

SEDONA

Written by

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EXT. SEDONA RED ROCKS, A PLATEAU - DAY

MAYA, 20s, copper-skinned and naturally pretty in backpacking attire, grins as she climbs onto a natural plateau and watches a lizard on a rock. She carries an expensive-looking camera around her neck and clicks it at the tiny reptile before it scurries off.

SAM (O.S.)
Maya! Slow down!

Breaking her gaze from the camera, Maya smiles back at her best friend, SAM, 20s, petite with a short pony-tail and a sunshine-y smile, and Sam's boyfriend, PATRICK, 20s, a gangly, good-natured goofball looking very weighed down by backpacking equipment.

SAM (CONT'D)
(laughing)
Wait up, you freaking mountain goat. In case you forgot, we didn't grow up doing this.

PATRICK
Yo, Maya. This is unreal. I can't believe you didn't move back here after undergrad.

EXT. PLATEAU TRAIL - DAY

The three friends walk along a dusty, red trail down the other side of the plateau as they talk.

MAYA
Yeah, well, I don't know. I don't really love spending time in our old house. I haven't really since my old man walked out on us. Too many memories that are... just, kind of tainted now.

SAM
Aw, but I'm sure your mom loves when you visit. She must miss you a lot, she still sends you that letter in the mail every month!

PATRICK
(amused)
Every month?

SAM

Yes, every month, it's so cute, Pat! There's a different color envelope every time, and it's always covered in these sweet little animal stickers-

MAYA

(halfheartedly, lost in thought.)
Yeah, it's really cute.

SAM

And we've been roommates for what, five years now- that's twelve times five. How many letters is that?

MAYA

Sixty.

SAM

Sixty! Sixty letters later, and I FINALLY get to meet your mom!

MAYA

Huh? No. No, I just said, I don't like visiting.

SAM

What? Maya. You can't road trip through your home-town and not stop home. Come on, don't you miss your family?

MAYA

Well, yeah, I do... Of course... My mom, and my sisters... But, it's just that we always end up talking about my dad, and, y'know, FONDLY REMINISCING. As if he DIDN'T tear out all of our hearts ten years ago. And that-

Maya kicks a stone which clatters down the steep slope beside the path.

-makes me want to get as far away from this place as possible.

Maya looks up at Sam's worried face.

Oh, it's fine, you guys, they don't even know I'm passing through!

(MORE)

MAYA (CONT'D)

And what they don't know can't hurt 'em. And, I mean, there's other reasons I don't visit often. The heat-

SAM

You love the heat! Come on, you've only said so five times since we've been in Arizona.

PATRICK

True.

MAYA

Well, there's... tarantulas...

PATRICK

You're crazy, dude. This place is unbelievable! This is my favorite destination we've hit so far.

MAYA

No, I know, it is beautiful...

PATRICK

AND, I got some sick pictures to edit when we get back. I didn't feel any magical energy vortexes though.

He mockingly wiggles his fingers at the words "magical energy vortexes." The group continues on the path.

MAYA

Pft. That is because they don't exist, Pat.

PATRICK

Oh, you've never experienced any mysterious energy anomalies, Maya? Time lapses? Supernatural activity? UFOs?

MAYA

Take it from a local, that vortex stuff is just a bunch of crap the washed-up hippies tell the tourists to get them to take their overpriced tours.

PATRICK

You wouldn't make a very good tour guide.

SAM

(teasing)

I don't know, May, that guy in town swore on his life that he saw an elephant suddenly appear out of the sky out here.

PATRICK

Dude, I believe him. Same thing happened to me at Burning Man last year.

SAM

Okay, Patrick. Come on guys, if we're not staying then let's hit the road. Next stop- Tuscon!

The three have walked a good distance from the plateau by now. Up ahead, the path veers to the left. But, right before they make the turn, Maya notices a uniquely-shaped tree and a tall, recognizable peak in the distance.

MAYA

Wait, hold up! See that cliff out there? Oh my god, my dad used to take me there all the time as a kid... you know, before. I'm sorry, guys, I need to get up there with my camera. The view is insane.

SAM

Awh, May.. We've got a long drive ahead of us...

PATRICK

No, it's fine. You go ahead, homie, we'll be in the car.

