# Following the Briar Path

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# Following the Briar Path

by [ScatteredRose](http://archiveofourown.org/users/ScatteredRose)

**Summary**

When a curse claims his brother, Roxas will brave any peril to save him. Through mysterious beasts, vengeful fairies, and bushes upon bushes of briar thorns, he searches for the sleeping princess that will end the curse. AkuRoku
Hey all! This fic is dedicated to my friend Claude whose amazing art gave me the idea. I’m sorry if it deviates a bit from the original material, my brain sort of got the idea and ran with it. If you someday read this I dearly hope you enjoy it! This is just the prologue and it’s dreadfully short, other chapters will be longer. If you’ve read my other fics you know I’m bad at keeping things concise.

EDIT: This fic is very dear to me and I have decided to edit what I wrote a year ago now that I think I’ve grown as an author.

There was a time in the not so distant past when magic was a very real thing used for both evil and good. No one ever questioned the existence or validity of things such as hexes and spells, and as such there was many a cautionary tale told to both young and old. Humans had learned to be wary of the enchanted creatures that inhabited the forests and hills, for who would be foolish enough to slight such a being? They grew to learn to live in harmony with these creatures, for if they didn’t, they would be sure to suffer dearly for their mistakes. There was superstition in every household, and each family did what they could to avoid the wrath of good folk.

In the setting sun two young boys chased after one another, childish giggles echoing throughout the hillside. They had gone out to keep their father company as he tirelessly worked to harvest the rest of the years crops. The gods had smiled down upon the family that year and they were met with a great bounty, so great in fact that it would be very laborious to harvest it all before the frost set in. This work did not hold the children’s attention for long no matter how they had promised to help, and of course soon they were running about and playing instead offering their father any sort of help.

The life of a miller was not interesting enough to hold the attention of children under ten, and it hadn't been long before the two had run off, chasing each other along the edge of the forest.

“It’s not fair!” The littler of the two, a small chubby cheeked brunette, complained with a stomp of a little foot. “You’re too fast, Roxas. I don’t ever, ever get to win!” The other child, taller than his brother by nearly a head, laughed, slowing his pace and turning back to address his younger brother.

“Of course I’m faster than you, Sora. I’m older than you by two years, nearly three. I’ll probably always be faster than you.” The grin on his face was a mischievous one. One of a boy who found joy in teasing his younger brother.

Sora's reply went unheard however, when a streak of red made itself visible just past the trees. Roxas immediately rushed to the very edge of the forest, pushing past brush to search for the creature.

He had never seen a fox before, not a living one. The fox, sleek and beautiful, pinned him in place with coal black eyes before turning and fleeing deeper into the lush green foliage. The blond was prepared to follow until the sound of his little brother's shouting caught his attention, snapping him out of the almost trance like state he was in. He hurried back to the younger boy's side, tripping over himself.
Sora was standing directly beyond the see, looking absolutely furious.

"Why did you run away like that? We were playing." He folded his little arms, looking miffed. Roxas looked back to the forest, feeling what might be considered longing, before replying.

"Sorry. I saw a fox and thought he might be more fun to race." He said with a half shrug, clearly provoking his younger brother. "You're just so slow..."

“Nuh uh!” he cried. “I’ll beat you home and prove that I can be faster than you!” He didn’t wait for a reply to his declaration, turning and sprinting toward their family’s little cottage. Little legs pumped themselves as fast as they could carry them towards home.

Roxas followed in hot pursuit, and it was he who touched the doorway first with a crow of triumph. Sora began wailing the very minute he realized he’d been beaten once again, big tears rolling down rosy cheeks.

Looking up from the handkerchief she’d been embroidering, the boys’ mother; Tifa, a pretty, shapely woman with long dark hair and amber eyes, quickly rose from her little chair by the fire to take the crying boy into her arms.

“Roxas, were you teasing your brother again?” The woman shot the boy an accusatory glare.

“I wasn’t!” He defensively replied, shrinking away from his mother’s intensity. “We were just racing today and I kept winning. He’s just being a sore loser.” The blond turned up his nose, ignoring the smaller boy’s whimpers.

“Roxas!” The woman’s glare only intensified, causing the blond’s grumpy pout to disappear immediately at the thought of actually being in trouble. Reaching out, she grabbed the little blond by his hand. “You have to give Sora a turn to win too, you know that. When I let you out I expect you to play fair.” Using the corner of her apron she wiped the little brunette’s eyes and nose, patting messy boyish hair with a loving hand. “Sora, I was making cakes today and I think I made too many…” The boy was gone in an instant, leaving Roxas to his scolding. Tifa sighed, kneeling before her son and taking his other hand, holding them both in hers.

“Roxas, you know Sora is younger than you, and that means he’s smaller than you are. It is your duty as his older brother to see that he is happy and that no harm comes to him. As his older brother you need to protect him. I will not always be here to see to that.” Roxas nodded, the grumpy look on his face fading into one of understanding.

This caused his mother to smile softly, cupping his cheek. “You’re a good brother. But being a good brother means playing fair and playing nice, understood?” The boy nodded again and the woman took him into her arms, holding him to her in the comforting embrace only a mother could provide. “I knew you would, my good boy.” She released him, looking more proud than angry now, and Roxas was relieved all was forgiven. “Best head to the kitchen quick before Sora eats all the cakes.” She added with a playful smile. Roxas was off with a flash again.

It was after the boys had stuffed themselves with confectionaries and found a new game to play that their father appeared in the doorway, looking worn but slightly amused.

“I take it Roxas and Sora weren’t much help in the fields today.” Tifa smiled knowingly, leading her husband to a comfortable spot by the fire. The autumn chill had already started to set in during the nights, making every room but the one with the fireplace bitterly cold during the nights and mornings. Cloud, the patriarch of the little household, was a tall blond man with a muscular build. As formidable as he looked, however, he held a wry sense of humor. He just snorted and shook his head.
“If running around and yelling all about the hillside counts as helping then, yes, they were wonderful additions to the field.” He said, a small smile ghosting his features. Tifa rolled her eyes, settling beside her husband.

“I told you they’d do more playing than working. Sora is only six years of age you know.” She reminded him. Cloud shrugged.

“True but when I was Roxas’ age I was already working in the fields with my father every day. He is already eight years old, I’d at least like to show him something. If only for bragging rights.” The two were incredibly proud of their children, so much so that the entire village was aware. In this day and age, who wouldn’t be proud to not only have one but two healthy, bright boys.

Perhaps if the Strife family unit wasn’t so intimidating and impenetrable the villagers would gossip about how the children should work harder or maybe do a few more chores at their ages, however between Cloud’s scowl and Tifa’s feisty demeanor no one would dare and the children had been allowed to grow in their own time.

It was for the best that neither of them seemed particularly gifted yet. No matter how fearsome the two proud parents were, little could keep the town gossips from spreading rumors of witchcraft and faeries.

“You know those boys won’t get a thing done when they’re together.” Tifa sighed, shaking her head. “One always manages to find some way to distract the other.” This caused Cloud to laugh. It was true, when the two were together they always managed to find a way to play or quarrel.

“Wonderful, I’ll be plowing and harvesting alone until I die.” He said gravely. Tifa chuckled softly, reaching to grasp her husband’s hand.

“They’re only children. When they’re men I bet they’ll be doing all the work for you.” Rising from her chair she placed a kiss on her husband’s forehead before returning to attend her work in the kitchen. It was nearly time for supper.

Once the family had eaten and the boys had helped their mother tidy up the kitchen, it was time for a story, as it was every night at this time.

Tifa always had a captivating tale to tell her children, and the two boys always listened with utter adulation. Sitting in her chair by the fire, she waited for the rest of her family to join her, her embroidery settled in a soft heap in her lap. Finally when everyone was in their place, her husband in the chair beside her and the two boys sitting cross legged in front of the fire, she decided to start

“Have either of you heard of the sleeping princess?” She began, watching both children fervently shake their heads no. Leaning forward, she began her tale in full.

“In the kingdom just north of here a King, who had waited many long and sad years, was blessed with a daughter. It was said that even as a babe she was more beautiful than the sunrise, the sunset, all four seasons, and the crystal blue oceans of the west combined.” Little eyes widened in awe, for neither child could imagine something as beautiful as all of these lovely things. Tifa continued.

“So overjoyed was he that he decided to throw a banquet of celebration at once. Everyone in the land was invited, the nobles and the common folk alike. Even the fae were welcome. Only one person was forbidden to come.”

“Who was forbidden to come?” Roxas asked, clinging to his mother’s skirts. Tifa smiled, delighted as she always was that her children enjoyed her tales.
"There was one fairy, mean and spiteful as she was lovely. This fairy had a temper, and was known all throughout the land for her terrible and powerful hexes. The king didn't want such a wicked fairy in his presence and refused her an invitation.” As she spoke she deftly wove the needle and thread in and out of the fine cloth in her lap.

"Was she mad?" Sora asked.

“Oh, very mad.” Tifa replied. “So mad that as everyone was celebrating the Princess, she appeared before them in a billow of pitch black smoke.” Sora leaned closer to his brother apprehensively.

“'I see all the nobleman in the land are here.' she said.” Tifa’s voice echoed through the house as she cried the fairy’s words thunderously.” ‘'I see all the commoners in the land are here.' she said. 'I even see that all the fae in the land of here, so why then wasn't I invited?’” The two boys looked fearful now, Sora gripping Roxas’ arm for comfort. Their mother was very good at telling stories. It was always a theatrical affair.

"Without even bothering to let the king explain himself the fairy screamed in her rage. 'I curse you, and I curse your kingdom! I curse until I can curse no more, and even then may my curse spread. On the day this child turns fifteen she will prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel and sleep an endless sleep. I mourn your loss knowing your child will live as nothing but a pretty doll.' The king and queen wept, but as were the laws of magic, every spell can be broken.” The terror and sadness on the boys’ faces eased slightly, causing Tifa to smile. She didn't want to traumatize her sons.

“What breaks the spell?” Roxas asked, almost feeling a sense of urgency. “If every spell can be broken what breaks this one?”

“Some say a kiss will wake the sleeping princess.” She pursed her lips in thought. “I've never woken a sleeping princess before. I curse you, and I curse your kingdom! I curse until I can curse no more, and even then may my curse spread. On the day this child turns fifteen she will prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel and sleep an endless sleep. I mourn your loss knowing your child will live as nothing but a pretty doll.’ The king and queen wept, but as were the laws of magic, every spell can be broken.” The terror and sadness on the boys’ faces eased slightly, causing Tifa to smile. She didn't want to traumatize her sons.

