

FADE IN:

EXT. WILLOWMERE VILLAGE SQUARE - MORNING

The golden sun spills over a patchwork of thatched roofs. Villagers bustle through the market faces warm and familiar. Banners flutter lazily in the breeze.

At the heart of it all a BOY of sixteen—ROWAN—stands atop a rickety barrel wielding a wooden sword voice cracking with excitement.

ROWAN

Prepare to face the mighty Emberblade! No fiend can stand against me—
Rowan swings the sword bravely. The tip flies off and knocks a pie right from OLMA the baker's hands.

OLMA

(shaking her fist good-natured)

Save some heroics for your chores Rowan!

The crowd bursts into laughter. Rowan flushes but bows with dramatic flair. His best friend ADA (15) wiry and quick-witted sidles up clutching a satchel of apples.

ADA

(teasingly)

Is the mighty Emberblade allergic to pastries?

INT. ROWAN'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - LATER

Sunbeams catch floating motes of flour. Rowan's MOTHER MAELYN (gentle practical) kneads dough. Rowan sits at the table carving swirls into his wooden sword.

MAELYN

You're meant to be gathering eggs not daydreaming dear.

ROWAN

I was practicing heroic stances. In case bandits attack. Or goblins. Or you know pastry theft.

Maelyn pats his hand fond but resigned.

MAELYN

How about you protect us from burnt bread instead?

EXT. WILLOWMERE CHICKEN COOP - DAY

Rowan opens the creaky door wielding the sword like a dragon-slayer. The hens scatter feathers flying. Rowan shrieks as a rooster chases him sword clattering.

Ada watches doubled over with laughter hiding behind the fence. Rowan recovers a single slightly cracked egg victorious.

ADA

The dragon guardian strikes again! You survived Sir Rowan.

ROWAN

I'll accept my medal in breakfast scrambled.

INT. THE TIPSY WILLOW INN - EVENING

A cozy fire-lit space. Laughter and music twine among the rafters. Ada and Rowan perch on stools noses pressed to a dusty glowing SCROLL courtesy of WYN the barkeep a soft-spoken barrel-shaped man with rosy cheeks.

WYN

Found it in the thatch eh. Always glows when you whisper something brave to it. Magic's everywhere if you know where to peek.

Rowan clears his throat hesitant.

ROWAN

I'm going to be a hero. One day.

A pulse of golden light erupts from the scroll moths swirl in the rafters. The room hushes everyone pausing gazes falling on Rowan.

ADA

Well. That's new.

EXT. ROWAN'S ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Rowan lies back with his sword and glowing scroll. Moonlight silvering his freckles he stares at the stars eyes wide.

ROWAN

Tomorrow. Maybe. Maybe it starts tomorrow.

A shooting star streaks above. The scroll glows softly a heartbeat of hope.

INT. ROWAN'S BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN

Rowan tosses in sleep. Mist rises dreams swirl. A luminous foxlike SPIRIT - ELO - pads from the shadows ethereal and mischievous.

ELO

Rowan of Willowmere chosen by courage not by grace. The doorway has opened.

ROWAN

(half-asleep stammering) What—what doorway?

ELO

Wake before fate closes it. Bring the scroll. This realm needs mending.

Elo leaps—vanishes in a swirl of stardust. Rowan bolts upright breathless.

EXT. WILLOWMERE VILLAGE ROAD — MORNING

Misty and cold. Rowan fumbles with a bundle: bread cheese wooden sword the now brightly glowing scroll. Ada intercepts eyes wide with excitement and worry.

ADA

You're actually going aren't you?

Rowan fumbles with the sword sends it nearly tumbling.

ROWAN

I have to Ada. I... think I was chosen. I mean a fox spirit told me. In a dream. Or maybe it was the bread pudding.

ADA

Don't die. And bring me back something sparkly. Or at least come back Rowan.

They hug awkward and fierce. Rowan sets off heart in his mouth and the scroll pulsing at his side.

EXT. EDGE OF THE GREAT WOODS — DAY

Rowan hesitates. The woods are deep ancient trembling with birdsong and secrets. The scroll glows brighter; unseen voices seem to bubble between the leaves.

ROWAN

(quietly to himself) First step. Just a story until you walk it.

Taking a shaky breath Rowan steps into the looming green.

CUT TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD TRAIL — DAY

The forest arches above—the light dapples in shifting patterns. Rowan utterly alone and yet not—traces his way environment shifting from familiar to enchanted.

Puffs of magic shimmer between the ferns. Creatures dart—a blue squirrel with wings a chattering plant that giggles and hides. Rowan gawks delighted and daunted.