Patrick grabs Sam's butt and Sam slaps his hand away. They laugh.

MAYA

Ew okay, I'll be right back. RIGHT BACK, you guys!

We see a montage of Maya hiking to the tall cliff about a mile away and climbing to the top.

EXT. CLIFF SUMMIT- DAY

When she reaches the summit, she holds out her camera and walks to the edge. Below, there is an enormous, rushing river.

MAYA
(squinting at the river)
What?

She takes a photo then climbs down and stares at the water.

EXT. RIVERBANK AT BOTTOM OF CLIFF - DAY

STELLA (O.S.)
Cool camera you've got. I've never
seen anything like it.

Maya turns around to see STELLA, 60s, looking like she stepped right out of the page of a history book on the 1960s hippie movement.

MAYA
Thanks! It's a Nikon. I'm a
photography student. Wow, I love
what you're wearing. Don't move.

Maya snaps a picture of Stella.

STELLA
(laughing)
I'm Stella.

MAYA
Maya! Hey, do you live around here?
I'm freaking out. I used to come
here all the time as a kid but this
river WAS NOT HERE.

STELLA
Oh, no...

MAYA
How could this be? It can't be man-
made, it's enormous and I would've
heard about that.

STELLA
Look at me, child. You've never
seen this river before?

MAYA
No! Like I said, I-

STELLA
Where did you come from? Which
direction? We need to get you out
of here.

MAYA

What? Right back that way but our car is at the park visitor center- wait, but that would be.. Across this river? What the hell?

Stella grabs Maya's arm and starts walking with her.

STELLA

Come, child, hurry. The more time you spend in the vortex, the more control it will have over you. We must get you back at once.

MAYA

(screeching to a stop)

Oh, god! Vortexes!? Look, ma'am, I'm really in a hurry and I don't have any money or anything...

Stella stops, holds Maya by the shoulders, and stares into her eyes.

STELLA

Listen to me. I am stuck in this place. I've learned to harness the energy and control the hallucinations but I cannot find my way out, because I've been lost for too long.

MAYA

I really-

STELLA

LISTEN. I want to help you. I don't want for you to become one of us. You don't have to believe me but believe in yourself. You know this river should not be here; IS NOT here.

Maya looks at the river and at Stella's clothing then back at her face.

MAYA

I want to get back to my friends.

STELLA

Good. Now think of the place where you last saw them and hold that memory in the front of your mind- The vortex will try to make you forget but if you do, you'll never get out.

MAYA

Okay, that's all I have to do? Go back to where I came from?

Stella nods once.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Easy, this way.

They start the trek back in the direction Maya came from.

EXT. - SEDONA RED ROCKS, OFF TRAIL - DAY

MAYA

This looks different. I mean, the same.. But different. I recognize those peaks, but not that one.

STELLA

In the vortex, the canyons change. Have you heard the stories, child? Of hallucinations, people becoming hopelessly lost out here, wandering aimlessly under the sun...

MAYA

I've heard the stories, but they've always been just... stories. Distorted accounts of dehydration or urban legends made up a long time ago that never faded away.

STELLA

There's usually a reason that old stories don't fade away, don't you think? It's okay, as long as most of the landmarks are the same, we're heading in the right direction.

They continue on. Maya sees some strange lights up ahead, but they disappear suddenly.

MAYA

Stella, this is taking too long. We should have been back by now. I don't understand, the bottom of that big canyon up there is where I left my friends but we keep walking and it always stays the same distance away.

STELLA

Your sense of time is off. Dream time, I call it. Meant to discourage you. Come on.

The sun looks twice its normal size and some of the canyons appear strange and wavy, like a mirage. They pass a beautiful garden of lush flowers; picture-perfect and eerily out-of-place. Maya is looking increasingly alarmed, but they keep going.

MAYA

I know this place! We're almost there! Just around this bend, and up-

EXT. NEW RIVERBANK - EVENING

As she runs around a bend in the rocks, she sees that the river is now ahead of them.

MAYA

What? No, it can't be... We left the river.. back there...

STELLA

The vortex is trying to throw you off. I've seen this before.. Usually there's a way across, some loophole. There!

They see a small wooden boat turned over and start running towards it.