Roxas, who was particularly taken with this tale, was still insistent on getting answers.

“Will anyone be able to break it? She will wake up one day, won’t she?” He was dreadfully upset by the idea of being cursed to sleep forever. Would one have bad dreams or no dreams at all? What if one had a nightmare, they wouldn’t be able to wake up so how would the nightmare come to an end?

“I’m sure some brave prince will rescue her. It is a prince’s duty after all.” She smiled. Reaching down, she placed a hand on each boy’s head, combing loving fingers through their hair.

"Perhaps you could do it, Roxas." Sora tugged at his sleeve insistantly. "You were brave today, you went into the forest all by yourself."

Roxas was about to deny his bravery when he saw his mother freeze, a look of horror on her face.

“You must never go into the forest.” She warned, gripping his arms tightly. “They say a terrible beast resides within, devouring any traveler who dares enter. The beast and the faeries keep anyone and anything out so the princess may never awaken.” The look in her eyes was stern and anxious, her grip tightening almost painfully. “You must promise your mother you will never venture there, would you do that for me?” Her face was serious but her voice was pleading and almost fearful in a
way the two had never heard before. "Promise me you will never enter the forest again."

Both children nodded and the woman sighed, releasing her vice tight grip on Roxas' arms.

"Well, that's enough excitement for tonight." She leaned in, giving them each a kiss on the cheek. They were soon sent off to bed with visions of fairies and lovely princesses in their heads, their distress over the story and their mother's reaction fading like the last few crackling embers in the fire.

Tifa told many stories, for she knew many and was imaginative enough to concoct her own or twist existing ones into dramatic, enchanting affairs. This tale was only one of many, but none knew that this one tale in particular would linger and return to claim its worth in words.

Note: Again! Sorry for it being so short! I'm also still working on my other fic it's just you know how it is. Sometimes you need to juggle fics I guess. Anyway hope you all liked it and will join me for the rest of this fic. Also you can find Claude on instagram under the name CloudCastor, please check them out.
It was a cool day, for which Roxas was grateful. It was harvest season once again, and seeing as crops were good this year he and his brother had agreed on taking turns harvesting wheat and working the mill. Their father, stubborn as ever, helped when he could, but his persisting illness had the boys doing much of the work while their mother forced him to rest. When Tifa had her heart set on something one would be hard pressed to change her mind.

Just because it wasn't fatal yet didn't mean they could take chances.

Of course, Roxas was a little more dedicated than his brother, who was known to frequently sneak away from work and mosey his way into town. He supposed he couldn't blame Sora. The brunette was sixteen years of age now and at the point in his life when being social was prioritized above all else.

This morning he was the first out of bed, his younger brother still fast asleep in the bed adjacent to his. As it was nearly every morning.

Regardless of his understanding nature, he certainly didn't like being the only one working in the fields. It was only that he understood his sibling like no one else. Sora would sleep in like the lazy thing he was and then pick up the slack when he finally arrived. Wiping a bead of sweat from his brow he looked up at the sky, noticing the day was unusually cloudy. He felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up.

That was odd, this surely couldn't be a bad omen. It was autumn, and in these parts rain wasn't unheard of this time of year, however for some reason the clouds seemed darker and angrier than usual. No matter how he tried to tell himself it was nothing, Roxas' nerves refused to settle. Suddenly a large gust of wind blew over him, making the field of wheat ripple. He braced himself, waiting for more wind to follow, but he was left in utter stillness. It was as if the world stopped turning in that moment, devoid of any sound or sign of life at all.

"Roxas!" He could hear his mother calling to him, causing whatever strange aura hovering over him to vanish. Her appearance allowed him much needed respite. Working in the fields all day seemed to have allowed his imagination to run wild. Putting his sickle down, he jogged lightly back to the family's cottage where he was greeted with a proud smile. "Do you think you would mind running a few errands for me? Sora seems under the weather, so I figured you would like some light work today." The blond offered a relieved grin, gladly taking the parcels from his mother.

"You know this is why they think you spoil us." He remarked, causing the woman to laugh.
"Well my spoiling got me two very fine young men." Leaning in she kissed her son on the cheek before sending him on his way. Running back indoors to quickly grab his satchel, he was off.

Running errands in town was perhaps Roxas' favorite task. It wasn't as if he minded the labor of the fields, it was just that he enjoyed being able to get out for a while. He enjoyed making light conversation with people as he dropped off the various baked goods his mother had baked or the garments she'd mended, but what he enjoyed most was when all the chores were done and he could do what he liked very best of all.

It was his secret, one he could never let his family know. The village in which he lived was a very nice place, but it was by no means large, and at times it made the blond feel a bit claustrophobic. At times like these he liked to leave the boundaries of town and sit at the very edge of the forest, sketching whatever wildlife or foliage he saw.

He was left with a notebook full of creatures and plants of all sorts, his pride and joy.

Making his way into town his first stop was the blacksmith's, for his wife had given his mother some clothing to mend. Entering the shop, he waited patiently for the blacksmith to notice his presence. It took a good while for the burly blond man finally looked up from his forge, grinning broadly when he saw Roxas in the doorway.

"Roxas, pretty rare to see you out and about." He clapped the blond on the back hard, causing him to stumble a bit. "How's your father?"

It was stiflingly hot and uncomfortable, and Roxas really didn't want to stay long. He could already feel himself sweating.

"His illness persists, but so does he. I doubt it will keep him for long." He answered with a smile. The smith, Cid, and his father were good friends. As much as he wanted to leave and find some place cool to sit, he thought the man deserved to know how Cloud was doing. "Is Shera here? I have something for her."

"She's upstairs." Cid gestured to the staircase with his thumb. "Be careful, she's too polite. She'll have you here all day." Roxas laughed.

"Thank you for the warning." He replied, starting up the staircase. Sure enough Shera was there, bustling about.

"Hello Mrs. Highwind, my mother asked me to bring these back to you." The woman looked startled and a bit frazzled, and Roxas felt a little guilty for sneaking up on her. Shera Highwind was a very kind woman, but she was also charmingly odd, her dark hair always a mess and her mind always hyper-focused on something, for she was very smart.

"Oh! Oh my, thank you Roxas." She took the parcel and scurried into the other room, returning with two coins. "Here is payment for your mother, and something for you as well." She stated warmly. "It doesn't seem so long since I last saw you and still it seems you've grown. I'm sure all the village lasses are after your affections now." Roxas could feel his face heat up.

In truth he didn't think he wanted any female affections, and he doubted he would be receiving any with the reclusive life he tended to lead. That was more for Sora, who was far more social and amiable than he.
"I don't think I've caught anyone's eye yet, Mrs. Highwind." He offered a friendly smile.

"Well you shall soon, you are nearing marrying age. It won't be long before you find a lucky lass to court." The chipper woman didn't seem to catch the disturbed look on Roxas' face as the blond imagined the duty of courting and marrying someone when all he wanted to do was draw and chart the different breeds of the area's botanical life. While his parents made marriage seem perfectly nice, it was the last thing on his mind.

"Would you like to stay for tea? It looks chilly out." Shera offered.

"No thank you Mrs. Highwind, I'm afraid I have other things to deliver." Roxas declined politely. He knew if he accepted the invitation he'd be there 'til sunset. After saying goodbye to the pair he made his next stop, the Apothecary.

Perhaps she could distract him from the alarming thought of marriage.

He was very glad that her shop wasn't boiling hot. At the smith's he was sure he would swoon if he didn't leave quickly. A woman with long chestnut hair that had been plaited into a neat braid at the back of her head looked up from whatever potion she was concocting at the sound of someone entering her shop, soft green eyes brightening at the sight of Roxas.

"Hello Aunt Aerith." He greeted her, smiling brightly. Aerith put aside her work and got up, pulling the blond into a crushing embrace. She smelled of the flowers and herbs she used in her elixirs.

"Roxas, how long has it been? You need to tell your mother to visit me once in awhile, the last time I saw all of you together you had to have only been this tall." A delicate hand hovered just under her breast. Roxas didn't think he'd been that small, but she was his mother's sister, after all, and he was sure she probably missed them. It wasn't that he lived very far away, it was just that the entire family always seemed too busy to visit town.

"I'm sorry Aunt Aerith." He offered an apologetic smile. "I'll tell mother to start visiting town again, I'm sure she had no idea she was missed so much." The woman smiled.

"Good. So what brings you here today? Medicine for your father?" She was already looking through bottles trying to find the correct remedy. If not for Aerith and her amazing capability for healing, Roxas was sure there would be many more sick or dying in their village. Some called her a White Witch, but regardless everyone knew she had a cure for nearly every ailment, and thus she was the one they went to for help.

"Not today, my mother baked corn cakes and since she knew they're your favorite she wanted me to bring you some." He offered her the neatly wrapped package. Aerith's eyes gleamed with delight.

"Oh thank you Roxas. I hardly ever remember to eat these days, I'm so busy." She took the package from his hands and placed it on her large oak work table. "Thank your mother for me. After you guilt her into visiting of course." She winked. Roxas laughed. His aunt was such a warm, pleasant person to be around. Not to mention she had a sense of humor, which Roxas found to be a rarity in this town.

"I'll do that." He assured her. Turning to leave, she suddenly stopped him with a gentle hand on his shoulder.
"Roxas… Before you leave, have you heard any strange news lately." Aerith bit her lip, and Roxas was caught off guard by how nervous she looked.

"Strange news…" He tried to think, but he couldn't come up with anything. "I don't think I have… Why do you ask?" The brunette sat down, suddenly looking rather haggard.

"It is only that… There is rumor of a strange new illness. One that can affect one in a short amount of time, and spreads very quickly. They say it is a blight spread by the fae..." She drew a deep breath, trying to stay composed. "That is all I know, and I would have liked to learn more about it so that perhaps… Perhaps I could create a cure before it reaches us." Roxas placed a comforting hand on the woman's shoulder.

"Perhaps it is only a rumor." He suggested. "You know how the spinsters love gossiping." Aerith nodded, still looking troubled.

"Perhaps." She tried to sound hopeful, but Roxas could tell this was making her very afraid. "I will come back to visit tomorrow. Perhaps now that I know to listen I'll learn more." Aerith sighed.

"Thank you, Roxas. You can be on your way now. Enjoy some time off." She mussed his hair and shooed him out of her shop.

He had a few more parcels to deliver, but since they weren't to anyone he was close to they were delivered swiftly with little conversation. A few of the older villagers peeped their heads out of windows or doors to look at him sourly. Apparently rumors still persisted even now.