Music and laughter echo from deeper woods. Rowan stares down at his wooden sword the scroll humming like distant thunder.

ROWAN

(smiling uncertain) Well world. Ready or not.

He disappears into the glowing mist carried by hope magic and the laughter of legends yet to come.

FADE OUT.

EXT. EDGE OF MYRWOOD - DAWN

The forest is thick with fog trees twisted and ancient. Rowan stands at the threshold eyes wide face illuminated by the magical scroll's glow. Shadows flicker distant laughter of woodland sprites echoing.

ROWAN

(softly steadyng himself)

All right then hero... just don't trip.

He steps forward. The woods respond: roots curl away a shaft of golden light blazes a fleeting path deeper. Rowan's hands tremble but his resolve hardens as the forest envelops him.

CUT TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD - MORNING

Rowan creeps warily brushing past oversized ferns. Curious eyes blink from mossy hollows. Suddenly—a SNAP. Rowan dangles upside down ensnared in a rope trap. Woodland sprites giggle unseen. He struggles scroll dangling above his head.

ROWAN

(embarrassed muttering)

Brilliant start Rowan. Saved the realm snared by cheese thieves.

A glint: mischievous fox eyes in the undergrowth. ELO the fox spirit emerges tail aglow circling Rowan. Elo nips playfully at the rope until Rowan drops to the forest floor in a heap.

ELO

(voice crackling with mirth)

Bravery takes many forms.

Rowan scrambles upright dusting himself off cheeks flushed.

CUT TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD - WOODLAND TRAIL - LATER

A winding path stitched with wildflowers and stones. Elo darts ahead Rowan dogging his swift steps. The scroll hums under Rowan's fingers softly glowing with each brave stride.

ROWAN

(calling with uncertainty)

Elo! Where are you taking me? What am I meant to find?

Elo pauses turns eyes twinkling with mischief. With a flick of his tail petals spiral through the air swirling around Rowan in dazzling shapes.

ELO

All answers grow in time. Beware the hollow shade—trust your light.

CUT TO:

INT. ADA'S ROOM - WILLOWMERE - DAY

Ada paces her small cluttered bedroom a bundle of nerves. Maps and old tales scattered across the bed. She clutches a stone Rowan left behind wrestling with worry and longing. Outside Maelyn and Olma argue gently about the baker's missing rolling pin lending the scene a background of domestic warmth.

ADA

(muttering defiantly)

He'll trip over his boots for sure. I ought to... I ought to find him first.

Ada snatches up a satchel stuffing it with bread an apple and the glimmering stone. She lingers at the door wrestling with her fear and her fierce loyalty.

CUT TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD TRAIL - AFTERNOON

Rowan picks his way along a stony path still awkwardly hero-like. Sunbeams pierce through thick foliage. Elo disappears ahead momentarily.

Suddenly a rustle—Rowan raises his wooden sword instinctively. But it's just ADA emerging from the brush cheeks flushed grinning wide.

ADA

Lost already hero? I thought you'd at least last the morning.

ROWAN

(relieved teasing back)

I hope you brought snacks. It's dangerous out here. Monster leaves hungry roots—

Ada produces the apple tossing it to Rowan. Their friendship and dynamic immediately resume: brisk but underscored by worry and care.

CUT TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD - CROSSROADS - EVENING

Rowan and Ada with Elo in tow reach a fork in the path. One road leads toward a sunlit glade the other into deep shadows veined with silvery mist. The scroll pulses toward the darker path but Ada hesitates.

ADA

(forced bravado)

How about we follow the one that doesn't look like you know doom?

ROWAN

(conflicted then determined)

The scroll wants us to go that way. We... we have to trust it.

Ada sighs but nods. Together they choose the shadowed path. The trees seem to close in as they walk bravado thin but courage undimmed.

CUT TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD - NIGHT

The forest deepens to twilight blue. Rowan and Ada set camp beneath a twisted willow-like tree. Whispers rustle the leaves. Elo curls up nearby glowing faintly. Ada shares her bread; their silences are heavy threaded with anxiety and closeness.

ROWAN

(trying to sound brave)

We'll make it Ada. Once we fix... whatever this is we'll go home heroes.

ADA

(softly guarded)

Or we'll come back missing eyebrows and half a pie like your last attempt at greatness.

Rowan laughs relief in his eyes. They huddle close as night thickens. In the shadows a pair of ember-bright eyes glint—unseen by all.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD - CAMPSITE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Neighboring moonlight. Rowan sits by the dying campfire alone. The scroll glows brighter. Whispers swirl: a vision bubbles through the flames. Maelyn's voice loving and concerned; Olma baking; Wyn behind the inn's counter all wreathed in smoky gold. The dream flickers—then abruptly Rowan sees his mother's worried face transformed by shadows into something monstrous.

