

"OVERGROWN"

BLACK.

TEXT: "Through the small rear window of these people's house they could see into a splendid garden that was filled with the most beautiful flowers and herbs. The garden was surrounded by a high wall, and no one dared enter, because it belonged to a sorceress who possessed great power and was feared by everyone."
- Jacob and Wilhem Grimm, "Rapunzel"

EXT. GARDEN - MORNING

A light soundscape of birdsong and humming bugs comes alive as the sun rises on an other-worldly garden-- overgrown bushes, hanging flowers suspended from branches, a couple of flowering trees towering over the area. The sunlight filters through the treetops, coming down to illuminate an oddly constructed sheet fort built among the plants. One delicate white sheet is strung up around a makeshift bed of mismatched blankets and pillows. Atop the bed, arranged like Sleeping Beauty-- ROSE, a wisp of a girl no older than 16, sleeps. Her hair, soft and airy, is almost as long as the length of her body, fanning out around her.

All at once but not suddenly, Rose opens her eyes. She rises in a swift, gentle motion, like a flower opening toward the sun. It takes a moment for her to fully awaken. She absent-mindedly runs a hand through her hair with a sleepy smile. But then-- her hands meet a tangle, and her eyes widen in fear. She frantically combs through her hair with her fingers, stopping and wincing as she finds each additional tangle.

All grace gone, she stumbles out of the bed in a panic, all but crawling to an old mirror propped against a tree. The little nook is surrounded by old books-- leather-bound fairy tales. Sitting on top of the books is a silver embossed hairbrush. Rose hastily grabs the brush, then settles herself on the ground, in front of the mirror.

Visibly anxious, she brushes through her hair, growing calmer as she goes on. She does not stop until her hair is completely tangle-free. Once she is done, she takes seven deep breaths, pausing between each one as if counting in her mind.

EXT. GARDEN - LATER

Rose, barefoot and still in her nightgown, walks through a different part of the garden with a watering can in hand. She smiles and gently touches each plant, closing her eyes as if listening, as she makes her way through. She stops at a particularly beautiful bed of flowers and gingerly tilts the can, creating a steady stream of water. Once the flowers are satisfied, she looks up as if being watched.

Leaning over the fence is ELLA, 55 and robust in a pair of patched overalls. She smiles and waves at Rose.

Rose returns no warmth. She retreats further into the garden.

Completely surrounded by greenery, Rose falls into a dreamy trance. She waters each plant with tender care, each step so light she could be dancing.

A weather-worn basket of gardening supplies waits for her in the shade of a tree. She leans down to retrieve a pair of pliers, then sets her attention to pruning.

Almost indiscernible amongst the vibrant colors of the surrounding blossoms, a single lifeless rose hangs heavily. Rose finds the dying flower and holds it in the palm of her hand. Closing her eyes, she snips the stem and closes her hand around it. She brings it close to her face, taking a moment to grieve.

Rose drops the pliers back into the basket and makes her way out of the garden, leaving the dead rose atop a pile of compost.

EXT. GARDEN - THE NEXT MORNING

Rose strolls through the garden, once again stopping at each plant as if to say good morning. She now carries a woven basket along with the watering can. Her pace is leisurely as she takes her time with each plant, enjoying the sunlight on her face.

She retrieves her pliers and revisits the rosebush. She harvests several of the flowers, tying them together with a ribbon and placing them in her basket.

As she rises, she notices Ella at the fence again. She is holding a basket of her own, full of honeycrisp apples.

ELLA

Good morning! Your blooms
are coming in nicely.

Rose looks away, avoiding eye contact.

ELLA

(cont'd)

I notice your garden
is missing plants of
the edible variety.
Thought I could share some
of mine. I suppose I'm
more of a survival gardener
myself. (chuckle) Although I
can't say I'd be so practical
if I had your way with flowers.

She holds the basket of apples out over the fence. Rose eyes them hungrily before catching herself. She shakes her head no and turns away, gripping her basket in fear.

EXT. GARDEN - THE NEXT MORNING

Rose wakes up in her sheet fort, sleepily blinking back the sun. As she runs her fingers through her hair, she notices an apple sitting beside her. She eyes it suspiciously, but decides to ignore it.

