

# Through the Echoes Into the Woods

*A novella*

Fantasy / Romance

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***Content Warning: This story contains themes of anxiety, panic attacks, and brief mentions of suicidal thoughts and dysphoria. Reader discretion is advised.***

### **The Magic that Calls Her Home...**

Aven has always felt out of place; plagued by anxiety and a deep sense of not belonging. She struggles to fit into her quiet cottage life with her family, feeling disconnected from her own body and the world around her. A strange pull draws her to the woods, where she discovers an enchanted greenhouse, teeming with otherworldly plants and signs of life.

### **Between Two Worlds, She Finds Her Truth...**

In this hidden sanctuary, Aven meets a boy who isn't quite human. A mysterious presence who seems to understand her in ways no one else can. As Aven's bond with the boy grows, she realizes that the greenhouse may be a doorway to another world, one where she might finally belong. The more she uncovers, the more she questions whether this new world can truly offer the peace she longs for.

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## PROLOGUE

Aven closes her eyes, and as she does so, she tries to focus on the point in the middle of the darkness that is wrapped around her. She stares into it, hoping to find it, the thing she is looking for. Sometimes it takes her a while to slow down her breaths and find the right image, but if you look close enough into that dark spot of nothing, there is a world.

Her small little world.

The one she paints in the corners of her mind, when her heart is in too much pain. When she does not know why she feels sad. When she suddenly can not breathe properly. When she hates everything around her, because nothing looks like she imagines home, nothing smells right or looks right. Sounds are just a disruption of the place she wants to rest inside her head.

When she gets that heavy feeling right under her breast, a bit above her stomach, it becomes as hard and heavy as a stone and allows smaller stones to fall down to her stomach, creating a slight discomfort. The sound the smaller rocks make, as they land in the pit, is the only thing ringing inside her head. With each fall a new word echoes in her head.

*Drop Find*

*Drop Somewhere*

*Drop New*

*Drop You*

*Drop Don't*

*Drop Belong*

*Drop Here.*

It is not quite enough for a panic attack, because it is different from that. It is more like a bad feeling. That you are not where you belong, that you are not supposed to be here. That somehow, someone trapped you in a body that you call yours, with a face that feels familiar, but in a world where you do not know how to behave.

Where people do not get sad for the same reasons you do. Where people do not see anger as something good. Where happiness is a mere myth, something you chase rather than simply feel. Where people love pretty things but do not truly see them and treat them as if they are.

She gets them a lot, these episodes. Too much when she was a child, less when she met her best friend Faye, and more now than before. She used to go into the bathroom and close the lights, wrapping herself in darkness and covering her ears. The only person who ever joined her was Faye, and to her she said, “I need to numb all my senses.”

She supposed Faye did not get it because she kept on asking her questions Aven had no way of answering. Questions regarding how to make it better, how to make it easier, and why she felt so upset.

With each word, Aven felt her heart beat faster, and her breaths grow uneven. She told Faye that everything around her made her crumble and trapped her in a box that was her own life, which is a good deal of the truth, but not all of it.

Aven used to sit there terrified of life, feeling misplaced and unreal. She used to sit there until she simply did not anymore. Until she finds a way to trick herself back into thinking,

*she is right where she is supposed to be.*

Now that she has the second option of closing her eyes instead, she has managed to create quite a pretty collection of images and short visions over the years of where she knows she is from, which people are hers, and what looks like home.

It is hard to tell if she has ever been there, maybe she never will be. Perhaps this life will continue to trick her into thinking that *this* is real, *this* is her life and *this* is where she is meant to be.

Perhaps she is already there but somehow stuck here in consciousness, or maybe there is a parallel version of her living this and sharing it with her. Either to be mean and have her hate it here or to inspire her to also find her way there. Or maybe to make it bearable to be stuck here.

She does not know if it is a place to be found, even if she is sure that it exists. But maybe there will be a day, resting in her future, when she will feel like she belongs. Where she will experience feeling less abnormal and more at ease. Where people feel sad the way she does and anger and happiness too.

She wants to go there. And maybe she will manage to find it, even if the first time she got it wrong, even if she accidentally got placed here, maybe one day she will go,

home.

## CHAPTER 1

Aven stares at her feet on the ground. The dress she is wearing is not long enough for the fabric to keep her thighs from touching the wooden bench underneath. But it is nice, because it is hot today. Despite her very short and light summer dress, the heat is overwhelming and the bench is the only thing cooling her down.

She draws random patterns with her foot in the sand. She takes deep breaths and tries to stay focused on keeping her mind empty. She tries to let the birds around her sing, just be birds singing, not a reason for her to fall apart and miss a place she has never been to.

When she closes her eyes, she tries to let the sun beams in her face. The sun only warms her face and does not make her wish she was somewhere else when she opens them again.