His favorite was the one where he was a changeling child. His family was always accused of consorting with the fae.

After delivering his last package and bidding goodbye to the village tailor, he made his escape to his special place. Settling on soft moss covered ground, he pulled out his notebook and charcoal out of his satchel and began to look for interesting things to draw today. He had always felt drawn to the forest, ever since he was a young boy.

He was often lucky enough to see an animal or two. The day prior he had been fortunate enough to see a doe and her fawn. The big animals were always his favorite, though they didn't tend to sit still as well as birds and plants did.

Staring through the dense trees today he finally found a plant he didn't recognize and began sketching. Perhaps this was why he didn't notice he had company until it actually spoke.

"You come to this place every day. What is it that you do with that book of yours? Do you cast spells?" Startled, Roxas fell back, not expecting to be joined by anyone. If his mother knew he was this close to the forest he would receive the scolding of a lifetime. Looking up he could find no one however, as if the speaker was hiding himself.

"Spells? Certainly not!" Roxas balked at the idea. One would have to know how to wield magic, or at least have the ability latent in them for that. Roxas was sure he had nothing of the sort. He was just the son of a miller, a simple village lad. "I merely draw in charcoal the things I see here." Whoever or whatever had decided to join him on this day laughed. He heard a few twigs snap as whoever was keeping him company seated themself just past his line of sight.

"What could possibly be worth immortalizing in charcoal here." The voice scoffed. The blond felt
offended, as if he should defend the place in which he found so much joy.

"Many things." He snapped. "There are many creatures that are unique here. They are worth noting, at least to me."

"I suppose." The voice acquiesced. "However, there are creatures in this forest that are perhaps too unique. Have you ever considered that?" Roxas huffed, settling again with his notebook resting in his lap.

"I am no fool. I know there is an enchantment upon this forest." Whoever he was talking to was treating him as if he were dull, and it annoyed him. They laughed again. Or was it he? The voice sounded male, but he had no real way to know and he certainly wasn't about to ask such a rude question.

"Than you are an even greater fool. You know this forest is enchanted and yet you come closer each day." The voice mocked him. "Are you that foolish or is there an enchantment upon you as well." The voice was sharp and sarcastic. Roxas really wished he knew who it was he was arguing with, but he was a little too angry to ask.

"I view it from a safe distance, thank you." The blond defended. "Every man, woman, and babe in the village knows never to enter, I am no exception." The faceless speaker clicked its tongue.

"If you say so." It sang. Roxas huffed, tired of being mocked.

"If you've seen me every day why do you choose now to speak with me?" He demanded.

"Curiosity, perhaps. I have little to keep me occupied and I felt drawn to this place today." It seemed as if the speaker was being sincere. His words did leave Roxas wondering though. Where did the being he was speaking with now come from, and what exactly was he? The way he talked made it seem as if he were no normal traveler. And there was something about his voice that seemed… Odd.

"You speak very strangely." Roxas remarked. That made whomever he was speaking with chuckle. "If you would stop hiding perhaps I could sketch you, as well." There was a long silence, and Roxas wasn't sure the person was still there. "Well?"

"I cannot." The response was bland but it sounded like, deep down, his visitor were torn. Roxas sighed, tearing a sheet from his notebook.

"Well if you won't permit me to draw you then at least have one of these." He balled the paper up and tossed it as far as he could into the woods. "Immortalized in charcoal." He mimicked. "Perhaps it will interest you in the local fauna."

Placing his notebook and charcoal back in his satchel, he stood. The sky still hadn't cleared, but he supposed it was probably time for him to head home. He had been out longer than usual today. Remembering what Aerith had told him, he decided it wouldn't hurt to ask whoever he was speaking to about it. For all he knew he had been speaking to a fairy the entire time.

"I don't suppose you've heard of any blights or diseases quickly overtaking the nearby towns… Have you?" It was a stretch he thought. Such a strange cryptic person didn't seem likely to answer such a question. "Ones that… That may overtake a person quickly and spread?"

"Diseases, no. What you speak of is a curse." There was a pause. As if this being wasn't sure how
much information he should divulge. "Spells and curses are very particular." He explained. "If not worded carefully there is risk of terrible things happening. Your people, are they superstitious?" He asked. Roxas nodded, though he didn't know if the creature could see him.

"Quite. Many people refuse to even speak with my family because we work the mill." The man... Or perhaps creature... Hummed.

"Favored by the fae, the millers are. There may be hope for you yet." Roxas snorted.

"Perhaps. We have had no trouble thus far, but mother always leaves gifts on the porch at night. She may be the most superstitious of us all." Tifa was always on the lookout for omens and blights. "Tell me, do you know anything else of this sickness… Or curse?" The being seemed hesitant to answer.

"I know that it was cast by someone very angry and careless. You would do well to keep away from fairies. Their whims are ever changing. It is easy to anger one by mistake." There was a rustling in the brush, perhaps the person he was speaking to was moving now. "Listen to superstition. It would serve you well."

"Well thank you anyway." Roxas sighed. Whoever he'd been talking to had told him more than he'd expected. "I'll be back tomorrow, if you want to pick on me some more."

"I will make it if I can." The voice answered, sounding amused. Shaking his head, the blond began the walk back home. What a peculiar fellow, but he supposed anyone brave enough to be in that forest would be peculiar. As he walked back up the hill to his home he noticed a wispy mist had begun to settle over the village. Trying to ignore his goosebumps, he continued his journey home.

When he returned home the first thing he noticed was that everything was as he left it. None of the tools had been moved at all. Entering the cottage, his gaze was immediately drawn to the worried looks on his parents' faces.

Tifa, who was usually composed even at the most trying of times, was pacing in front of the fireplace and wringing her hands fretfully. Cloud sat by the fire, frowning as he gazed at the flames swayed and lapped at the logs they rested upon. Roxas approached cautiously, not wanting to startle the woman and rattle her further.

"Mother… Is something the matter?" He asked, beginning to feel anxious himself. His mother turned to look his way, still looking distracted and concerned. Her deep amber eyes, usually holding so much warmth, seemed devoid of that now. Focusing on Roxas she all but ran to him, flinging her arms around him in a crushing embrace.

"Oh thank goodness you're back." She cried, holding her son as if she were afraid he'd vanish altogether. The entire atmosphere was all wrong.

"Did something happen while I was gone?" He looked from his mother to his father, the expressions on their faces gripping his heart with an ice cold grasp. Something was very wrong. "Please, tell me what is going on." He begged. Tifa opened her mouth to speak, but all that came out was a choked sob. Placing her hands over her mouth she turned so her son wouldn't have to see her weep. His father stood, taking the trembling woman into his arms.

"Your brother will not wake. We have tried and tried but it's as if he's frozen." Cloud's expression darkened. "He breathes, his heart still beats…" Tifa took a ragged breath, turning toward Roxas once more, but still accepting the comfort of her husband's embrace.
"He was ill this morning… He told me he was feeling fatigued so I let him rest." She explained, her voice wavering as she struggled to hold back tears. "And then… Then as the day progressed he grew more and more sluggish until…" She bit her lip hard, tears spilling from watery amber eyes.

"It was midday, your mother thought perhaps Sora should eat something." Cloud took over, telling what his wife could not. "She called to me, and that is when we discovered that he would not wake." Roxas drew a shaky breath.

His brother was so lively yesterday. It didn't seem as if he were ill at all. How could such an illness overtake Sora in only a day?

"I need to see him…" Roxas murmured, sounding to himself as if he were in a daze. "I need to see him." He repeated, rushing past his parents to the bedroom he shared with his little brother. He was surprised the door didn't slam from the force of his opening it, though even if it did he would have little care.

Hurrying over to Sora's bed he felt a lump form in his throat at the sight of his brother. The boy lay fast asleep, curled up on his side the way he always slept, under a heap of blankets. Daring to reach out and touch his brother's cheek, he was surprised to feel the warm yielding skin of someone who hadn't yet lost all their baby fat. Of someone who was still very much alive. Sora was breathing steadily, much to Roxas' relief, but when he shook the brunette he didn't stir.

No matter how hard he shook him, he wouldn't stir.

It was as if he was frozen in time, unwakeable and unreachable. This felt like some sort of fairy tale... How could this be real?

"They say it is a blight spread by the fae..."

Roxas could feel himself start to panic, he knew of no disease that could do such a thing… Of no malady at all that could work so quickly and so fiercely. Could this have been what Aerith was talking about? Would the rest of the village suffer the same fate as Sora? The thought of his mother or his father falling ill like this made him feel like breaking down altogether.

"Diseases, no. What you're hearing of is a curse."

The words echoed in his head. It was as if the being he had talked to earlier in the day had known…

"I felt drawn to this place today."

Drawn to the edge of the forest, drawn to the village… It was as if whoever it was had also felt an omen. Sitting on his own bed he struggled to think. What sort of curse would be powerful enough to affect an entire village? What sort of curse would cause someone to slumber as if they were frozen in time? What sort of curse could take someone like this in merely a day?

It couldn't be... It was like something out of a horrible, horrible fable... And part of him felt partially responsible, as if he'd brought this terrible magic with him from the forest he had frequented since childhood.

As he thought more, his body threatening to crumble under the fear and sadness overtaking his heart. He could recall a story... One his mother told. One he'd thought of often as a child but less and less
as he grew. Now he could recall it with such clarity it was as if she'd told it yesterday. Now it made sense why his mother had been so insistent on his staying away from the forest, the forest that was supposedly enchanted. Why his mother was so superstitious, why she told so many fables.

"'Spells and curses are very particular.'"

Was the story of the sleeping princess true? Or merely just another fairy tale thought up by a creative mind. But perhaps his mother hadn't been as creative as he thought, and perhaps there was truth in the fables she told.

But then, why were people getting sick so quickly? Were there other people getting sick like Sora? The person he had been speaking to seemed to think so. The person he had been speaking to seemed to know quite a lot.

Assuming the wicked fairy in the tale was real, had she been as overzealous with her spell, as the person in the forest had suggested? He struggled and struggled to remember the exact words from a story he hadn't heard nor thought of in many years.

“I curse you, and I curse your kingdom! I curse until I can curse no more, and even then may my curse spread.” His mother had recited in a booming voice.

'...May my curse spread…'

He the recollection sent a shiver down his spine. Such a spell seemed dangerous, the words she had spoken didn't seem careful at all. If this story was true… Then the curse was spreading just as it was told to. Putting entire towns to sleep… Putting his brother to sleep.

Even if this was mere speculation, it was the only hope Roxas had to hold onto of getting his brother back… Of getting his best friend back.