MAELYN (VISION)

Don't lose yourself Rowan. The Myrwood twists more than roads.

The flames die. Rowan shivers rubbing the scroll for comfort. The vision leaves him restless doubts gnawing at his courage.

FADE TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD - MORNING

Mist clings to the earth as Rowan wakes. Ada is already up skipping stones across a small mirror-bright pond. Rowan looks haggard. The scroll's glow has weakened. A shadow hangs between them—neither quite voicing their fears.

ADA

(playful probing)

Dream of pies or monsters?

ROWAN

(evades)

Hard to tell the difference out here.

Ada senses Rowan's burden tries to lighten the moment but the atmosphere holds unspoken tension.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD - THE HOLLOW SHADE - DAY

A grove of blackened trees roots arching overhead like claws. The atmosphere turns suffocating. Elo halts fur bristling. Rowan and Ada share a look and push onward. The scroll's light flickers—faint.

ADA

Are we supposed to breathe here or just hold on till it's over?

Suddenly ghostly shapes slip between trees—memories fears echoes of lost hopes. Rowan faces the shade of his father silent and accusing. Ada's deepest fear—the prospect of losing Rowan—is made manifest a cold whisper at her ear.

ROWAN

You're not real. You're not.

His voice shakes. Ada seizes Rowan's hand squeezing tight. Slowly with effort they move through the shade—the ghosts fading as the friends bolster each other's resolve.

CUT TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD - ENCHANTED POOL - NOON

A glassy iridescent pool bordered by ancient stones. Rowan kneels cupping luminous water in his hands. Ada studies reflections wary. Elo laps at the edge causing ripples of golden light.

ROWAN

(awestruck breathless)

It's beautiful... Do you think—

Ada presses a finger to her lips pointing: within the reflection Rowan glimpses the memory of Willowmere and his mother smiling—a reassurance. Rowan sips the magical water. His courage steadies the scroll's glow returning.

CUT TO:

INT. INN - WILLOWMERE - DAY

Wyn polishes a mug behind the counter. Maelyn anxiously stands by the window lost in thought. Olma paces clutching a basket of rolls. The mood is uneasy—the village heart beats with worry for what has been set in motion.

WYN

(gentle encouragement)

Rowan always returns a hero from his stories. This shall be no different.

MAELYN

(voice trembling)

Stories don't always end kindly Wyn.

Olma quietly sets rolls by Wyn her silent support reinforcing the village's quiet unity.

CUT TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD - DEEP WOODS - AFTERNOON

Rowan and Ada weave through the roots of gnarled oaks. A flash of movement—roguish woodland bandits dart from the shadows snatching the glowing scroll from Rowan's pack! Rowan gives chase Ada hot on his heels.

ADA

Not again! Why is it always cheese apples or magic scrolls?

They plunge after the bandits dodging enchanted traps: exploding mushrooms entangling vines. Rowan's sword hacks vainly at brambles. Elo tackles one bandit regaining the scroll but not before the bandits curse them—The Night's Maw comes!

QUICK CUT TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD - SHELTERED GLADE - EVENING

Exhausted from their escape Rowan and Ada sink against a mossy log. The scroll's glow falters. Rowan gazes at his hands—dirty trembling—not the hands of a hero.

ROWAN

(winded hollow)

Am I meant for this Ada? Maybe Elo was wrong. Or the scroll just liked a good story.

ADA

You were never just stories Rowan. You're the only one I'd follow into a cursed wood. So stop doubting or I'll make you eat mushrooms for supper.

They share a tired laugh the moment bittersweet—love friendship and doubt tangled together.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD — HEART TREE — NIGHT

A clearing—at its center the legendary Heart Tree massive and aglow with veins of gold. Rowan approaches as if drawn. Elo stands sentinel at the roots. The scroll pulses in Rowan's hand reacting to the ancient magic. Ada stands back wary.

ELO

(solemn new gravity in his tone)

Place the scroll. Truth blooms here—hero or coward all hearts are bare in this light.

With trembling hands Rowan places the scroll at the Heart Tree's base. The ground shudders. The scroll erupts in golden light racing up the trunk setting the whole clearing ablaze with magic.

ADA

Rowan!

The very air bends. Rowan is caught in a swirl of visions: Willowmere burning Ada fading to shadow himself stumbling lost and alone—the cost of failure. Then—another flash. Rowan older stronger leading others through the dark. It's a possible future.