She believes she looks like she is waiting for someone, a friend, a boyfriend, or a bus. But no, she is just sitting here because when she stepped outside the door of her house earlier, she had to sit down and bring herself back into herself. Without warning, she had gone numb and sad. Her body remembered something her mind can not quite piece together.

At first, the wind against her cheek feels like a lover's touch, intimate in the way that you have lost them once and the memory of their skin against yours is all you have to live by.

The sun on her face reminds her of the warmth she is supposed to have from the feeling of being home, but is simply something she has learned to imitate in the hollow place in her chest. Then her body goes still, and everything around her feels like a bad show. It is like it mocks her life, even if she has learned to really love it.



If it had been a panic attack, she probably would have tried to call someone. A panic attack is something you can explain to people. People can relate to that more than whatever this is.

*"I've been stressed a lot recently."*

*"I lost someone."*

*"I'm scared of something."*

*"I'm highly sensitive or anxious as a person."*

*"I had to do something that was hard for me."*

But this, she thinks, people might not understand this. Maybe they do, but they would never tell her and she would not even know how to properly explain it to them.

So here she sits.

Everywhere she looks, there is green, light, and summer. It is a difficult day to hate, but even in this state, she hates it. She wants to be where her heart is clearly trying to guide her. She has never really been that good at localization and reading maps.

Thankfully despite all the red houses surrounding the area, there are not too many people living here. It is far outside the city, but she does not mind the bus ride. Everything is like the countryside here even if it belongs to the state of the city.

Her house is the big one by the lake, where she lives with her mother and her little brother. She has an older one too but he is old enough to have moved out. And yes, she has a father too but he lives in a different town and they do not really talk much.

As a child, she loved to swim in the lake, mostly underwater rather than above. She liked the way it was quiet but not *too* quiet, just enough life not to feel alone but not too much, you have to yell to be heard.

She always leaves early for school so she will not be late by sitting here. She made sure of that, as if she had planned ahead, she might have felt this way when she stepped outside. She has only been here for a few minutes and already managed to try to convince myself that she knows how to do this. But if she stays much longer, she can not guarantee that she will not miss her first class.

Sometimes it goes fast and sometimes it takes days. Days of not being able to cope with the simple thing of doing your life like you always do it. Society has many words for it, many diagnoses. She has related to all of them, at one point or another during her life course, but never taken the time to get a proper diagnosis.

Because for her, it would be no different. She would still be this person underneath all the therapists and medicine. She would still miss a place she does not know how to go. She does not want to fix it. She would still want to be herself somewhere, *right?*

She likes to have this give her occasional thorough depression and misery, if it means that it will be the only part of her connected to this place she dreams of.

It sounds vague. This place she is talking about. But in time it will be clear. And she will be sure when the time is right. If it is ever going to be her time. Either way, the time is now too late and she has to stand up and start walking towards the bus station. She puts her headphones in without playing any actual music. Music makes it worse in most cases, and enhances it. Which is not an insult, but rather an incredible compliment.

Because art is the only thing she thinks this world did right. Music is art and people are fantastic at making music. She can trap herself in some songs, and live inside them like her very own little

cottage in the very world she dreams of being her home. There is a lot of music that shows her the image of the place she loves more than any other.

So no music. She needs to look like nothing is wrong and she does not feel trapped. When she actually could be as easily trapped by a song as she can by her own emotions on a day like this.

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Aven does a good job keeping her gaze forward, staring into the back of the seat in front of her. She does not listen to anyone, she does not look at anyone and she does not think of anything.

On most days, this is hard. Everything reminds her of a reason to feel sad, so she tries to snap out of this bubble to survive. But on some days, she is strong enough to step outside it and rest in it, as if she is sunbathing in her own nervous system.

It hurts, yes. But it makes her feel alive, good, and like she is part of something bigger. She finds comfort in the idea that one day, she will be part of something more significant.

But on a day like this, the pain is better off as numbness. Because the pain does not just hurt, it consumes and takes and does not give her back romantic pictures of what ifs and potential dreams coming true. It leaves her stranded with questions that she can not ask anyone without hurting or freaking them out.

Aven sometimes makes that mistake. She calls Faye, for example, her favorite person in the world. And because of that she always thinks, *this* time she will find the words, *this* time Faye will understand exactly what Aven means.

But she never does. And yes, it hurts. She always wishes Faye would be the one who finally understands. But she does not blame her. Faye sometimes tries to help her rationally, finding a temporary solution, or asking simple questions that try to lead her, and therefore Aven, to a logical answer of the source.

But it is never about that. And she thinks Faye knows that too. Because she usually does not say much, Aven knows it makes her sad to know how she sometimes gets sad, about everything.

This results in Aven punishing herself for being ungrateful, for sounding like she hates everything and wishes she was not here.

