

Introduction

The story starts at the dinner table with one empty spot. The parents seem awkward and distant; the mother seems absent and the father is trying hard to keep the mood up for Lily. As the father offers to get some ice cream, Lily stares at her unresponsive mother and wants to console her but doesn't know how.

Later that night, Lily goes up the stairs to get to bed. Before she enters her room, she stares at a closed door as the lightning briefly reveals the name "Dion" engraved in it. She whispers this mysterious Dion goodnight and wishes him a happy birthday before going up to her bedroom.

A visitor

Scene vibe

The storm is still raging above the house and the only light that makes the room visible are the flashes of lightning and the dim light shining through the curtains from the street lamps outside. In Lily's room, a haven for fantasy novels and adorned with posters of her beloved movies, the chaos outside was only matched by the chaos within.

Amidst the thunderous noise outside, the faint pitter-patter of small footsteps echoed. They were accompanied by rumblings as though someone was searching through Lily's belongings. Shadows danced on the walls, weaving together to form a strange, inhuman silhouette. Clothes were thrown carelessly across the room, transforming it into an even more disheveled mess than before.

Theon appears vibe music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1fO2qW5zrg>

Suddenly, a triumphant "aha" rang out from the shadowy intruder. The sound woke Lily up from her slumber. Her eyes darted around the room, frantically seeking the source of the disturbance, and eventually locked onto a pair of small, duck-like eyes. Fear gripped her as she gasped in astonishment at the peculiar creature that had invaded her room.

Scene continuation

The duck-like creature, assuring Lily that there's nothing to fear, raises her curiosity. The little stranger introduces himself as Theon, a resident of a vibrant fantasy world brought to life by Lily's own imagination. Theon had noticed a sinister corruption seeping into his world, tracing it back to its source, which astonishingly, appeared to be Lily's very own room.

Theon remarks on the dull, gray nature of Lily's world, urging her to step into his colorful realm. He explains that by finding a magical box of colors in his world, she could not only restore her own world but also save his. To emphasize the urgency, Theon points to a dark, corrupted spot in her closet, showing her how quickly the corruption is spreading.

Curious and determined, Lily asks how she can reach this world of color. Theon's frown suggests she should have known the answer. With a swift gesture, he lifts the carpet beside

her bed, revealing a gaping hole in the floor. Dim light spills through it, providing enough illumination to fill the room. Lily peers into the hole, her eyes widening in shock as she asks if she must jump into that dark void to reach the other world.

Theon nods solemnly, explaining it's the only way for now. Without further ado, he takes a daring leap into the unknown, exclaiming with a joyful "Woohooo." Sometime later, Theon's head reappears at the opening below, reassuring Lily not to be afraid and encouraging her to take the leap. With a deep breath, Lily summons her courage and jumps down into the mysterious hole, ready for whatever adventure awaits her.

A new world

Lily's startled scream pierces the air as she hurtles through the hole, gravity shifting in a disorienting blur. At last, she emerges, landing gently beside what seems to be a water well. Despite the dizzying descent, her landing is surprisingly soft due to the peculiar inversion of gravity in this newfound world.

Lily sees the new world around her vibe music:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6qlzKxmW8Y> or
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP_us9dTj5g

Blinking against the blinding brightness, Lily squints until her eyes adjust. Before her stretches a vast, magnificent green field that seems to extend infinitely. The breathtaking scenery overwhelms her senses.

Theon, the duck-like creature, comments with a grin that this world is far superior to her own. However, he reminds Lily that if she ever wants to return, she'll have to brave the well's descent once more. Lily still feels queasy from her previous plunge and hesitates, dreading the thought of repeating the experience. Noting Lily's reluctance, Theon reassures her and gestures towards the well, which appears ominously darker than its surroundings. He explains that it was near this well that he detected the source of the corruption, which has a powerful presence here. Peering into the well, Lily glimpses the ceiling of her room far below. The interior of the well seems to writhe and shift because of the corruption, an unsettling sight.

Theon's expression grows more concerned as he gazes downward, but he abruptly jumps back and urges Lily to join him, emphasizing the need to press forward and locate the elusive box of colors. As they embark on their journey, Theon elaborates on the box's whereabouts. He reveals that it will be hidden in the most vivid, colorful places from Lily's most colorful childhood memories. Together, they write down potential locations and push forward into the unknown.

Denial

Fact: In this stage, people act as if the loss did not occur. This is a natural defense mechanism the mind uses when the loss is so great, that the brain is essentially too overwhelmed to begin the grieving process.

