler

I mean... I want to stay here. In the Echowood. Just - not here.

[Grael's wings flutter]

Grael

Traveler, I've told you time and again that this world is no place for the faint of heart-

The Traveler

Did you happen to notice how I just saved you from Maeven?

Grael

That's... That's not the same, she-

[The Traveler steps forward]

The Traveler

She had every intent to kill you for the sake of "all life," and I stopped her. With a broken sword.

[The Traveler sits down across from him]

Grael - You taught me so much about this place... how to survive, how to find my way - how it works. Please, just... Trust me to use it. Let me go.

[Long silence]

Grael

Go.

The Traveler

Go?

Grael

You're stronger than you look, dear heart... And made of sterner stuff than I ever gave you credit for. You'll do just fine out there. Where will you go?

The Traveler

Market town's just a few miles down the road, right? That's probably where Silvia ended up.

Grael

Hitching your wagon to a bard, are you? That's not the path I would've expected.

The Traveler

That's... kind of the point, isn't it?

[Grael chuckles]

Grael

Yes... I suppose it is. Well. I suppose there's no point in putting it off any longer, is there?

The Traveler

No, I... I guess there isn't.

[Grael sits forward]

Grael

Fare thee well, Traveler.

The Traveler

Yeah... Goodbye, Grael.

[The Traveler stands and rushes to the door]

[Door opens]

[The Traveler pauses, looking back]

The Traveler

I hope to see you again. Someday.

[Door swings shut behind them]

[Music]

[Grael sighs, then rises, wings fluttering]

[Flying around the room, he blows out candles, closes shutters,
cleans up empty bottles, and straightens chairs]

[Moving to the fireplace, he pushes the grate aside, knocking it
down to ashes]

[Picking up a metal bucket, he pours water over the fire -
extinguishing the flames]

[Crossing the room in darkness, he puts on a coat and grabs a
ring of keys off the wall]

[Opening the door, he leaves the inn for the cold night outside]

[A heavy click as he locks the door behind him]

[He flies a few feet, then lands, walking away from the inn]

[He stops, then looks back]

Grael

Goodnight... Echowood.

[Silence - wind and creaking branches]

[Footsteps]

[A rising, shimmering sound appears in the sky above him, and
Grael stops]

Grael

Is that... It can't be...

[Pulsing rises, then something falls through the trees nearby]
[Silence]
[Footsteps approach, along with a shimmering noise]

Grael

Sirius?

Sirius

I told you I'd find my way back.

[Music]

Grael

How? How can you be here? I thought-

Sirius

Is that any way to greet an old friend?

Grael

I thought I'd never see you again.

Sirius

Good to know the stars can still surprise you, even after all this time. Is that your home?

Grael

It - It was... Is, I guess, but it's - it's complicated.

Sirius

Aren't you going to invite me in?

Grael

It's... It's a little dark in there.

[Sirius chuckles]

Sirius

Not so dark yet.

[The shimmering sound increases as Sirius steps up beside Grael, taking his hand]

[The two walk back towards the inn hand in hand - Sirius walking, Grae'l flying]
[Grae'l unlocks the door and opens it, and the two step inside]
[The door swings shut behind them]
[Music]
[The sounds of the Source fade back in]

Amy Sterling

An ancient faerie trapped in a dying world of his own making... his, and the child Rowan's. One whose past is shadowed, calling himself an old god but not knowing what that means... and the other, a simple human girl, whose power underpins the Echowood so completely that her absence spelled its doom. Neither of them should be possible. Neither of them fit. And yet, here they are... and here is the Echowood, sitting on the precipice of destruction.

Yet both of them have accepted this. Both have given up on preserving the world of their creation beyond its natural lifespan, and both have found peace with the ones they love. How does this memory fit with the others? What role does it play in... whatever this labyrinth is leading me towards? This nameless fear whose shape I've only just begun to guess...

[Sudden scraping of stone against stone as a door opens in the wall of the labyrinth]
[Slow, measured footsteps move through it, then stop]

Who is... who is that? How did they...

[The footsteps begin to move away]
[The door of stone closes behind them]

Wait... wait! Where are you going? Who are you?

[The figure gives no reply]
[Amy chases after it]

There is someone else in this labyrinth... someone who just opened a door in the walls of reality and stepped through like it was nothing. Someone like me, perhaps? They certainly looked

human, so far as I could tell. And something tells me they have the answers I seek. We are close now... so close to the heart of this maze, and to the truth. I am Amy Sterling, and come hell or high water... I will know that truth.

[End theme and credits]