It was his duty as Sora's older brother to keep him safe from harm, and he had failed. He would be sure to make it right and find a way to wake him, he would suffer any peril to do so. Even if he was completely wrong, this was all he had to go on.

He could only pray the hunch he was staking his and Sora's lives on was correct. Returning to the room where his parents still struggled to console one another, he announced his departure.

"Mother, Father, I'm sorry." He balled his hands into tight fists, determined not to lose his resolve.. "I have to leave. I have to wake Sora up… I have to keep you all safe." Tifa's eyes widened, watery and full of fear.

"No! Roxas no, you can't leave!" She reached desperately for her son. "I couldn't bear to lose you too."

Tifa’s trembling hands gripped his so tight it was almost painful. The look on her face reminded him of a frightened animal, overcome with sheer panic. Roxas shook his head.
"Mother, please. I have to do this. If I don't whatever this is could affect the both of you. It could reach the village." He felt as if he had brought this tainted magic into his home, to Sora. She looked to Cloud, who nodded. She continued holding his hands, as if she were reluctant to let him go.

"Where will you be going?" She asked, apparently finding some sort of silent agreement with her husband.

"I need to wake the Sleeping Princess, or at least find the fairy who laid this curse upon us," Roxas hoped he didn't sound ridiculous, like he was desperately chasing after a fairy tale and nothing more.

"The Sleeping Princess... But that is only a legend, a cautionary tale... It is even older than my father’s father. Please, I don't want you going into that forest..." Tifa began apprehensively, her voice quivering.

"Mother..." Roxas interrupted, struggling to swallow the lump forming in his throat. "Please... This is the only way I can think of... I know it sounds ridiculous... Insane, even... But I beg you, please believe in me." He gave his mother's hands a squeeze. "Please believe that I can discover what has happened... That I can find some way to wake Sora."

She looked to Cloud again and released a shaky sigh.

"If you're that set on making this journey, at least let your father and I help you prepare. We are expecting you to return, no matter what."

"We need you, just as we need your brother... Have good judgment. We will have faith in you." Roxas could feel a wave of relief wash over him knowing he wouldn't be leaving his parents feeling any undue anguish.

"Rest for tonight." She suggested. "You can leave in the morning. It'll do you no good to stumble around such a dangerous place in the dark." It pained Roxas to stay and do nothing, but he knew his mother had a point. He didn't want to be in such a place when the witching hour was upon it.

Trudging back to the room he shared with Sora, he lay down on his straw mattress and watched his brother sleep until morning.

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Note: This was still shorter than I can usually make it but I had to find a cut-off point. Next chapter will be longer hopefully. I can't tell if this is going to be a long story with short chapters, or a short one with long chapters haha.
The Enchanted

Author’s note: Hello~ I hope I do a better job letting the universe flesh itself out in this one. I’m so mad at myself for just confusing people so far! I’m very excited about this chapter though, so I hope you like it as much as I do.

Roxas was up before dawn packing for his journey. The only trips he’d ever gone on were trips into town. He had never dared to leave his home before now, so he didn’t quite know what he might need on his quest.

There was no map for where he was going, so he decided he’d make one, packing his notebook and charcoals so he could chart his path. He would also need to build a fire, he realized, packing flint. Then he decided he’d probably need a candle and lantern in case he needed to see when natural light wasn’t an option. He packed the horseshoe that hung over his bedroom door, for it was the only iron thing he could think to pack and he couldn’t be sure his dagger would provide enough protection.

His mother could replace it once he was gone.

Once his satchel was full of really anything he could think to bring, he strapped a bedroll to his back and a sheathed dagger on one side of his belt, as his canteen was tied to the other. He then tied his lantern to his satchel so he would have less to carry. He probably looked very odd with all sorts of things strapped and tied to his person, but more than anything he wanted to be prepared for any and every situation.

The morning sun rose slowly, coloring horizon orange and filling the sky with pink and yellow clouds. Roxas usually hated sunrise, as sunrise meant work, but today he thought it couldn’t rise fast enough.

The brighter the sky grew the more impatient Roxas became. He could wait no longer, the feeling of restlessness becoming too overwhelming to bear any longer. Kneeling at his brother’s bedside, he patted down the brunette’s messy hair. He hadn’t moved an inch from when Roxas had examined him last, but his chest still rose and fell slowly.

“Bye Sora… Don’t cause too much trouble while I’m gone.” He smiled ruefully, giving Sora’s cheek a pat, something his brother absolutely hated. If he stayed with his brother any longer he was sure to break down, for Sora never slept peacefully like this. Sora flailed and kicked and wiggled all night long. This… Didn’t feel like Sora. It just didn’t feel real.

With that he left his room… Their room… His and Sora’s, and he told himself that once he returned he would be able to bicker over it with Sora once more.

His parents were waiting for him in the main room, both looking as if neither of them had slept either. Tifa noticed her son immediately, packed with and buried by so many things it looked as if he were someone’s luggage that had sprung to life. She left her chair and hustled off to the kitchen, returning with a neatly wrapped bundle in her trembling hands. Handing it to him shakily she explained in a quivering voice.

“I thought you might get hungry…” She forced a smile, eyes welling with tears. Roxas took his mother in his arms, giving her one last tight hug. Turning to his father he smiled mournfully.
“I’m sorry.” He apologized. “When I return I’ll work doubly hard to make up for what I’ve missed.” Cloud shook his head, putting a hand on his son’s shoulder.

“Your return will be more than enough.” He assured him. As satisfied as they could be with their goodbyes, Roxas left his home in the early morning hours. He had a stop to make before he entered the forest.

“Aunt Aerith?” He called, entering quietly through the front door. The Apothecary apparently wasn’t at work yet, however he could hear someone bumping and shuffling around upstairs. ‘Perhaps I woke her…’ On any normal occasion Roxas would feel sorry, this day, however, was different. This day he felt nothing but pure adrenaline. Hurrying down the stairs in what looked like only her chemise, the woman greeted her nephew with surprise.

“Roxas, what are you doing here? The sun has hardly risen.” Her hair was a wild mess of curls, having been slept on and not yet combed.

“Aunt Aerith…” Roxas wasn’t sure how to begin. It still felt like a dream to him. A horrible dream that he would wake from at any minute. “Sora is sick…” That wasn’t right… “No… Sora has fallen under some sort of spell.” Ignoring the look of surprise on the woman’s face he continued, not wanting to waste a single minute. “I have no magic, I am sure, but whatever spells… Whatever herbs or potions or anything that you think could prove useful to me, even the slightest, I need them.” Thin brows drew together in a frown.

“Roxas what do you plan to do?” She asked cautiously. Roxas grasped both her hands in his, his desperation evident through the look on his face.

“Please… Even if you disagree with my decision please agree to help me. You know far more about spells than I.” He pleaded. If he had to be honest with himself he was going into this completely blind. It was foolish, but if Sora never woke…

“I am only a White Witch. All of my magic is curative.” Aerith bit her lip. She looked apprehensive, as if she wanted to say or do something to stop Roxas from making a terrible mistake, but whatever worries she may have had didn’t keep her from grabbing handfuls and handfuls of herbs from her shelves and handing them to Roxas.

“Put this St. John’s wort somewhere on your person. The fae cannot pull any tricks on you if you do.” She handed him a sprig of some sort of flowering plant, though most of the lovely yellow flowers had dried up. “And this.” She tied a little pouch around his neck. “In this pouch there are clovers. Wear them and you can see through their disguises. I have also provided you with some curative plants, remember what they look like, perhaps you could gather your own as well.” Aerith explained, looking over her nephew with soft, sad eyes.

“Thank you, Aunt Aerith.” Roxas kissed the woman on the cheek. “I knew you would be able to help me.” He paused, remembering their conversation from the day prior. “That disease you’d heard of… I think that is what’s making Sora sleep like this. Please be careful.” Aerith nodded and sent him off with a pat on the back, but she lingered in the doorway and watched his turned back until he was too far away to see anymore.

All of these wards he was wearing made him nervous, however he refused to let a little thing like nerves keep him from saving his brother. He had to break this spell, or he’d never see Sora’s goofy smile again.
His first step into the forest was careful, but it looked like any other forest to him and he couldn’t quite find it in himself to find it frightening. In fact part of him was glad to finally be here, after only looking wistfully into the green, green trees for so long.

His steps were purposeful as he trudged through the overgrown shrubbery. Every twenty steps or so he would turn around look behind him at the path he’d made before adding it to the makeshift map he was drawing. Once in awhile it would sound as if someone were laughing him. Sometimes it was a chorus of mocking giggles, sometimes it was just a lone chuckle.

This he found quite unsettling, as no one could have followed him from his village. Nor would they, knowing the nature of the place. This meant that these were voices coming from within the forest. The fae and their kin that lived in these trees were surely the culprits.

Finally after much walking he hit a wall of sharp briar he couldn’t just walk through. It grew tall and thick, and seemed to span as far as he could see. Taking his dagger he decided to cut a path for himself to crawl through, however when the very first bundle of branches was sliced away the entire forest went quiet and still.

“First he tramples the plants, now he cuts them.” This voice was unsettlingly close, when Roxas spun around to look behind himself he found… Nothing. He could hear what sounded like scandalized whispers coming from every direction. “What a disgraceful way to treat nature. The roses will never bloom if humans keep destroying them.” The word ‘human’ was said with such disgust Roxas was taken aback. He could sense the underlying malice in those words.

He knew talking to this thing would probably just make things worse, but he found he couldn’t help it after hearing nothing but laughter for the past… Well he didn’t know how long he’d been here, but the entire time he felt as if he was being teased.

“I’m sorry for cutting… Your… Rose bush, but you see I can’t get past it unless I do.” He heard a scoff.

“That’s of no concern of mine. You would only continue tramping all over the plants if you were to pass. You might as well get comfortable. You really should thank me, there are creatures far crueler than I in this forest.” Clutching the tiny bag around his neck, he scanned his surroundings until he found the speaker, sitting high in a tree above him and looking down at him as if he were nothing but filth.

It appeared to Roxas to be a very lovely man, otherworldly in appearance with hair the color of the dahlias that grew in his mother’s garden. If it weren’t for the point of his ears or the way he was dressed Roxas might have thought him human.

He looked very dapper dressed in a variety of vibrant greens, his clothing in pristine condition and made of finely woven cloth. Resting upon his brow was a crown of leaves and brightly colored flowers, flowers that shouldn’t be blooming at this time of year. One of the fae no doubt. For every thing that seemed human of the man there was something unsettling.