She is scared to sound too suicidal. It is like the words are more bitter than the feelings. On the inside it feels okay to hate everything and feel like your life at its loveliest, is not enough. But to say it out loud makes you into something else. This kind of sadness is better off not being told to anybody.

When she is smart she writes, and channels it somehow. But most days she lays in it and lets it eat at her until she bleeds out dry. She did this when she was younger, when she was, well, suicidal.

She never told a soul, at least not until it was over. And now that she has told people they still think of it as a different thing than what it is. Because she would never actually do anything about it. She would never hurt herself, the thought of dying terrifies her.

She has always wanted to be immortal alongside the people she loves. She hates death, even fears it. But she also wanted to disappear, go away, exist somewhere else. Not because she does not love life; she does. She even loves the little things more than the big ones.

She loves it so much that she does not know how to fit inside it when it gets too much. This is what makes it so funny that she wants to be immortal, she wants to be like this, feel like this, forever.

You tell me, how many happy romantic people have you met that are suicidal and want to disappear, but also live until the end of time?

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Stepping off the bus, Aven is almost completely present. She even passes by the café to get a sandwich and a latte instead of walking the rest of her way as a ghost teaching itself how to blend in as a human.

The comfort of the warm cup in her hand and her sandwich in the bottom of her bag almost ruins it. It makes her feel small and taken care of, which makes her feel sad and therefore empty.

Yeah, it is tough on days like this. To just be normal, like most days, part of your own life.

She swallows the tears and the feeling in her stomach, continuing down the road. She spots her friends and feels the mask slip on.

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Aven does not talk so much in school, at least when she is surrounded by a lot of people. She keeps to her small circle of friends which consists of four girls, herself included.

They all have something in common with her and all possess something she envies. Nel has an energy that she could never imagine possessing. Sure, Aven has an endless mind but she does not share all

of it with the world at all times. That is why she writes and reads, to save it for herself and only share it with others when she feels like it.

But Nel, seems to want everyone to know who she is at all times, seems to have a fire that will never burn out or need new fuel to keep strong. Aven's fire lies within, whilst Nel's burns on the very outside of her skin. She is the kind of person who leaves an imprint, a lingering warmth, or a scorching mark, depending on how close you dare to stand.

When she was younger Aven thought she might miss out on a lot of stuff if she did not share her fire at all times. So she tried to, but now at the age of nineteen, burnt out, she can not imagine anything worse than being the center of attention in a larger group than four.

Cass, also known as Cassandria, is kind, in a way Aven can not picture herself either. She has too much of a temper for it and gets too easily irritated by other people. But Cass makes it look so easy, she radiates calm and kind energy even on her worst days.

Faye is the most like Aven, to others they might appear different but within they are what people would call twin souls. Two souls were ripped into two pieces and scattered across two separate people.

They are almost exactly alike, they have the same anger, the same passion, the same love for things, and the same pessimistic view of the world. But Faye is more realistic than Aven.

Aven is what you would call a dreamer, for better or for worse, she lives in her head most of the time while Faye is very good at staying focused on what is now and what is in front of her.

All her friends help her through the days she feels like this, by letting her observe and stay quiet instead of forcing her into shallow conversations between classes.

She is toying with an old receipt in her pocket from a book store and has almost torn it into a few dozen pieces when the bell rings for the first class to start.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This story came to me with surprising ease, almost as if it were written in the margins of my own life. It began as a personal expression, like a diary entry where I was trying to navigate my own reality, to make sense of being someone who struggles to find a place in a world that often feels alien. I've always felt drawn to magic, to the realms of the imagination, and Aven became a way for me to explore these feelings.

In many ways, Aven is an extension of my own desires and dreams, the parts of me that long for something bigger, something magical, that can help make sense of the complexities of life. Growing up, I struggled to understand where I fit in, but through my writing, I found a way to cope. I used creativity as an outlet to explore these emotions, to give shape to the feelings of being trapped between reality and imagination. Writing became my way of turning something that once felt impossible into something I could control and understand. Aven's journey is a reflection of that longing for something more and the moment when you finally accept that the magic you've always dreamed of is real and waiting for you.

This novella is for those who have spent their whole lives waiting for something, for that one spark, that one moment where everything aligns. When it finally comes, it's not just a dream, it's something you immediately recognize as yours, as if it's always been a natural part of you. It's for the people who have felt like they didn't belong, only to discover that what they've been searching for has been inside them all along. I wrote this story in less than a month as though the world



inside me had been waiting to be told. It started small, just a flicker of an idea, a little bubble of a world that existed inside me. And over time, that small world began to take shape and grow, until one day, it turned into something real, something tangible. I hope this story resonates with anyone who has ever dreamed of stepping into a world where they truly belong, where magic is not just a fantasy but a way of living.

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