As they strolled down the unfamiliar road toward their first destination, the playground, Lily and Theon couldn't help but ponder its whereabouts in this new world. While Theon was quite familiar with this realm, Lily's childhood memories provided a vivid description of the playground she sought: an astonishingly tall swing set that made you feel like a bird in flight and a dangerous slide capable of launching you to distant lands.

In the distance, they spotted an intersection containing a cluster of road signs and an unusual, oversized rock nearby. Hopeful for clues, they rushed towards it, only to discover that the multiple signs on the pole were arguing with each other about which way they had to face, leaving them just as clueless as before. Disheartened, Lily began to regret her decision to accompany the enigmatic creature. Meanwhile, Theon strained his eyes, attempting to decipher anything from the vanishing letters.

Goofy vibe music for the traveler: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2UHoGnGyvE>

Their discouragement was interrupted by a voice from behind, assuring them that he could easily point them in the right direction, as he was quite familiar with the area. Turning around, Lily and Theon noticed that the colossal rock they had mistaken for a natural formation was, in fact, an enormous backpack. The speaker remained concealed in its shadow. Though Lily eagerly approached, Theon's keen eye caught the corruption marks on the ground beneath the stranger. He urged caution, explaining he had seen that the corruption had taken over other inhabitants before, and they couldn't afford to be reckless.

They cautiously approached the backpacked traveler, who had overheard their conversation and claimed to know precisely which playground Lily spoke of while he pointed in the direction. Theon, skeptical about the situation, inquired if he was absolutely certain. In response, the traveler confidently affirmed his certainty while paradoxically pointing in the opposite direction. When Lily pointed out the discrepancy, the traveler grew defensive, taking offense at her doubts. After some discussion, Lily's curiosity got the better of her, and she asked the traveler how he found himself at the intersection.

The traveler stood up, now visibly irritated, and pointed an accusatory finger at Lily, scolding her for implying that he lost his way. He insisted that he knew the route perfectly well and was merely taking a break. Theon pressed him about the duration of his rest, prompting an inadvertent admission of eight hours, which the traveler hastily corrected to eight minutes with a throat-clearing cough. As the traveler stood up from the shadow of the backpack, the corruption became more apparent, spreading across his skin.

Seeing Lily's growing discouragement, Theon whispered reassurances that everything would be fine, and they could find their way without relying on this good-for-nothing, deliberately raising his voice in the end so the traveler could hear. Lily didn't want to leave this traveler all by himself getting even more corrupted, so she started to look around for anything that could

help. She spotted a sheet of paper sticking out from beneath the backpack where the traveler had been seated. While the traveler was busy arguing with Theon about calling him a good-for-nothing, Lily curiously approached and attempted to extract it, but it refused to budge without tearing. Theon grasped her intent and began pushing the backpack until it toppled over, all while the traveler protested angrily, demanding they keep their hands off his belongings. As the backpack fell, it revealed a massive map in the spot where it had rested.

The traveler gasped and rushed towards the map, making it abundantly clear that he had indeed been lost, his map having slipped out of his pocket during his break just before he set the backpack down. With his pride wounded and the map discovered, he conceded that he had not known the way. As he admitted his shortcomings, the corruption began to recede from his skin, sinking into the ground. The traveler offered a heartfelt apology and expressed gratitude for their assistance, explaining that he wasn't feeling quite himself that day, as this wasn't his typical demeanor.

The traveler helped them to locate the road leading to the playground of Lily's memories using his found map. The traveler skilfully secured his heavy backpack and slung it onto his shoulders effortlessly, despite its size seeming far too unwieldy for his frame.

After exchanging farewells, they embarked on their separate journeys.

Anger

Fact: In this stage, people question why something occurred and express outward anger. This stage can be particularly difficult when the loss is unpredictable, or if it was blindsiding. Anger is manifested as a control-seeking behavior and allows us to seek temporary control of our environment by asserting aggression to avoid feelings of helplessness.

Lily and Theon arrive at the playground, their excitement building as they approach the first destination on their quest to find the box of colors. However, they can't find anything and the box remains hidden. Lily's disappointment is visible as she slumps onto the gigantic swing. Theon, determined to lift her spirits dares Lily to swing as high as she can. With a mix of determination and playfulness, she accepted. As they both swing higher and higher, the wind rushes past them, bringing forth an overwhelming feeling of joy. Amidst the laughter and exhilaration, a strange sense of déjà vu washed over Theon. He couldn't shake the feeling that he had been here before.

As they continued swinging, Theon gestured towards a familiar-looking forest in the distance as they reached the peak of the swing. This triggers triggers a vivid memory from Lily's childhood, a flash of vibrant colors and laughter. Her heart swells in nostalgia. Theon says that the second place on their list is a tree house, and the forest seems to be the logical next step on their journey.

Theon, who knows the forest well, begins to share stories about the guardian of the forest - a protector of nature who could potentially guide them through the forest. As they approach the forest, an unsettling sight greets them. Most of the trees stand broken and uprooted, the ground scarred by a force that doesn't seem of human origin.

When they eventually locate the tree house, they are confronted by a massive beast. It furiously attacks any tree in its way, the anger within it apparent. The guardian, once peaceful, has been transformed into a creature of rage by the relentless corruption plaguing the forest. Theon recognizes the guardian within this monstrous form and understands that the corruption is what's fueling its anger, creating a destructive cycle that threatens to consume it entirely.

Theon and Lily hatched a plan to reach the treehouse and search for the box of colors, as they saw no hope in reasoning with the enraged beast. Theon bravely offered to serve as a distraction while Lily approached the treehouse from the other side.

The moment the plan fails, Lily has to run vibe music:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2W2TeUUYps>

However, their plan went awry. As Theon attempted to divert the beast's attention, Lily inadvertently stepped on a twig, capturing the creature's focus. She had no choice but to flee for her life, with the beast hot on her heels. Her escape was further complicated by a larger fallen branch from a tree, causing her to tumble down a hill and into a shallow lake. As she struggled to recover, the beast closed in, towering over her and growling menacingly. Lily froze in fear as the creature drew nearer, but then an unexpected twist occurred; as the water's ripples became more gentle, the beast saw his own reflection revealed in the clear water.

Beast realizing the damage it has done vibe music:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLe3pznz9oM>

The sight startled the beast, sending it into a panicked retreat. Lily and Theon pursued the creature and found it in a clearing, whimpering. Lily approaches cautiously with soft words, trying to communicate she means no harm. She stroked the beast gently, and it seemed to respond to her touch causing it to raise his head gently. A small part of the corruption on the ground seemed to slowly fade away. As the beast immediately noticed this change, it perked up and even more of the corruption began to dissipate.

Theon came running down the hill out of breath and making him light up at the sight of the monster slowly becoming the guardian he once knew. As the guardian grew more hopeful, the corruption retreated at an even faster rate, leading to a joyful and remarkable transformation.

They slowly walk back while the corruption seems to fade everywhere in the forest. When they reach the tree house again to investigate, they once again are met with no luck in finding the box. However, they did make another friend in this world. Once again, Theon mentions the feeling that he had done this before but couldn't really tell when.

As they continued their journey toward the third place on their list, the beast observed them from the forest's edge, its hope rekindled. It watches them until they disappear in the distance, then turns and ventures back into the forest, eager to reclaim its role as guardian and restore the forest to its original state.

Bargaining

Fact: Bargaining is used to seek hope when feeling hopeless. This stage is motivated by an internal belief that our bad behaviors have somehow contributed to a negative consequence either directly or indirectly. We tend to seek understanding and control in an otherwise hopeless or helpless situation.

The third and last destination on their list was the Fisher Village, a place that held a special significance for Lily. Her father and grandfather had always loved fishing, and so she often joined them on their trips when she was younger. They would take a boat to their favorite spot, an easily recognizable location near a massive rock that protrudes above the water.

Realizing the water is gone, and corruption is spreading faster than they thought
vibe music:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4Ximn7nZdc>

Upon arriving at the fisher village, they quickly realized that something was wrong- the water was gone. Corruption had overtaken the ground where the once beautiful clear water used to be. Lily and Theon spotted the distinctive rock that Lily had mentioned, but the odds of reaching it seemed slim. However, as they made their way along the docks, they noticed a lone fisherman with an enormous fisher hat at the end, seemingly unfazed by the creeping corruption beneath him.

Fisherman vibe beat music:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIXoEJGZoJw&list=PLPfHal9XqTnE6AD-dSRfCoDJNjPCluQ7_&index=2

Approaching the fisherman with caution, they inquired about the vanished water. He admitted he didn't really know what had happened. When asked why he continued to fish despite the absence of water and fish, he explained that he thought that if he left fish food on the hook, the fish might come and, in turn, bring back the water. Lily and Theon exchanged puzzled glances but didn't want to waste any time, considering the escalating corruption. As Theon prepared to step down from the dock onto the corrupted ground, the fisherman warned him against it, pointing out another man nearby who was stuck in the corruption but seemingly indifferent as the other man continued to fish.

Growing increasingly frustrated by the proximity of the rock they sought, Lily vented her frustration. The fisherman suggested they could find another rock, as he knows quite some beautiful rocks in the neighborhood. Lily and Theon paid him little attention, determined to explore their own options.

As they brainstormed a plan to reach their boat, nothing seemed feasible. Lily's frustration mounted, and their conversation turned into an argument. Theon believed they should continue trying to reach the rock, but Lily had grown despondent and wanted to move. However, the lake was the final destination on their list so there was nowhere else to go, intensifying Lily's discouragement. She declared their entire journey a futile endeavor as they still hadn't found the box of colors, even though Theon promised they would find it in the most colorful place of her memories.

The argument escalated into a heated dispute, with neither of them realizing that the corruption was also affecting their behavior. The fisherman's smart-ass comments only added to the tension as both Lily and Theon simultaneously told him to be quiet. Theon attempted to bargain with Lily, suggesting they could just explore another location if she could conjure up a colorful memory from her youth. Yet, Lily couldn't think of any place more vibrant than those she had already mentioned, further fueling her frustration.

Ignoring the fisherman, Lily and Theon walk back to investigate their possibilities. As they think up on any plan to get to the rock the fisherman overhears and tells them its not possible, and gives them more useless advice.

They try to make up a plan to get to the boat but nothing seems to work. Lily gets more and more discouraged and the comments of the fisherman aren't working. The conversation between them starts to become arguing. Theon thinks they still need to work out a way to get to that rock, but Lily doesn't want to go on anymore and just move on to the next place. However, the lake was the last place on the list, making Lily even more discouraged, and tells Theon this has all been a waste. Theon says it's not over yet because he made a list himself just in case with more places on it to visit, and pulls out a ridiculously long list making Lily even more agitated.

The argument starts to be a fight after Lily insults Theon that he can't even fly to the next location himself.. They don't know that the corruption is actually affecting them causing them to behave like this. The fisherman makes a comment and Theon and Lily simultaneously tell him to shut up as they continue their arguing. Theon tries to bargain that they could go to another place if she could just think of something from her youth, but Lily can't think of anything that would be more colorful than the places she already mentioned and becomes even more frustrated.

In a fit of anger, Lily stormed off the docks, declaring her intention to return. Theon watched her depart, shouting that he would carry on alone to save this world since she no longer cared.

Their paths diverged, each heading in a different direction.

Depression

Lily stormed away in frustration, only to realize she had no idea how to find her way back. Back at the forest's edge, she slumped down on what she thought was a rock, defeated. Suddenly, a familiar voice startled her, causing her to leap to her feet. Once again, the "rock" turned out to be the enormous backpack of the traveler. He greeted Lily, genuinely curious about how they had been since their last encounter. He inquired about her other friend, the one who had called him a "good-for-nothing", a remark that still irked him. Lily, still simmering with anger, retorted that she neither knew nor cared about her friend's whereabouts.

The traveler, noticing Lily's frustration, swiftly changed the subject and asked what she had been searching for. Lily replied in annoyance, mentioning the elusive box of color that probably didn't even exist. The villager noted that she had been quite passionate about it earlier, as had her friend. He expressed surprise at how they seemed to work together, even

though they had only known each other for a short while. This observation momentarily silenced Lily's rant. The traveler, trying to ease the tension, suggested that Lily needed a fresh cup of tea and a delicious biscuit, as he had been preparing some for himself earlier. A whistling teapot sound comes from deep within the backpack, and the traveler stands up and steps inside the enormous backpack. It surprisingly sounds like he's walking down some stairs, but maybe he is actually. Lily could have sworn she heard other people saying hi to the traveler in the backpack. She shakes her head in confusion and her thoughts turn to the adventures she had shared with Theon, filling her with regret. She became increasingly anxious about his well-being and decided she needed to go back and find him.

She abruptly runs away back towards the fisher village. The traveler comes back out of his backpack carrying a plate of tea and biscuits and asks Lily where she is going. Lily apologizes and keeps on running.

A looming shadow casts over the traveler, revealing the forest guardian again. The traveler offered one of the biscuits meant for Lily to the guardian, who gleefully devoured the whole package instead, leaving the traveler with just one... and a mildly annoyed expression.

Upon Lily's return to the fisher village, she discovered that the entire village had succumbed to corruption. She desperately called out to the fisherman, who now sat motionless in the same spot, covered in the spreading corruption. He offered no response. Frantically scanning the surroundings for any sign of Theon, Lily's eyes fell upon Theon's ridiculously long list. She followed the road where the list was thrown away and noticed that the corruption grew denser with each step. To her shock, a gigantic ribcage, encrusted with corruption, spanned her path, intensifying her concern for Theon's safety. She proceeded through the ribcage, with the corruption closing in around her, her determination unwavering.

Then, Lily spotted a figure in the distance that vaguely resembled Theon and called out to him. He seemed unresponsive, and she sprinted toward him, only to be halted as her foot got stuck in the sticky corruption on the ground, causing her to fall backward trying to get loose. Lily called out to Theon once more, and this time he responded, expressing the futility of their situation and urging her to leave for her own world. This world, he claimed, could no longer be saved. Despite their conversation, Lily saw no alternative but to save Theon by passing through the corruption. Summoning every ounce of her courage, she leaped toward Theon through the encroaching corruption. It tried to hold her back, but Lily's determination proved stronger, and she managed to reach Theon.

Desperately, she attempted to remove the corruption spreading over his body, with Theon continuously insisting it was futile. The corruption resisted her efforts, growing back even more stubbornly each time she removed it. Panic surged within Lily as she realized her attempts were in vain. She shouted that she would never leave him, even if the corruption overtook her too. Giving up on resisting the corruption, she clung to Theon tightly as it enveloped them both. Touched by her unwavering determination, Theon mustered a faint smile before everything went black.

Acceptance

Lily's eyes fluttered open, and all she saw was an abyss of darkness. She called out for Theon, but her voice merely echoed back to her. In her attempt to escape this void, she walked in a random direction until she spotted a small, huddled figure on the ground. Drawing closed, she realized it was her own reflection, a figure she had seen every day of her life.

Reaching out to touch the figure, a distant door opened, capturing her attention. When she turned back to the figure, it had vanished. From the door, eerie and distorted noises emanated, growing clearer as she approached. Stepping through the door, a bright light momentarily blinded her before finding herself in a hospital room and the noises became clear as the sounds from an EKG machine and a mechanical ventilator. Her eyes widened as she saw a frail, weak figure in the bed. With trembling anticipation, she called the figure "Dion". Dion smiled and invited her to come closer. As she approached, he became more distinct, and tears welled up in Lily's eyes. Dion expressed gratitude for the incredible adventure they had embarked upon together, reminiscent of their childhood days of playing with their stuffed animals. He handed Lily a stuffed animal resembling Theon, now appearing as lifeless and Dion in his fragile state. He revealed that they had hidden the box of colors in his room together when they were younger, and it was up to Lily to retrieve it again. Lily refuses to leave Dion's side, pleading with him not to leave her. Dion reassured her that if she had found her way to this place on her own, she possessed the strength to find acceptance. He promised to watch over her, even as she grew older, and moved on thinking about him. Lily couldn't bear to accept this reality, crying out that they still had so many adventures to experience together.

Dion suggested they could continue their adventures the same way she has been doing up till now, in her imagination. As the room began to distort and Dion receded into the distance, Lily reached out her hand, but she found herself back in her own room, hand outstretched in longing. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she gazed at her own hand and clenched it into a fist.

Reunion

With determination, she rose from her bed and left her room, leaving behind her toys - a backpacker, a beast, a fisherman, and more - strewn across the floor. She stood before the door that bore the name "Dion" and opened it, revealing a neat and orderly room that seemed untouched for a long time.

She made her way to the same carpet in her room which contained the magic portal. Lifting the carpet and removing two loose floor planks, she revealed a cardboard box adorned with vibrant colors. As she opened the box, it unveiled numerous drawings, each one a testament to the adventures she had shared with Theon, chronicling their every experience. Beneath the drawings lay treasured items, belongings of Dion, and a familiar stuffed duck. Lily carefully picked up the box and descended the stairs. Her parents, who had grown concerned over her delayed bedtime, looked up to see her tear-stained face. Lily showed them the contents of the box, and her mother burst into tears. Even her father, who had tried to be strong, could no longer hold back his emotions as he embraced Lily and her mother.