And, if there was one thing Roxas knew about the fae, it was that they delighted in riddles and deals.

“Perhaps we could make a bargain.” Roxas suggested. The pink haired fairy raised a delicate brow. “If you only let me cut one more branch I could give you something of mine in return.” This made him smirk.

“How very bold, striking a bargain with a fairy.” A fairy who seemed to think very highly of himself, Roxas noted. “What makes you think I won't request something you cannot give? What
makes you think I’ll be fair to you when to me you’re nothing but an insect. There are thousands of you, there is only one of me.” Roxas didn’t feel like arguing that there was only one of him too, and every human was, in fact, different from one another. He would only end up saying something that would anger the fairy, and this was one fairy he really didn’t want to make angry. He had an air of authority about him that made Roxas nervous.

“Because I do not ask you to make a request. I ask you to take an offer.” He knew very well not to trust the fae to play fair. If he let the fairy make a request he could wind up in very hot water. The fairy snorted.

“Alright, I will play along. What have you to offer me?” He asked snidely, looking at the blond with a cold, skeptical gaze. That was a good point. He didn’t really have anything to offer unless the fairy liked currant buns or corn cakes... He didn’t know what this fairy would like at all. 

I have to think like a fairy...

They liked things that were novel, and this one in particular seemed very vain. This fairy, he felt, thought him stupid and probably wanted to trick him somehow. This gave him an idea...

“I can give you yourself.” Roxas offered. “I can immortalize your… Beauty… So that it lasts forever.” He would beat the fairy at his own game. either the creature would find it enjoyable or it would infuriate him, but a bargain was a bargain, if he chose to accept. The fairy pursed his lips in thought.

“You have intrigued me. I take this bargain.” He decided. Roxas wasted no time grabbing the biggest, thickest branch he could find and chopping it away. The fairy still watched from his perch, scowling. Now that he was on the other side of the sharp thorns he took out his notebook and began carefully sketching. Once he was finished he reached to hand it to the creature.

“In this you will always be as you are now. No matter how your form may change, this you will stay the same.” He grinned, feeling triumphant. “And whenever you look at it you can fondly remember our bargain.” As the fairy stared at the drawing Roxas took his chance to hurry away quickly. Lest the fairy begin to think he was tricked, for he certainly wouldn’t let a human get away with such a thing.

He had now had his first encounter with a fairy, and he felt quite smart. If the forest were merely filled with creatures like him then perhaps he’d make it through alright after all. Whispers still followed him, and he tried his best to ignore them.

“Tricking a fairy…”

“Brave or stupid…”

Roxas could hear laughter echoing all around him through the trees, causing a shiver to run up his spine. When he was out of this forest he would be glad. Though he had been able to trick one fairy, he knew there were many others that might be just a little smarter or less vain. When he made camp that night he slept with the iron horseshoe clutched tightly in his hands.

~o~

The next morning before packing everything up, Roxas forced himself to eat some of the bread and cheese his mother had packed him and swig down a bit of water. He couldn’t find it in himself to actually feel hungry or thirsty, but he knew if he went without food or drink he’d likely faint. He didn’t like the idea of fainting around fairies. He could easily imagine being spirited off and waking in a fairy ring.
After he had everything packed and on his person he set off again into the woods. Today it was eerily quiet, no laughter or whispers followed him as he blazed his own trail through the forest. Whenever he accidentally displaced something, he would try his best to put it back to the way it was. Though it took much longer this way, he thought it was a little nicer than making a big mess of everything as he chugged along. Every so often he’d come across a plant he recognized and place it with the rest of the medicinal herbs Aerith had given him. He would then record it in his notebook so as not to forget what it was and how it looked. Soon the little pouch was packed tight, which pleased him. He did his best to only take what he thought he would need and leave the rest, not wanting to be wasteful.

He dearly hoped he wouldn’t end up wounded during this venture, but he knew it was very unlikely he would make it through completely unscathed. The only reason he hadn’t come across any bandits by now was because everyone knew this place was a home to the fae. Though he wasn’t so sure they were any safer than bandits.

“It would help if I knew how deep this forest was…” He muttered as he fought his way through the thick foliage. His map only told him how far he thought he’d gone in. There was no saying when he would get out. It didn’t help that he kept running into more impenetrable walls of briars, which this time he had no choice but to walk through for fear of angering that fairy again. He supposed in the summertime there would be many lovely wild roses here, but it being autumn all he got were the thorns.

His breeches, while being worn from many days in the field, had had no snags or tears until now. Covered in scrapes with tears in his clothing, he was sure it looked as if he had had a fight with the bushes and the bushes won. What a sorry sight he would be to see.

“I suppose I’ll need all those herbs I gathered after all.” He muttered. “Who would have thought my fiercest foe would be shrubbery.” His legs ached from the excursion, but he refused to give in to the pain. He still had yet to come across any beast, and with the way his legs were complaining he had little chance of running.

“Stupid legs…”

“You sure do talk to yourself a lot.” It was the voice from yesterday, either omnipresent or following him. “I believe I told you how foolish it would be to enter this forest, yet here you are. Are all humans this stubborn?” Roxas huffed.

“I hadn’t anyone to talk to until now, I guess I just made do with myself, now if you don’t mind…” He continued stumbling through the dense foliage.

“You shouldn’t go any further.” It cautioned.

“Yes, well, I’ve made it this far haven’t I? Might as well go the whole way.” Roxas replied grumpily.

“You don’t look well.” It remarked. “I wouldn’t suggest continuing your journey in such a state.”

“I have been walking since yesterday, naturally I don’t look well.” Roxas groused.

“You should at least take a rest.” It advised. “You look dreadful.”

“Gee, thanks.” Roxas responded flatly. That made the being laugh. Apparently it found Roxas’ sarcasm amusing.
“If you’re going to keep nagging me at least show yourself.” He snapped.

“I only nag you for your own good. Believe it, or don’t. It matters not when you refuse to listen anyway.” The voice sounded bland and disinterested. “Very nice job getting past Marluxia by the way. Using his vanity against him, I couldn’t have thought of a more fitting way.”

“Marluxia… Being the pink haired fairy from yesterday?” Fairies did not give out their names freely so he knew asking the fairy would be moot. How this thing… Man? Whoever it was, how it knew the fairies name was a mystery.

“Quite pompous. Very annoying. Yes. He is not one to be taking lightly, however. And he has friends in high places.” It answered sourly. Roxas snorted. “They don’t like that I’m warning you.” The thing mused.

“Well then they should be happy I’m not listening.” He was limping and he knew it, but his adrenaline was enough to keep him going at what he considered a decent pace. He could hear a groan of frustration.

“Well you should be! Listen, there is no way out of this forest, got it? Just go back while you still can. I liked the paper you gave me so I thought I’d give you fair warning but no, the little miller has to make things difficult.” Roxas laughed at how childish he- he would call it a he, he decided- sounded.

“You can have all the wads of paper from me you can handle once I’m almost out of here.” He promised. Whoever he was talking to didn’t answer, and spoke no more as Roxas limped his way through the forest.

“Not that way…” He could hear a small quiet voice say.

“That way is the way to the beast.” Another added.

“Come play with us instead, we will play nice.” The first little voice promised. Roxas wondered perhaps the little voices would bewitch him had he not been wearing so many charms.

He could feel apprehension settle in the pit of his stomach and stay there. If the beast was near then certainly an exit had to be near as well, if tales held true. And beast or no he had to get out of here.

He wasn’t sure how long the fairies would let him go before they came out and played cruel tricks on him.

Every once in awhile he would take a rest on an overturned log or in a nice patch of moss, but he never stayed down for long. The entire time small, soft voices warned not to travel any further and invited him to join them in their games and haunting songs.

It was nearing sunset when Roxas finally reached a clearing. At first the blond couldn’t believe his good fortune, for it the perfect place to stay the night. That was until he noticed tendrils of black smoke snaking through the trees and around him, settling at the center of the clearing.

It was mesmerizing to watch the streams of smoke slip through the trees, melding together in one large mass and taking the shape of the biggest creature Roxas had ever seen in his life. Once they found their place the ribbons of smoke became shining black scales, large elegant wings, and sharp teeth.

The blond was stunned silent.
It was absolutely terrifying and yet he watched in awe as this creature came to be. Once it seemed to be complete the and whatever it was before him was whole, the being gave a lazy, cat-like stretch.

Reaching for his dagger, Roxas decided against arming himself, because he honestly didn’t want to fight a battle he had no chance of winning. This beast was far bigger than he, and he doubted his little iron dagger would do much damage. Besides, the creature had done nothing to him... Yet. In fact it was just sitting and watching him with a dubious gaze... It hadn’t even taken a single step closer to Roxas. Gulping down the lump in his throat, he did the only thing he could think to do.

“H-hello.” He greeted it timidly. He knew it was quite silly to reason with a beast, but he had always been much better at talking things out. The creature, or more accurately a dragon of some sort it seemed, regarded him with cautious curiosity. It still had made no movement toward him, so he figured he had at least a little time to speak.

“I suppose you are the great beast everyone speaks of. I never imagined I would meet you in such a way. It was as if you formed out of nothing...” He paused, collecting himself, before speaking again. His hands were bunched into sweaty fists to keep them from trembling. He was somehow able to keep his voice steady, masking the overwhelming fear he felt.

“You are much larger than I thought you would be, but I think I imagined you much differently than this.” The dragon still made no move to attack, just watching him with the most intense eyes Roxas had ever seen. Carefully reaching for his belt he unhooked his dagger and let it drop to the forest floor with a soft thud. “I don’t intend to fight you... You’ve done me no harm so- so perhaps since I’ve done you no harm you could extend the same courtesy to me.” It was a foolish hope, but it garnered a laugh from... The beast.

The beast suddenly disappeared in the same smoke in which it had formed, the curls and coils of smoke forming something new being altogether, and thankfully something much smaller. When the dark smoke cleared there was... A man? Perhaps it was another fairy. He was dressed in fine black robes and had the reddest hair Roxas had seen in his entire life. Up close it seemed there was still something beastly about his eyes, venomously green and almost cat-like. Jet black horns had blended themselves with his unruly red hair, and under each eye resting on prominent cheekbones were little black markings of some kind.

“I should have given you a bigger scare for not listening to me.” The beast, or perhaps man, now-scowled. “I didn’t want to have to harm you, but you just kept arguing...” He tutted, moving closer to Roxas who, while a bit less frightened now that the thing he was talking to wasn’t humongous, was still very confused. The man began circling the blond, looking him over with a scrutinizing gaze.

“You... Have to harm me?” His voice cracked as he felt the cold spike of fear return to settle in the pit of his stomach. Blue eyes couldn’t look away from this strange looking fellow, which was fine because he felt it was probably best he didn’t let him out of his sight either. The redhead shrugged.

“Curse said I did, but I think I managed to find a loophole.” He sounded almost proud of himself. “That bit about neither of us harming each other really helped, too..” Roxas frowned.

“Curses, curses, why does everything has to be cursed.” He grumbled. “Well, what is the nature of your curse, forest beast? Since you were about to devour me only a moment ago I think perhaps I should know.” His tone was a lot harsher than he’d meant it to be, but he was frustrated.

Besides, yesterday the beast seemed to somehow know about the curse that came to afflict Sora. The man’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Looks like someone isn’t afraid anymore.” He snickered.
“Not of someone who admitted to liking the drawing I threw at them.” Roxas retorted. The redhead nodded.

“Alright, alright, I suppose that’s fair enough. As for the nature of my curse…” He scowled. “Well firstly you were right to ignore the fae.” Roxas was sure now that this man had been watching him somehow. “I spurned the affections of a powerful and capricious one and she bewitched me for it. I was turned into a monstrous thing and cursed to remain forever in this forest as its guardian. Implied of course that I, being a monstrous beast, would gobble up any traveler who set foot here.”

“But you didn’t.” Roxas reminded him. “You spared me. Why is that?” Foolish, reminding the beast that he hadn’t done away with him yet. It seemed Roxas had been doing a lot of foolish things lately. The man scratched the back of his neck, almost as if he were embarrassed.

“Yes, I was going to. But as you made your way here you were so gentle. And then when you said you wouldn’t fight me…” He shrugged again. “Usually it’s the people who force their way through here that end up trying to best me, which of course does not happen.” He seemed almost cocky about that fact. “But since you were clever and kind instead of forceful you’re an outlier, and the curse doesn’t count for you. You haven’t harmed anything or anyone, so naturally I wouldn’t have to protect it from you. See? Loophole.” Roxas frowned. He didn’t like that he barged in and wrecked the place he’d probably be in the monster’s gullet by now.

“So you have been cursed… You aren’t one of the fae trying to play a trick on me?” He still had a fear that there was the real beast of the forest somewhere and this encounter was just meant to give him a scare. The man nodded.

“I was once every bit as human as you are, believe it or not. Though surely not as thoughtful as you are, elsewise I might have avoided this mess. And what’s more the devil woman cursed me thrice over. I was turned into a beast, that’s one curse.” He began counting on clawed fingers. “Another, that I must never leave this forest, and the last that I am forced to guard the place. She was very careless and angry when she cursed me. Went a bit overboard.”

“I’d say…” Roxas muttered. Though he was sure that the man’s cockiness had done nothing to help his situation. Not to mention he wasn’t the most polite person Roxas had ever met. “Why this forest?”

“That blasted fairy wanted to make sure no one could pass through to the other side. She pretty much leveled the Kingdom there with her magic, the crazy woman.” The redhead scowled, apparently not pleased to be speaking of the wicked thing that cursed him.

This was a lot for Roxas to take in and he felt exhausted.

“I don’t suppose you have a name, do you?” He asked. The man snorted.

“Isn’t it common courtesy to introduce oneself before asking the name of another?” His grin was impish. The blond shot him the most acidic glare he could muster.

“After what you’ve put me through I think courtesy would be just that. A courtesy. But fine…” Roxas huffed. “My name is Roxas. I’m trying to get out of this forest but it seems now I have to put up with a less than helpful-”

“Axel.” The man interrupted, still smiling that irritating smile. “My name is Axel.”

“Okay. Now I have to put up with a less than helpful Axel.” At least he had a name now. Further
proof this person was no fairy, he supposed, if he gave it away so easily.

Roxas bit his lip, trying to analyze the situation with his poor muddled brain. He was in the Enchanted forest, for one thing. And he had now met the forest beast... Lastly, the forest beast was truly a cursed man. A very beastly one, he surely wasn’t human. But he was more a man than a monster right now.

But since this man was cursed himself, he might know something about what was happening to Sora. It was almost as if he somehow expected something like this would happen yesterday.

“You’ve been following me...” It wasn't an accusation, it was fact. How else would Axel know the direction he’d been traveling, or that he’d been able to trick Marluxia? The redhead shrugged.

“I wouldn't say I was following you, I was merely keeping track of you. You make it sound like it's a bad thing.” Axel seemed oblivious to the fact that it clearly made Roxas uncomfortable to think someone had been watching him this entire time. Regardless of how creepy and weird this guy was, Roxas continued.

“So then you must know why I am here.” He figured. The redhead gave him a tired look.

“I know what you’ve said and done in this forest, I’m no mind reader. Though if I had to hedge a guess it would have something to do with a curse.” He raised a thin red brow.

“Good guess.” Roxas responded blandly. “You wouldn’t by any chance know about that, would you?” Axel sighed, folding his arms.

“Would you at least sit down first, you look like your legs have been waiting to give out on you all day.” He scrunched up his nose in disgust. “And you’re bleeding. You’re either very brave or very foolish.” Roxas didn’t know how Axel could know he was bleeding, but chalked it up to the man not being entirely human. He may look like a man, but he is still the beast of the forest...

He wanted answers, however, even if it meant he had to plop himself down in the soft grass like an obedient child.

“Better.” Axel decided. “It hurt just to look at you. Now, the curse you were talking about yesterday, is that the one?” Roxas nodded eagerly. Axel pursed his lips, as if he were thinking hard about what he would or wouldn’t tell the blond. “Right, well it started in that Kingdom I mentioned...” Axel’s eyes suddenly widened and his lips curled into a wicked smirk. “Oh I see...”

Using both hands he conjured what looked like some sort of glowing bubble. As Roxas watched the orb, which stayed obediently between Axel’s hands, a sleeping girl appeared, dressed in an ornate pink gown and a bejeweled crown. Light golden hair was spread across the pillow, and she lay completely still other than the gentle rise and fall of her chest. His mother had been right, for she was the prettiest maiden he had ever seen.

“You’re on a quest to wake Princess Namine, aren’t you.” Axel had a look of mischief on his face. “Does the miller wish to become a prince?” Roxas shook his head vigorously, partly because he didn’t want to see the frozen princess any longer and partly because he didn’t at all care to be a prince.

“No, it’s just that my brother... He sleeps the same way.” His lips were pressed together in a hard line. Mustn’t cry in front of the forest beast... “I care not for any princess, I just want to wake him. This seemed to be the only way...” Axel looked surprised, as if everyone came here for a chance at winning the heart of the legendary princess and no one ever traveled here for any reason otherwise. As if Roxas was something novel and interesting and new...
“It is as I guessed. That idiot woman couldn’t control her rage and now her curse is out of control.” Roxas’ eyes widened in horror. The tone of Axel’s voice wasn’t angry or upset. Just… Even. Just… Certain. What was with this man and his moods? It was as if his only change in mood came when he teased Roxas. “This is why I told you one must word their spells carefully. Elsewise the whole country ends up asleep as well.”

“The whole country?” The blond had no idea it was this serious. Such powerful magic, used so carelessly. Realizing he had caused Roxas distress, Axel quickly amended.

“Not the whole country, I’m sure only the villages and fiefs closest will be affected. Her magic couldn’t be that strong.” This didn’t help at all. His village quite close to the ruined kingdom. Now it seemed even more sure that his home would be affected. He could imagine his parents succumbing, then his aunt, then all the other friendly faces who greeted him each day. It made him feel ill.

“How do I break the spell? Will waking the princess wake everyone who has fallen asleep with her?” Axel hummed in thought.

“Maybe, if this is a standard sleeping spell and there are no special conditions. Sometimes any kiss will do, but sometimes it must be a kiss of true love.” Roxas was beginning to look and feel even more ill now. He had never heard whether there were conditions or not. And he knew nothing of curses or spells or any kind of magic at all.

But Axel… He seemed to know a lot. Really, he seemed quite knowledgable about the subject...

“Do you… Suppose you could help me?” He asked nervously. “You seem to know so much more than I…” The redhead shook his head.

“Spell. Remember? Have to stay here gobbling up the tourists.” He didn’t look very happy about this. But who, really, would be happy about being cursed.

“Well… My mother always told me all magic has a remedy…” Roxas began. “Do you know for your kind of spell… What that may be?” It was easy to forget that Axel had been very, very big and very, very frightening only moments ago now that they were speaking as they had the day before. The blond kept having to remind himself to tread carefully. He didn’t expect the redhead to plop himself down on the soft ground in front of him, opulent robes spreading out elegantly in the grass. The man seemed to be thinking, brows drawn together in a puzzled frown.

“It was so long ago I really don’t think I can remember the exact words.” Axel cautioned. “But I do know how to break these spells. She made very sure to tell me how hopeless my case was before she left me.” His voice was laden with bitterness. “Three impossible tasks must be completed, one for each hex. As if I could do that from in here...” That sounded incredibly unfair to Roxas, but from what he’d seen fairies were incredibly unfair.

“Well… In the stories I’ve been told most impossible tasks are merely riddles in disguise, and I’m good at riddles. Like you said, you have to find loopholes.” He hoped he sounded confident. In reality the man’s curse sounded absolutely impossible to break, but he was already going to be breaking one curse… What were a few more if it meant getting his brother back?

In truth he had no idea where to go or what to do once he was free of this forest. If Axel knew this much about the sleeping princess, perhaps he would know where to find her. Axel looked unconvinced, but at least he didn’t look angry.

“Well, as I said the wording might be off after so long, but I remembered them as best I could. I am to capture the moon, create a rope of ashes, and…” His face twisted in frustration as he struggled to
remember. “Obtain the heart of a beast? I am unsure about the wording but I am positive this one is about me. She is far too petty for subtlety.” Axel’s words dripped with venom. Now that he had heard what these tasks were, Roxas had to admit they sounded pretty impossible. No… Axel found a loophole in one curse… Surely somehow…

“Well,” The blond began timidly. “If I agree to help you break your curses, would you show me to the Sleeping Princess?” It sounded like a fair trade to Roxas at least. Axel narrowed his eyes, as if he thought this was all just a cruel prank.

“If I am able to leave this forest…” The redhead still didn’t look like he trusted Roxas, but he continued his thought. “I will go with you. Besides, you’re scarcely halfway through and already getting into trouble.”

“Only halfway?!” Roxas cried. “I was sure I was almost through…” He sighed dejectedly. Axel shook his head.

“No, unfortunately you still have a ways to go. Might as well clean yourself up and rest, the further in you travel the worse it gets.” The boy frowned.

“Thanks for the warning…” He grumbled. Pulling his satchel in his lap he began pulling out the things he needed to camp for the night, eventually getting frustrating and dumping its entire contents onto the forest floor.

“Oh!” Roxas’ attention was suddenly drawn to Axel again, who instead of looking sly or bitter looked… Intrigued. “Is that the thing you’re always writing in?” He pointed to Roxas’ notebook, leather bound and faring surprisingly well considering what they’d both been through.

“Yes, it is.” The redhead looked like he wanted to say something, but was unsure how. Grabbing his notebook, he offered it to the beast, who was seeming more and more strange the longer Roxas was exposed to him. “Would you like to look at it?” This seemed to be what he couldn’t bring himself to ask, as he accepted the book eagerly.

“Yes I would…” He was already distractedly flipping through the pages with careful hands, his voice seeming far away. He continued carefully scanning the pages Roxas’ book the entire time the blond set up camp.

Note: Hey! So I hope things are becoming clearer, I intend to dig into everyone’s backstory as the fic progresses but good things come to those who wait~
To Capture the Moon

Author’s Note: Hi again! Thank you everyone who has read and reviewed so far, I love everything I write but this has sort of become a passion project of mine. While I am not going to rush this, I can safely say there will probably be a rating change in the future. This is, in the long run, a romance after all.

Roxas looked up at the night sky pensively, unable to find sleep regardless of how physically and emotionally drained he felt. The fire he had built a few hours prior had long since burnt itself out and now he lay in complete darkness, the light of the moon obscured by impossibly tall trees. He could still hear the fae whispering amongst themselves, just quiet enough that he couldn’t make out what they were saying.

He was fairly sure Axel was still near, though he wasn’t sure where, exactly, considering he couldn’t see two feet in front of himself. Though he couldn’t see his newfound companion, he could sense he wasn’t alone, which was both reassuring and a little bit frightening.

He wondered if Axel slept…

Fairies didn’t sleep, for they had no need for it. This was very unsettling when one was alone at night with them. Axel, however, said that he had been human once, though how long ago that might have been still wasn’t clear. Did he still sleep like one? Or, like the other creatures inhabiting this forest did he not have the need now that he had been cursed into being something else entirely?

Roxas’ legs were now hurting terribly, stinging from the nicks and cuts he’d received from the thorny briar bushes and aching from the strain he’d put on them. No matter what position he lay in, he could feel a very noticeable pain that he could no longer ignore. He had been so full of adrenaline earlier in the day that it hadn’t occurred to him how much pain he’d truly caused himself until now. Before he settled down for the night he used some of the plants from his pouch to soothe the sting of the wounds on his legs. Superficial as they were, they were uncomfortable nonetheless.

“Axel…” He whispered cautiously into the cool night air. Everything in the forest felt eerily still. Where there should have been the sound of animals in the brush there was nothing.

“Why aren’t you asleep?” He could hear the redhead answer from very nearby, the tone of his voice almost chiding. That answered one question, Axel was still here and didn’t seem to have moved much since Roxas had decided to hunker down for the night. He snorted, amused by the ridiculousness of it all.

“Are you my mother now?” He could hear Axel huff in response.

“If you don’t sleep, your reflexes will be terrible and if your reflexes are terrible then you won’t notice when something big and dangerous sneaks up on you.” He replied indignantly.

“There are things bigger and more dangerous than you?” Though Roxas couldn’t bring himself to think there was really anything dangerous about his strange supernatural shadow, now. Annoying, most definitely, but not dangerous. He was sure this was foolish of him and maybe it was just because Axel looked a bit more human now, but it was hard for him to be afraid of the man. This seemed to fluster the redhead.
“Well… No, I don’t think so.” He admitted. “But if you’re spirited away by the fairies because you hadn’t gotten any sleep whose fault would that be? I am not here to look after you.”

“It would be your fault. You are talking to me right now, after all.” Roxas smirked. “I can’t very well sleep with you talking to me.”

“You started it.” Axel accused, his tone sounding almost childish. The blond laughed, which only served to puzzle him.

“Yes I did.” He acquiesced, trying to shift into a more comfortable position and only being met with more pain. “My legs hurt and you are a good distraction.” He heard Axel sigh.

“I told you not to keep going like you did.” He reminded him. “I told you that you were pushing yourself too hard, but would you listen? No…” He clicked his tongue in disapproval. “Humans… Always too stubborn for their own good.” It was bizarre to be chastised by the beast of the forest. Then again anything to do with the forest beast was bizarre. Roxas was sure if he told anyone at home they wouldn’t believe him.

“I thought you were just telling me to stop so you wouldn’t have to eat me.” He replied. The night sky was full of stars, but the moon was still hidden by the trees, causing there to be very little natural light. All Roxas could see were shadows and the vague outlines of things.

“Yes well, that too.” Axel admitted, a hint of embarrassment coloring his voice.

“Will you let me draw you now that you’ve shown yourself to me?” Roxas had been trying to imagine what the owner of this voice might look like, the face of the only person who knew of the secret part of him that longed for adventure. Now that he had seen that face he wanted all the more to put it in his book so he could always remember. The redhead was quiet, and Roxas wished he could see his expression.

Turning onto his side he realized his eyes had adjusted, somewhat, to the darkness. Sure enough Axel was there sitting on the soft ground with his long legs spread out, leaning against the moss laden trunk of one of the many trees that surrounded them. It was still a little hard to make out his features, but it was unmistakably him. The reassurance that, in fact, he truly did have company was comforting. He didn’t like being alone at night with fairies about. Axel gave him what looked like an exasperated look.

“If you actually go to sleep tonight, I will.” He promised. Roxas chuckled. Such a strange creature Axel was, scaring the life out of him one minute and acting strangely protective the next. He humored the man and closed his eyes, but it wasn’t but a few minutes later he decided he had more to talk about.

“Do you sleep, Axel?” He asked, rubbing one eye tiredly. It seemed his body was finally trying to give in to sleep and he was merely refusing to let it.


“I just wondered…” Roxas felt a sleepy sigh escape his lips, and realized he really was more exhausted than he’d originally thought. “You should try it.” He suggested. “You might like it.” Axel snorted.

“Thank you for the offer, Perhaps I will.” He paused, frowning in thought. “Though I should probably stay up, lest the fae get any ideas.” Roxas could could see a small smile tugging at the
corners of his mouth. “They already think I’ve gone soft.”

“They’re saying that?” Roxas had to hold back a yawn. His body was feeling increasingly heavy, but his curiosity was getting the better of him. “Can you hear them?”

“I can hear nearly everything in this forest. I’m bound to it, after all.” The blond felt a bit guilty for inadvertently reminding Axel of his curse, but he didn’t seem to mind all that much, his tone remaining aloof.

“What else are they saying?” Roxas supposed probably nothing nice, since all he had done since he’d arrived was trick them and ignore them.

“Most of it is just gossip. You are very novel. Some of them want to test you, I think your cleverness has them intrigued.” Roxas didn’t much like the thought of being tested by one of the fae. It sounded like dangerous territory to tread upon. “You’re too talkative. Go to sleep.” The redhead scolded, though he looked more amused than disapproving.

“Keep talking to me then.” Roxas insisted. “You’re making me tired.” Axel chuckled, rolling his eyes.

“Oh so my talking is putting you to sleep?” Roxas yawned.

“Yes. You are that boring, forest beast, that is why every man, woman, and babe speaks of you.” Apparently he wasn’t too tired for sarcasm.

“Am I really spoken of that much?” There was a hint of pride in his voice. It seemed he was only ever disinterested or cocky. What a strange creature.

“It is tales of you that keep the people of my town from entering this forest.” Roxas informed him.

“Everyone but you.” The redhead pointed out. The blond couldn’t help but smile, feeling brave again.

“Everyone but me….” Thinking of all he’d experienced since he set out on this journey, Roxas realized he had handled the peril he had faced quite skilfully.

“What sort of tales do they tell of me, in your village?” The redhead’s tone was one of arrogance. His ego was certainly something for one who had been cursed in such a way

“In my village… We speak of a great black beast who kills any being who enters this forest. Entering the forest is suicide because the beast spares no one.” Roxas nibbled his lower lip furiously, hoping he hadn’t offended the beast. “None have ever seen you… That is, the beast we speak of. I believe the accounts are quite dated. We have passed this tale down for decades, maybe even longer. Every teller of the story seems to add or omit something.”

“What were you told?” Axel looked utterly enraptured by the words Roxas spoke. As if he relished the attention. As if he had never heard another’s accounts of him.

“My mother…. She told me many stories. She was very good at it.” He took a deep breath, trying to dispel any thought he had of home. Of his mother. Of Sora. “She would warn my brother and I never to enter the forest, for there was a terrible beast who resided there who would surely devour us.” He paused before adding. “I always imagined you quite differently.”

“How did you imagine me?” Axel pressed, apparently finding great interest in what others thought of
him. No wonder he was cursed by a fairy, he has the ego of one.

“I think I imagined you to be more grotesque looking. And not as big…” In Roxas’ imagination the great forest beast had always been a ghastly creature with matted hair and big claws. The reptilian thing he’d met that evening wasn’t what he had in mind at all. There was nothing appalling about the sleek and regal looking creature he was met with. Just frightening.

“With all the tales you heard… You entered the forest regardless.” Roxas couldn’t discern what Axel was feeling, for his tone had become cold and detached again.

“Well I couldn’t very well stay there and do nothing.” Roxas replied. After a pregnant pause he heard Axel sigh.

“Well I very well can’t have you up all night. You’re supposed to annoy me little by little for a long span of time. I shouldn’t let you annoy me all at once now.” Axel apparently had a skill for being acerbic. “I will tell you of the forest and its inhabitants. I am the one who knows most about it, after all and it is immensely boring.” He smirked. “It would put you to sleep very quickly.”

“Good.” Roxas allowed his heavy eyelids to fall, listening to Axel list off which fairies annoyed him most. In an odd way it reminded him of when he was a child, falling asleep to the tales his mother told. Except now, he was part of such a tale. He could only hope he could find a way to make it end happily.

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Axel had been alone for… A very long time. He did have the fae to keep him company, but they were often more bothersome than anything else, and didn’t make for very good conversation with their riddles and ambiguity. The only time he received any human company, it was usually a cocky bandit or traveler tramping through the forest to get to the Kingdom at the other end.