The magic shudders falters. The Heart Tree's glow turns sickly. The scroll cracks. A howl tears through the woods—the MIDPOINT REVERSAL.

TO BLACK.

EXT. MYRWOOD — HEART TREE CLEARING — LATER

Total darkness—then a pulse of corrupted blue light. Ada shakes Rowan awake. The Heart Tree is dying its gold veins blackening. The howling grows louder: THE NIGHT'S MAW a massive shadow-beast forms at the edge of the clearing.

ADA

We need to run!

Rowan tries to retrieve the cracked scroll but the dark force buffets him. Elo leaps between Rowan and the shadow-beast drawing its attention. Ada pulls Rowan to his feet; together they flee Elo's foxlight shimmering defiantly but dimming.

CUT TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD — RUNNING BLIND — NIGHT

Rowan Ada and Elo dash through tangling brush the Night's Maw in pursuit. Suddenly—Elo is battered aside by a shadowy force. Rowan

desperate goes after the fox spirit; Ada screams his name but Rowan is swallowed by a maze of roots vanishing from sight.

ADA

(frantic heartbroken)

Rowan! Rowan!

Ada collapses sobbing. The Night's Maw stalks her direction but is distracted by Rowan's movement deeper in the forest. Rowan and Elo disappear into shadow.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD - ROOT-LACED HOLLOW - NIGHT

Rowan awakens in a pit of tangled roots alone but for Elo—who is weakened his glow flickering. The scroll is nearly dead. Rowan's arm is scraped clothes muddy hope running dangerously thin.

ROWAN

(choking back tears)

I can't do this Elo. Heroics—maybe Ada was always right I'm more likely to break things than fix them.

ELO

(weak but sincere)

To mend the realm first mend yourself—courage is brightest in the dark.

Rowan shudders hugging Elo close. Tears streak his muddy cheeks. For a long time he says nothing—finally he sits up determination kindling.

FADE TO:

EXT. MYRWOOD - MOONLIT GLEN - NIGHT

Ada sits alone knees hugged to her chest surreptitiously wiping tears. She unslings her satchel and clutches Rowan's sparkling stone for comfort. She looks to the moon voice fierce in the hush.

ADA

(to herself mustering courage)

Don't you quit Rowan. And don't you dare leave me to rescue you all alone.

Ada wipes the last tear standing as if drawing power from the earth itself. She strides into the darkness fearless now.

FADE OUT.

EXT. HEART TREE CLEARING - NIGHT

Fog clings to the shattered ruins of the Heart Tree. Black roots pulse with shadow. Rowan lies half-buried amidst dying embers breathing

shallow his hand still clutching a fragment of the cracked scroll. The Night's Maw prowls the perimeter—an ethereal shadow huge formless whispering Rowan's failures.

Rowan's eyelids flutter. Elo the fox spirit struggles close a faint flicker of silver in the suffocating gloom.

ELO

(raspy fading) It's not lost yet brave boy...

Rowan looks at him—eyes rimmed with tears and new steel. The shadow hums. He tightens his grip on the scroll shard a pale glow pulsing faintly in response.

EXT. MYRWOOD - SHADOWED PATH - SAME NIGHT

Ada moves determinedly Rowan's sunstone clutched in her palm each step dragging her further from hope and deeper into the gloom. Silvery eyes pierce from snarling shapes—she faces phantoms yet presses on.

ADA

(defiant trembling)

Rowan if you're lost I'll find you... Even if the trees eat me up first.

Shadows surge—a monstrous inky tendril writhes toward her. Ada plants her feet as the stone's light burns bright repelling the dark. With a furious wordless yell she pushes forward.

EXT. HEART TREE CLEARING - LATER NIGHT

Rowan upright now faces the Night's Maw as it takes ever more monstrous form—height of a barn eyes like mournful empty stars. Its voice merges with the wind the moaning of the forest Rowan's own deepest fear.

NIGHT'S MAW

You failed. They will all forget you. All you love will wither.

Rowan shakes tears leaking silently—but he looks to Elo who gives a weak but nodding encouragement.

ROWAN

(voice almost breaking)

I know I failed. But that's not all I am. I can try again. You're not the end—not for me not for Ada not for this wood.

Night's Maw writhes clutching at Rowan with spectral claws. For a moment its shadow covers him completely—Rowan gasps nearly crushed.

EXT. HEART TREE CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

A blinding white beam cuts through the fog—Ada bursts into the clearing sunstone aloft dazzling back the shadow. She slams herself between Rowan and the Maw wild-eyed and fierce with fear.