She goes to her hairbrush. As she works through her hair, her eye returns again to the apple. Finally, she gives in and puts down the brush. She takes a single shameful bite of the apple, unable to hide the delight on her face.

EXT. GARDEN - LATER

Rose sits on her knees, happily absorbed in her work as she weeds a section of the garden. The cored apple sits on the ground nearby. As she claims victory over a particularly stubborn weed, she falls back into the grass, laughing at herself. She closes her eyes and soaks in the sunlight.

ELLA

Good morning, sunshine!

Rose's breath catches in her throat. She opens her eyes.

Ella is once again on the other side of the fence. She grins beneath the brim of an oversized sun hat.

ELLA

You should really be
wearing shoes, sweetheart.
The ground is so dirty.

Rose eyes the gaudily-painted watering can in Ella's hand and the dirty shoes on her feet. She sits up, turning away from the fence.

ELLA

You sure you can handle all this
on your own? It's a mighty big garden

for such a tiny little girl-- not
that you're not mighty in your own
right! Here, let me help you.

Rose opens her mouth in protest, but she is only able to form a weak whimper. She shakes her head again, compulsively running her fingers through her hair as her breath subtly quickens.

Ella throws one leg over the fence, straining the stitches on her overalls. She stumbles and lands ungracefully in Rose's garden, then laughs at herself. The moment Ella's boots hit the ground, Rose finds a tangle in her hair. Her breath accelerates to the point of nearly hyperventilating.

Ella sits herself down beside Rose and reaches out for a handshake.

ELLA

I know you're not much for talking
so it doesn't really bother me
that you've never asked for my
name. It's Ella, though. I'm Ella,
and I'd like to help you out. I've
got a bit of a green thumb myself.

Rose only stares in fear at Ella's outstretched hand. Ella shrugs and eyes the apple core on the ground.

ELLA

So you do eat! Oh thank goodness,
I really was worried about you.
I've got more of the apples
if you'd like some. I'm happy
to share. Here, it looks
like that bush might need
some water.

She lifts her watering can and leans over Rose to reach the bush in question; Rose yelps and pulls away.

ELLA

It's okay, dear.
I'll let you do it.

Rose clutches her chest and crawls away from the woman. Once a safe distance away, she begins anxiously ripping up the grass beneath her feet. When she realizes what she's doing to the garden, she jerks her hands away from the ground. Looking down, her fingertips begin to turn green, the color moving across her hands through careful roots. Rose shakes her head; her hands return back to their normal color.

The wind sends Rose's hair flying all around her. She tries to untangle it with her fingers, but realizes it's too much. The roar of it all swiftly becomes deafening. Rose places her hands against her ears as she stands. She takes a few staggering steps away from Ella, but stumbles and falls.

Ella rises and rushes towards Rose. She tries to give her a steady hand to hold onto.

ELLA

Hey, it's all alright.
Can I get you some water?

Rose pushes her away. Tugs frantically at her own scalp. She flees toward her fort, stumbling over a pile of books as she reaches her bed. She retreats into her bed, pulling the sheet around, effectively slamming the door. She holds her breath, then, frustrated, lets it out.

ELLA

(off-screen)
Sweetheart?
You okay in there?

Rose pulls her knees up, crosses her arms, and puts her head down. Her sniffles grow quieter and further apart. The deafening sounds around her begin to fade.

BLACK.

EXT. GARDEN - AFTERNOON

Rose wakes up wrapped in the sheet, the walls of her fort gone. She is immediately overcome with fear and reaches for her hair, but she seems too weak to properly sit up. She squints in the light of a nearing sunset.

Leaning against a nearby tree is Ella, dozing off herself. She stretches leisurely, then looks around. She leans toward Rose.

ELLA

You gave me quite a scare.
Feeling any better?

Rose closes her eyes and takes seven deep breaths. Then, she turns back to Ella. Slowly, she lifts a finger and points to the stack of books by her mirror.

ELLA

Story?

Rose shakes her head no and readjusts the point. Ella nods in realization as she reaches for the hairbrush.

ELLA

This?

Rose nods and opens her hand. Ella gives her the brush, and Rose motions for her to turn around. Ella does so.

Rose carefully takes Ella's coarse gray hair down from its bun. She then begins to brush through it. It is awkward at first, but soon they each relax. Ella hums.

FADE OUT.