

Far From Any Road

By

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Cast of Characters

LILY:

FRANKLIN:

Sunlight streams green through a dense canopy of trees. Twigs and fallen leaves litter a narrow wooded trail. The forest is silent, as if holding its breath.

FRANKLIN, late twenties, sits on a decaying log, running his fingers over his bandaged right hand. He wears a heavy hiking backpack, and a bandana around his neck.

LILY, a young woman walks down the trail, searching. Her eyes fall on Franklin, and she rushes to greet him.

LILY

Franklin! Where have you been? The we've been looking for you all morning! The medicines you gave the children have taken effect! Their fevers are drifting away by the second!

FRANKLIN

I knew they would.

LILY

Well come on then! My sister's already awake! The whole clan wants to thank you! We've assembled by the creek!

FRANKLIN

I... I'm not feeling well. I'm not going back.

LILY

What? Franklin you deserve a break, you've been up for days! Let's just sit here for a while until you're rested.

FRANKLIN

I mean, I'm not going back. Ever.

LILY

What is this? What's gotten into you?

Lily takes a step toward Franklin. He rises quickly and holds his free hand out to halt her.

FRANKLIN

Stop! Don't come any closer.

LILY

What's going on? What's happened?

Franklin sighs deeply. He slowly unfurls his bandage to reveal bloody bruising along his hand.

FRANKLIN

I wasn't quick enough, Lily. When I buried little Tomasin last night... he did not sleep in peace. Before I could lay earth upon him, his eyes opened wide, only they weren't his eyes no more. They were eyes of the hate and hunger. Before I could put him back to sleep, he landed one tiny kiss on my flesh. And that's all it took. That kiss done grown, it's mark has spread across my hand. It's much too late already.

LILY

No! No, this can't be! You're a healer, you know all the salves, all the poultice, you can fix yourself! You fixed up all the kids!

FRANKLIN

It don't work that way, child. The children take medicine easier. Their bodies are more open to change, like half tanned clay. We grown ups are different. Harder to change. Harder to heal. Easier to break.

LILY

You're not broken, Franklin! We need you!

FRANKLIN

My work is finished, Lily. I've made more mistakes than I can count in this life. I've been adrift on a trail of regret since I was their age. I tried to do some good, thought it would level everything out. And it did, in its own way. I'm ready. The regret has washed away. My time of sorrow is over.

LILY

We can't survive without you! What if the pestilence comes back? What if the animals die again, and the cycle repeats? We were careless and greedy and it almost cost us everything! How will we make it through another Black Spring if you're gone?

FRANKLIN

This time of contempt changed us all, child. The weeds of anger and suspicion have been burned away by the fires of our love. Our people are back on the path. We strayed too far, and paid the price. You won't make the same mistakes again.

LILY

But... but at least return for a goodbye? Please?

FRANKLIN

No.

Franklin reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small vial of blue fluid. He drinks the mixture, shivering, before retying his bandage.

FRANKLIN

I'm already contagious. All I exhale is noxious. I must stay away, every day hereafter.

LILY

I won't let you do this. I can't let you die out here, all alone!

FRANKLIN

It will take some time. I have brought some medicines I made for the clan, and there is more material in the deep woods. It will take months, maybe years, but I'll live them happy knowing I've kept you safe. If I am the last victim of this pestilence, I will pass my final days in tranquility.

LILY

I loved you the most, Franklin. More than my own kin.

FRANKLIN

I love you, Lily. I've taught you all I can. Don't fritter your time away. As long as there is a single beat in our clan's heart, I will never fade away.

LILY

What will I tell the others?

FRANKLIN

Tell them the truth. Tell them not to follow me.

LILY

But where will you go?

Franklin turns away from Lily and pulls his bandana up around his mouth.

FRANKLIN

Far from any road.

Franklin leaves the trail, setting off into the deep woods. Lily watches him for a moment before

burying her head in her hands.