ADA

(furious loving)

If you want him you'll have to go through both of us! We're not alone not ever again!

The Night's Maw rears hissing but recoils from Ada's sunstone. Elo—now fading almost away—weakly channels energy into the earth. The roots begin to glimmer faintly under Rowan's and Ada's footsteps.

EXT. HEART TREE CLEARING — CONTINUOUS

Rowan stands supporting Ada and Elo; together facing the darkness. The pieces of the cracked scroll flutter with renewed light. The Heart Tree's roots respond growing and arching forming a protective web.

ROWAN

(quiet determined)

It wasn't about the scroll. It's about mending what was broken. Not just magic—the people. Us. I won't let the Maw take it or Ada or even myself.

He hands one scroll piece to Ada. Together they place both fragments at the Heart Tree's roots. The sunstone shines—flares—unbearably bright. Rowan and Ada hold hands focus and begin to tell the story—not of their failures but their love and regrets and hope.

ADA

I was scared. I thought losing him would break me. But I came for him anyway. And for myself.

Magic surges—a wind howls. The Maw screams clutching at its chest as cracks of golden light burst from within. The Heart Tree's branches settle over Rowan and Ada protectively.

EXT. HEART TREE CLEARING — DAWN

Light bathes the glade. The Night's Maw disintegrates in a fusillade of sunlight and laughter—echoes of forgiveness and memory. The Heart Tree mended pulses with green and gold. Elo lies weak and translucent—but smiling. Rowan and Ada embrace exhausted and weeping relief flooding the dawn.

ELO

(voice barely a whisper)

The wood thanks you children... It dreams again. Go home while it's bright.

From Elo's form a single silver feather floats glimmering in Rowan's hand. Ada kneels to touch the roots—new flowers bloom instantly. Their laughter rings answering the long darkness.

EXT. MYRWOOD — MORNING

Rowan and Ada make their way back through the now-glistening trees. The oppressive mist is gone; beams of sunlight pattern the moss. Magical creatures watch shyly from the boughs—friendly now at peace.

ADA

(teasing gentle)

Race you to the river? Bet you can't win without a fox's help.

ROWAN

I've got a feather—who needs a fox?

They chase each other tumbling laughter echoing the forest alive with light.

EXT. VILLAGE OF WILLOWMERE – DAY

Rowan and Ada emerge from the treeline into the embrace of fields and home. Villagers spot them gasps giving way to shouts of joy. Ada's mother races to her—tears laughter endearing scolding. Rowan surprised is swept up by the crowd.

ADA'S MOTHER

(smothering hug)

Where's your brain girl? And your shoes? I'm not letting you out again—ever!

ADA

(laughing through tears) We brought the sun back Mum.

Rowan stands sheepish. A battered Elder hands him the scroll fragments with a nod of grave appreciation. The villagers look equally at Rowan and Ada—no longer as children but as their own kind of heroes.

INT. WILLOWMERE VILLAGE HALL – EVENING

A table—lit by candlelight—the scroll fragments rejoined set proudly at the center. Rowan and Ada freshly washed are invited to sit at the head. The Elder rises.

VILLAGE ELDER

Our woods are safe tonight because you faced what we could not. The stories will change now—because of you.

The villagers bow their heads. Rowan meets Ada's eyes—both overwhelmed by the gravity and gentleness of acceptance.

ROWAN

(soft choked) Thank you for trusting me even when I didn't trust myself.

A hush—the sense of something mended not just in the wood but in the hearts around the table.

EXT. EDGE OF MYRWOOD – DUSK

Rowan stands at the threshold the silver feather in one hand sunstone in the other. Ada joins him gazing into the forest—now alive with birdsong and gold. They stand in silent reverence.

ADA

You could stay you know. Be the wood's new champion. Or just... visit sometimes.

ROWAN

(smiling) I think the wood's had enough of champions. It needs friends not heroes.

They laugh youthful and unburdened. As the last rays slip below the treeline Rowan places the feather in the soft moss. A fox's shadow flickers for a breath—a final goodbye from Elo.

EXT. WILLOWMERE — NIGHT

A slow pan over windows aglow with candlelight; laughter carries in snippets. On a windowsill rests the restored scroll the feather and the sunstone. Outside Ada and Rowan lie in the moonlit grass their shoulders touching sharing apple slices and a hushed conversation.

ROWAN

Do you think the stories will remember any of this?

ADA

Maybe. But I'll remember. That's enough.

They gaze at the stars—two small unsung heroes the Myrwood's story now their own.

FADE OUT: