

Ren looked at Basil again. “I think I see a small platform up there.” She said. At this point, the tree had started to slow its growth. Ren climbed further, with Basil not far behind. When they reached the platform, Morris’ fur rose. He stared at a small flower jutting out of a vine. Ren walked over to the flower, and examined it closer. “Umm, it’s glowin’ a bit.” Said Ren. Basil shrugged. Ren, ever the reckless, picked the flower from the vine. “Wh- why would you touch it, it could be poisonous! You can’t just pick up any random glowing- ugh, never mind.” Said Basil. “Geez, why do you think everything’s poison?” Said Ren. “And besides, it’s pretty” She added, smiling. She tucked it in her backpack. “Anyways, I’m hungry. It should be about lunchtime back at school.” Said Ren “Yeah, you’re right.” Said Basil. Ren pulled out her phone to check the time. “F-FIVE THIRTY!?! IT’S FIVE- it’s five thirty? Nononono, my phone must be glitching from the altitude... or the fact that we’re in a different world.” Said Ren. Basil’s eyes grew wide. She stayed silent. Ren sat down and pulled her lunchbox from her bag. “You hungry? I know you always get school lunch. She scooted her lunchbox over to Basil. But yet Ren’s usual sandwich, salad, and cookie were gone. Instead, they were replaced with a foreign fruit salad bagged up in leaves and an oatmeal-looking cookie with thinly slicked fruit sandwiched between. “Umm...Ren? Did your mom pack you stuff today? I’ve never seen anything like this.” Basil said cautiously. “Lemme take a look.” Ren said, then grabbed the lunchbox. Her face immediately twisted into a look of disgust. “Slugs?!? Wait...Glowing slugs?!” Basil was extremely confused. “Um...I’m pretty sure that there were these weird fruit salads and oatmeal cookie sandwiches? They looked really suspicious...” Basil said. “No, they’re definitely slugs—EWWW ONE MOVED WHAT THE HECK—They are definitely slugs.” Said Ren. “Whatever, let’s just try to figure out where we are.” “Wait, but we can’t climb down the tree, or we’ll just end up back at school. We have to jump.” Basil said, then contradicted herself. Ren looked at Morris. She scooted the lunchbox over to him. “You eat this?” Ren said, in a funny voice. Morris’ pupils dilated as he started to chew it up. Basil wrinkled her nose. Ren rested her head on her hand. She yawned. She grabbed the edge of the ledge and looked over. They heard a low growl. Basil flinched. “Uhhhh,

what was that?" She said Ren awkwardly smiled and gestured to her stomach. "I'm not all that hungry, really." Said Ren. Basil raised her eyebrow. "Really?" She asked. "Yes, really." Said Ren. "What about you?" She asked. "A little bit." Basil responded, chuckling. Ren leaned over the edge again. "Well, I don't think it's gonna do us any good if we stay up here. I think we should head down before dark. Basil bit her lip and paused. "Alright." She sighed. Ren grabbed her stuff and started to get a hold on some vines, and Morris lept onto her shoulder. She held out a hand to Basil.

"Coming?" She asked. Basil nodded. She took her hand and started to follow. Ren jumped off the base of the tree and gestured for Basil to come down too. Basil hesitated for a moment, then closed her eyes, sighed, and jumped. The mossy ground was soft and squishy beneath their feet and Basil noticed Ren taking her shoes off. "Come on, it feels nice!" Ren said, smiling. Basil took her socks and shoes off and set them on a wide branch near the base of the tree. "Hand me your stuff," Basil said, "We don't want anything to steal it." Ren handed Basil her stuff and ran off. Ren walked off towards one of the trees. She examined it for a moment. "Whaat are ya doing?" Asked Basil. "Aha!" Said Ren. She climbed up the tree a few feet and grabbed a round orange fruit from one of the branches. She sniffed it, and tossed it to Basil. "Catch!" She hollered. Basil nearly dropped it, but then caught at the last second. She tucked it into Ren's bag, right before Ren hopped dow with an armful more. Ren started to peel one. "Wait! How do we know it's not poison!?" Said Basil snatching it from Ren's hand. "Smell it." Said Ren. Basil hesitantly sniffed it. To her surprise, it smelled like an orange. Ren took it back, and when she finished peeling it, she took a slice, ate it, and handed it to Basil. "I'll be your poison tester." Said Ren, chuckling. "You eat it though. We should save as much food as possible." Basil nodded, and ate the rest of the orange except for one slice. Basil offered it to Ren. "You sure?" Asked Ren. "Oh my god, yes. You know, you're really bad at taking care of yourself." Said Basil. Ren sighed and took the slice, muttering something under her breath. "What's that?" Said Basil. "Nothing." Ren said, her mouth full. Ren looked at the setting sun, and looked at the tree. "See if you can find some stones." She said to Basil. "Alright." Basil said, walking off. Ren grabbed her pack, dug around. "Aha!" She pulled out herpocket knife and got to

work. When Basil returned, Ren was sitting next to a pile of leaves, small twigs, and sticks. Ren looked up “Oh good! I was beginning to get worried that you got lost!” Ren exclaimed. Basil rolled her eyes, setting the stones on the ground. Red arranged them all into a circle. She set up all the twigs and leaves into a small pile in the middle of the rocks. She arranged the sticks into a small teepee. The sky had darkened to a deep blue. Ren pulled out a box of matches, and lit the leaves. By the time the fire was completely burnt out, they were both fast asleep. Leaned up against the tree, Ren dreamt. Ren was laying in a black void, nothing but her, floating in the abyss. Her hands started to glow, and her eyes opened, glowing a bright blue. Everything went black. Laying next to the fire, Basil dreamt. She stood in a white void. Nothing but her, standing in the abyss. She stood for a moment, and then closed her eyes. Her hands started to glow a golden red. Everything went white. Ren awoke, but she wasn't sitting. She stood, panting, with a sword made of pure crystal in her hand. A dark figure laid on the ground. Her eyes grew wide. “Basil? Basil! Where are you?” She yelled. Ren's faint glow revealed Basil, still lying on the ground. Ren dropped her sword and ran back towards Basil she knelt down, and saw she wasn't breathing. Panicked, she took her wrist, looking for a pulse.* Basil awoke, seeing nothing but a faint glow, the shape of a sword. ”Oh thank the gods.” She said, feeling a live heartbeat, and seeing Basil's eyes open. Basil flinched, her eyes wide, seeing a figure with glowing blue eyes and glowing blue hands kneeling next to her. “Ren!?” She shouted, her eyes darting. “Where are you!?” She yelled. “It's okay, it's me!” Said Ren. Basil calmed down a bit. “Wait... Why are you glowing?” They said in unison. “Wait, I'm glowing!?” They both said. “Holy-! What? I wasn't imagining it!” Exclaimed Ren. Basil looked at Ren. She saw a pair of white glowing eyes from behind the tree. Ren looked in the same direction. “That's one of the things I knocked out over there!” Ren said. Without even thinking, like a reflex, Basil stood up and put up her hands. The golden red glow became brighter. Ren and Basil stood back to back. The glowing eyes moved around the clearing, just so that the entity was invisible. Then the entity crept closer until it was barely out of sight. Just then, Basil's hands started flickering. Then they brightened to a bright blue. Then she started floating, and her eyes and mouth opened wide, and

shot a white beam at the creature. Once Ren could see again, she saw the creature's eyes widen, then it turned around and ran back into the forest. Ren turned around and saw Basil still floating, with a white flame in her eyes. Then Basil turned to Ren and looked at her directly in the eye, then collapsed on the ground, massaging her eyes. Ren reached and touched Basil's shoulder. "You okay?" Ren said. "Yeah. That was fun." Basil smiled, then looked down at her hands. She snapped her fingers, then the blue glow reappeared. She looked back up at Ren and had the happiest smile on her face. "What can you do?" "Well, I don't think I can do anything compared to what you just did. Do you even know what you just did? That was so cool!" Ren exclaimed. Basil blushed. "But still, you should try out what you can do! But also, how did we get these?" Basil said, gesturing to her hands. "I don't know. But how did you activate that?" Ren swung her sword around, then grabbed it with both her hands and pointed it at the ground, then pulled it up and hit the moss. Immediately, it split in two small swords. Ren's eyes opened wide. "This is amazing! I-" She paused. "I don't know who or what we got these powers from, but... we probably got them for a reason." Basil nodded. "I wonder if..." She looked down at the remnants of the fire and snapped her fingers again. The ashes bursted into a blue flame. Red picked up the matches from the ground. "Guess we won't need these anymore." She said. Ren took her swords, and put them back together, forming the long sword again. "Or this..." She said putting the pocketknife back into her bag. Basil looked at Ren, tilting her head slightly. "Why on earth did you have those in your backpack? And why didn't I realize that earlier?" She asked. "Well, uh... you never know." Ren said, chuckling. Basil facepalmed. Ren heard a stick snap. She held up her sword. "We should get moving." She said. "It's not safe here." Basil nodded, and they headed deeper into the forest. Morris hopped down from the tree to perch on Ren's shoulder. "There you are!" Ren said, smiling. As they ventured into the thicket, the light of the fire grew dimmer and dimmer behind them. Basil snapped her fingers, and a flame appeared in her hand. "Well, that's handy." Said Basil. As the forest grew thicker, the quiet seemed emptier, and less natural. Ren and Basil stood with their shoulders touching, both of them gulping down their fear. A twig snapped, and they both let out a quiet squeak of fear. Basil

grabbed onto Ren's arm. Ren looked down, and saw a broken twig at her feet. "Oh, um... sorry..." She said, awkwardly. "It's- It's all good." Basil said, immediately letting go of Ren's arm. "I get easily scared." She said, looking down. They continued their trek into the woods, but as they walked farther in, they saw a light coming from ahead. "What is that?" Asked Basil. Ren shrugged. As they walked closer, they saw a stone archway, with a bright light coming from the other side. Ren stopped walking. "What is it?" Asked Basil. "Doesn't it seem a little suspicious? A random stone archway and light in the middle of a pitch black forest at night?" Ren said, walking behind a tree, signaling for Basil to do the same. "So far, I think walking into random things has worked out for us." Said Basil. Ren thought for a second. "I go in front, and you not far behind." She said. Basil nodded. Ren tossed her sword slightly in the air, and it disappeared, and appeared again, floating a few inches off her back, as if it was in a sheath. "Whoah." They said in unison. Ren sighed, and then started to walk in. The light blinded them for a moment, but then it settled, and they saw street lamps, about four feet tall. They took a look around, and saw small cottages about 6 feet tall lining the cobblestone roads. And it took them a moment to see the villagers. They saw large frogs, about two feet tall in clothes, running about the roads on two legs. Then they all saw them, and they all nearly dropped everything. For a moment, it was silence. "Um, are you seeing this?" Ren asked Basil. She nodded. Some of the frogs ran off, others running up to them, admiring them like some kind of statue. A few gave them baked goods, others gave flowers, like offerings to gods. One of them brought a hooded cloak for each of them. Some of them murmured about legends, and 'being saved'. "Uh, um, th-thank you all, but really, we don't need all this." Said Ren. They each persisted. Basil stood there, confused. "Really, we do-" then the sound of a stick hitting the ground rung across the road. A frog in a small cloak with a staff walked over. "Leave them." It said. The rest scurried off. "You two. We have some catching up to do, I see." He walked over to a larger cabin. "I am very confused right now, some explanation would be great." Said Ren. "I second that." Basil added. "Come inside." Said the frog. The frog led them into a clearing with two huge thrones set up. Basil and Ren's names were etched into the wood with black metal. "I'm surprised you didn't know

about the legend before. My name is Gace, and I'm the leader of the village of Coramon (core-eh-m-on), which, in our language, literally translates to frogs." He smiled, giving the friends a sense of security. Gace sighed, and rubbed his face. "Did you guys feel anything when you got here?" They both said no. "This will be hard to tell you, but this is your home. It's no surprise you two are best friends." "WHAT?!" They both screamed. "In the legends, it says that two baby girls will be born during the New Moon, the darkest night. This is extremely important because our moon is always full. Coramon has always been in danger of The Withered consuming the forest. The Withered is the other side of the planet. There is no possible way for us Corams to push it off, so we have to keep moving further away." "The legend claims that after the girls have reached age fifteen, they will find their way to their abilities and to our village. Then they will push The Withered back to its half of the planet and the forest will thrive in peace. Now, I'm assuming you have no clue what these abilities are or how to use them?" Basil snapped her fingers and the glow appeared. Ren reached behind her back and pulled the sword from its invisible sheath. "We've found them all right." Ren said. "Most of them." Gace added. Ren and Basil looked at each other, confused. "Ren, Basil, have you tested your powers all?" He asked. "I mean, we both defeated one-" Ren said. "No." Gace interrupted. "More than once." He said. Ren and Basil shook their heads. Gace massaged his frog-temple. "You two are going to need a lot of training." He sighed. "Follow me." He said, walking out of the door. Ren shrugged, and followed him out, along with Basil. He led them to a small clearing. There were several dummies made of sacks, dyed black like the things they fought in the woods, or 'The Withered'. "These should do for now. They should help you discover some of your other abilities." Ren nodded. "Okay." Said Basil. Gace walked off. "Good luck!" He shouted. Ren sighed. "I guess we should... start training?" Ren said. "Yeah." Said Basil. Ren pulled out her sword. Basil snapped her fingers. Two hours later, Ren and Basil sat against the wall, panting. "Anything?" Asked Basil. "Nope." Responded Ren. "You?" She asked. "No." Basil replied. Ren sighed. "What was he thinking? Training dummies? To help reveal our powers?" Ren rested her head on the wall. "I'm tired, you?" She asked. "Yeah. Sleeeeeeeeeeeep." She said, putting her backpack over her

head. Ren looked back at Bazil and laughed. She saw a shadow behind her. "Wait what is- Bazil, look out!" She yelled. Ren jumped in front of Bazil and pulled out her sword, but it turned into a sword and shield. "What is- what the heck!?" Bazil said, pulling her backpack off her head. Ren swung at the creature, but it dodged to the side. It screeched and swung with its shadow-like claws, but Ren held her shield up, and blocked the hit. It swung at her legs with its other hand, but Ren didn't see it coming. "Agh!" She shouted, and then she swung again and hit the creature straight in the torso, knocking it to the ground. Its eyes closed, and it stopped moving. Ren fell to one knee. Bazil ran over to her. "Ren! Are- are you okay?" She stuttered. "I'm- fine." Ren muttered, gritting her teeth. "Oh, shut up!" Bazil yelled. "You need to admit that you're human too! You need to eat, you need sleep, and you need medical attention when you get hurt by a magical shadow creature. Geez!" She shouted. Ren looked surprised. "Now show me your ankle." Ren froze for a second, and then sat down and showed Bazil her ankle. Bazil rolled up her sleeves, and the cuff of Ren's jeans. Bazil wrinkled her nose. "How bad?" Ren asked. Bazil looked at the blood dripping from the claw marks. "Pretty bad." She said. She pulled her water bottle out of her pack, and gently ripped the torn fabric from Ren's jeans. "He-" Ren started, but Bazil glared at her, so she kept her mouth shut. She let the cool water drip onto the fabric, and tied it around the wound. Ren winced. Bazil looked concerned. "This seems like more than a cut." Bazil said, frowning. She put her hand on the wound, and it started to glow. They both opened their eyes wide. "What is-" Ren started. "I don't know." Bazil said, staring at her hand. "Um, i think you're healing it..." Ren said, in awe. Bazil laughed and smiled, then focused on the wound. it glowed brighter and brighter, and when Bazil looked, she saw the skin pulling together on the edges, then mending itself towards the middle. "You're all set!" Bazil said brightly. Ren giggled. " You sound like the school nurse!" They shared a laugh together. Then Bazil noticed the sun rising. " You know, Gace is probably one of those guys that wakes up really early to start training, so..." Ren nodded. "We should do the same." She said. Bazil looked at Ren, a puzzled look on her face. "What's that look?" Ren asked. "What look? Bazil shot back, the look gone from her face. "That look... You were staring at me?" "Oh. Well, I guess,

you're just... you've changed. In the two short days we've been here, you seem a bit more grown up." Basil shrugged. "Grown up? We're high school sophomores, I'm pretty sure I was 'grown up' before." Ren responded. "No, I mean... like more mature." Basil said. "Oh. Have I?" Ren said, looking at the rising sun. "Yes, now stop staring at the the sun, you dummy," Basil put her hand over Ren's eyes. "You'll burn your eyes." "Okay, okay," Ren brushed Basil's hand away. "Now we should get to work." Basil nodded. "But I don't think we should do it here." Basil added, smirking.