Whoever had told them that there was treasure to be found in that ruined old Kingdom was cruel indeed. Once in awhile there would be the odd knight or prince but no matter the status of his visitors, they all seemed to be after the same thing. A chance to gain treasure, glory, and a kingdom through the Sleeping Princess.

And he would always be courteous enough to warn the fools before it came to eliminating them, not that any ever listened. Sometimes he was spared the awful task and the fairies would get to them first. He couldn’t be sure who was worse, he or the fae. At least he tried to make it swift.

When he did have to dispatch of them, he was always left with a hollow feeling. Not sad, not angry, just hollow.

No matter how many visitors he had gotten, in the end he was always alone. The only human words he ever heard were venomous and full of rage. Not that he could blame them of course. He was nothing more than a monster they had to vanquish, though none ever even came close to succeeding. To them he was a beast and nothing more, and there were times when even believed this was true. No matter how much like a human he tried to make himself, he would always be a beast.

And then one day, a boy appeared. Not in the forest, but just outside. Just close enough for Axel to see. Just far enough for the human to be safe. The was thin and blond, with very, very blue eyes. Just the type the fae would snatch away, for they had a type and blond, pretty faced boys was it.

His clothing was that of a farmer’s. That much Axel could discern, though peasants seemed to be dressing differently now. He had no way of keeping track of how long he’d been there, but as he
witnessed the evolving fashions of the humans he did see, he knew he’d been there for a very long time.

The blond wore a loose tunic, breeches, and boots. His boots and belt weren’t too shabby, Axel wagered the boy didn’t come from a poor family. Nobility, he was certainly not, but his clothes were neat and the materials in which they were made were fairly nice.

Axel also wagered that soon this human would no longer be considered a boy. That lanky frame would be filling in any time now.

The redhead figured the dumb lad had gotten himself lost, until he came again, and then again. So Axel started watching the strange human, every day with the same little leather bound book and the same charcoals in his hand. Sometimes he would bite his lip in concentration or wipe a hand over his face, smearing it with dark, sooty charcoal. He was always completely enraptured by whatever he was doing, and completely unaware that he wasn’t alone.

This human… Axel would admit he had been growing a little attached to it. Though the human boy didn’t know it, they were together every day. The fairies couldn’t have this human, nor could the forest. This was his human. His momentary escape from a life that was so dull and so limiting it suffocated him. If what he lived could even be called a life, that is.

The lad was always scribbling away at something, and Axel, for the life of him, couldn’t figure out what. That was what led to their first meeting, if it could be called that as they weren’t really face to face. After so long of just watching he could remain silent no longer. Though he felt a strange darkness looming that day, the conversation had left Axel with a feeling of… Optimism. One he hadn’t had in a very long while.

Optimism he would have someone interesting to talk to, now. Someone interesting to watch. His human had even invited him to come back.

He was a monster, and it was in every monster’s nature to covet things. So Axel coveted this human boy. He coveted their time together, time that neither the fae or the human boy himself knew of. He coveted the feeling of having something his irritating neighbors could not. And he coveted the time out of mind he got when he watched his human, for he very rarely had anything to distract him.

The morning after they had first spoken to each other, that optimism was gone. He could feel it scratching at his insides, he could hear it in the whispers of the nosy gossiping fae. His human, the one he had foolishly allowed himself to grow a little attached to, had entered the forest. All he could do was watch him and warn him, and hope with everything he had that the boy would turn around before they crossed paths.

All he could do was watch as the cruel fairies tried to spirit away the only thing that had caused his frozen heart to stir after what must have been centuries of loneliness. All he could do was desperately try and find a way around the inevitable, because if he didn’t he would be alone again.

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When Roxas woke it was still night. He must have only been asleep for maybe an hour or two. He had been feeling very restless lately. The moon was directly above him now, full and shining brightly. Looking over to where Axel had been sitting he could see that he was still there, looking into the dense forest as if he were trying to see something.

It seemed that he had decided against sleeping, at least for the time being. Though Roxas imagined it
would be quite boring to just sit and stare into space all night. Sleeping was a good way to make time go faster.

Deciding against bothering Axel, as he looked like he was busy thinking very hard about something, he continued looking at the moon. Now that it was no longer obscured by the trees, it seemed much larger and brighter than usual. Almost as if if he just reached, he could pluck it right out of the sky.

Of course no person could really obtain the moon in such a way, but it got Roxas thinking. The first impossible task he had to complete was to capture the moon... But no being on earth could make something so large and far away theirs.

There was seemingly no way... He would have to make do with a technicality. He thought and thought about some way to capture the moon without physically making the moon his.

Roxas knew what he had to do, it was only how that was the problem. Would capturing the moon’s image count as capturing the moon itself? It would still be the moon, in a sense. But how... He tried to think of where he had ever seen his own image, for that seemed the only way to start.

He thought of when he went to retrieve water from the well. Each time he looked into the water he could see himself clearly reflected there. It was as if his other self was trapped, looking up at him with the same blue eyes and the same messy blond hair that he had. Turning to the side his gaze was caught on the lantern that lay among his things, clear glass protecting the interior where a candle would sit. Looking back up at the moon, still directly above him in the dark starry sky, he suddenly had an idea.

If he could capture his own image in a reflection, perhaps he could capture the moon’s.

Crawling over to where he had neatly placed his belongings, he looked through what he had brought with him so see if he had perhaps had the foresight to bring something that would be useful in a situation like this. He thought of the glass bottles of all shapes and sizes in which his aunt kept her mysterious draughts, and how he could always see a skewed version of himself inside. He had no such bottles with him, having thought they would only weigh him down, but he did have glass with him. The bright moonlight glinted off of the metal that held the panes of glass in place. It was a shame that he had to destroy something so fine and probably expensive, but if he ever wanted to save Sora he had to break the beast’s curse. He took hold of the lantern and stood, holding it high above his head.

“What are you doing?” The redhead had apparently noticed Roxas’ shuffling around. He imagined he probably looked pretty odd holding a lantern over his head with both hands.

“I had an idea.” He responded simply. Axel raised an eyebrow, but watched the affair in silence. Throwing his lantern as hard as he possibly could onto the ground, he was pleased to see the glass shatter into large, jagged pieces. Crouching he took the largest shard he could find, and after working on its placement on the ground, stood victoriously. “Axel, come look!”

Axel slowly rose, lazily strolling over to where Roxas was pointing at the ground.

“You’ve... Broken your lantern?” The redhead seemed confused as to why Roxas wanted to show him something so unremarkable. The blond rolled his eyes.

“Look closer, Axel! I’ve caught the moon, see?” Axel crouched to examine the sharp shard. Sure enough the moon was there, reflected in the fragment of glass.
“So you did…” He looked dazed, and Roxas was a bit worried maybe it didn’t work. Looking up at Roxas, he opened his mouth and closed it again, apparently struck speechless. The blond cocked his head to the side inquiringly. Maybe Roxas wasn’t allowed to be the one to carry out these impossible tasks… Maybe it hadn’t worked. “That was… Very clever.” Axel finally managed. The blond beamed proudly.

“How do you suppose it worked?” He asked Axel, who kept looking up at Roxas and back down at the carefully placed fragment of glass.

“I don’t see why it shouldn’t… You did technically catch the moon, in a way.” He didn’t catch it tangibly, it wasn’t as if they could touch it, but the moon was indeed in that glass shard on the ground. He had captured it there. “I suppose I would not know for sure unless someone else entered the forest.” His frown. “Yet I do feel… Different. I can’t see as far as I could earlier… I can’t hear as well as I could earlier…” It looked as if he wanted to have hope, but was too hesitant to fully allow himself the feeling.

“Well I just made a pretty big mess… Does that bother you at all?” Roxas asked. Axel scowled.

“No, but don’t go stomping on everything now just to test me.” The blond supposed he still wasn’t completely sure he wouldn’t still be forced to hurt Roxas, and neither of them knew for sure if Roxas’ capturing of the moon actually counted. Trying to push Axel probably wasn’t the wisest thing to do.

“I would feel bad if I did that. All I want is to get out of here, I didn’t come to leave a mess.” Roxas wished he could cut his way right on through, for it would probably make the journey faster and far less painful. He couldn’t bring himself to do it that way, though, he felt too attached to the forest. He had visited it every day, after all. As close as he could get, at least. This forest had been the little taste of adventure he had always secretly yearned for, his relief from a town that knew nothing of him and yet sought to either plan his life or shun him. A place where no one expected him to marry, where no one expected to inherit the life of his father. “I hope it worked. If it worked it means I can do the impossible. I can set you free, and you can help me.”

“Yes well…” Axel still looked like he didn’t quite believe what had just happened. “I suppose it would be foolish of me to doubt you when you’ve shown me your cleverness twice now…” Roxas grinned, feeling almost hopeful for the first time since he left home. With one impossible task complete, he felt confident the redhead would have to help him save Sora.

After all, he only had one more impossible task before they could leave the forest together and by then he was sure Axel would want to continue accompanying him in order to complete the final task. After all he was proving himself invaluable. By no means did he believe he could fully trust the man yet, but now Roxas played a vital role in releasing the beast from his curse. That, he was positive, would ensure his safety.

Returning to his bedroll, he allowed sleep to wash over him once more. Before he closed his eyes he could see Axel return to where he had been sitting previously.

That night he dreamt dreams so realistic he could have almost thought them real. The truth of his situation, however, seemed to haunt him even in sleep.

In his dreams he could see Sora, awake and smiling as he tried to coax Roxas into rolling down the hill with him. Though in his heart he knew couldn’t possibly be real, he and his brother played until the sun began to set.

When the night sky started darkening, the setting changed. No longer was he making mischief with
his younger brother. Now he was in a sea of sharp thorns, tearing at his skin and clothes and sending rivers of sticky blood dripping from his battered body onto the barren, dusty ground.

Before him was a decrepit looking town, covered in cobwebs and what looked like a century’s worth of dirt and dust. Farther still was the looming shadow of a castle that once must have been very grand. Now, however, it was falling apart, years of erosion taking their toll on the ivy laden stone.

He could go no farther than where he stood, for the thorns only grew in number and cut with a sharpness that seemed impossible. Even standing still however, far from the village and even further from the castle, he could hear what sounded like weeping. The sound was so close it was as if he could reach out and comfort whoever the sound was coming from.

As the weeping grew louder, Roxas looked everywhere for the source, but there was no one in sight. He was all alone with the pitiful wails of someone he could not see.

Note: This is going pretty slow, I know. Don’t worry, there will be action and romance and all the magic you can handle. And with Vanilla finishing up I’m going to be starting another fic pretty soon so stick with me folks!

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