MAYA

Alright, let's flip it on 3. 1, 2,-

FATHER

Maya...?

Maya whips around to see her FATHER. He's handsome and dark in his 40s and looks like he belongs in the crowd of a classic rock concert.

MAYA

Dad...!? Wha- Where-? I don't..

FATHER

Maya. It's really you. You got so beautiful, kiddo. So grown up.

Maya only shakes her head, perplexed. She has tears in her eyes.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Maya, you need to hear this. I didn't leave you, I would never have left you kids. I've been trapped here for so long... In this place...

STELLA

Maya....

FATHER

It's like heaven and hell and purgatory all at once, this place... So many years I've been lost...

STELLA

Maya!

FATHER

But now that you're here, we can leave together. Come with me, kiddo, I know the way out...

STELLA

Maya, get in the boat!

Maya's father holds out his hand. Maya lifts her hand, unsure.

MAYA

But how?

STELLA

I can't see him, Maya. He isn't real! It's the vortex- it shows you what you want to see!

Maya looks at Stella then back at her father. Tears are streaming down her face, but she doesn't make a sound.

FATHER

Don't listen to her, Maya. She's a witch, she's the one causing the hallucinations. I'm the only thing that is real in this place.

Maya slowly reaches out... and takes his hand.

FATHER (CONT'D)

I'm here now, Maya. I love you.

She looks up, horrified. She pulls her hand away and backs up.

STELLA

Come, child! We don't have much time!

Maya turns and runs toward the boat.

FATHER

No, Maya! If you get in that boat, she'll drown you!

Maya gets in the boat and they push off into the water. Maya starts crying into her hands while Stella rows the boat. The water begins to ripple and the sky darkens.

STELLA

I'm sorry. We're close now.

MAYA

It wasn't him. I know it wasn't him. My real father is out there somewhere with his new life and his new family.

Thunder erupts overhead. The ripples turn to waves.

STELLA

Maya, your energy is feeding the vortex. Be careful now.

MAYA

And I hope they're happy. Just so that it hurts more when he leaves them too. And so they can spend the rest of their lives wondering what they did wrong and where he is now and why their own father could never even say "I love you" before he disappeared for good.

More thunder. A big wave splashes into the boat, which is now rocking uncontrollably in the water.

STELLA
Almost there! Hold on!

Another big wave hits and Maya almost falls out, but a hand grabs her and pulls her back.

MAYA
Thank y- (gasps!)

She looks forward. It's not Stella in the boat. It's her dad.

MAYA (CONT'D)
GO AWAY!

FATHER
Maya.

MAYA
STELLA!

Stella shouts back from the shore thirty feet away.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Who are you!?

FATHER
(face hidden in shadow)
I'm an angel.

The oars of the boat start moving on their own. In the wrong direction, away from Stella and the shore.

STELLA
Maya! Jump!

She jumps into the water. We see her getting tossed around underwater for a minute before she regains her sense of direction. She comes up for air and swims desperately for the shore.

EXT. OPPOSITE SIDE OF RIVER - STORMY EVENING

Once on shore, Stella yanks her up and they both sprint away and up a path.

STELLA
Run, keep running!

They run up the path. Then, Stella slows down and let's go.

STELLA (CONT'D)
I can't come with you. This is your way out, not mine.

MAYA
Stella-

STELLA
It's alright. I belong here now. You don't.

The strange orbs of light from earlier appear behind Stella. Stella notices Maya's alarmed gaze and turns around.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Go, keep running! Go on, child!

Maya begins to run as the orbs get closer.

STELLA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Maya! Let go! You don't need him!

She looks back at Stella who smiles and waves.

STELLA (CONT'D)
You're going to do great things and it's his loss!

Maya blinks back tears, smiles, and waves. Then she looks forward as she runs. Then, back again. Now, Stella is gone but the orbs are not.

She sprints up the path as fast as she can, then begins to climb. She reaches the top of a plateau and takes off, only to trip over a root and fall down HARD.

Close-up as she cowers on her hands and knees, out of breath and crying.

SAM (O.S.)
Maya! Slow down!

EXT - SEDONA RED ROCKS, A PLATEAU - DAY

Maya looks up. It's day time, not a cloud in the air.

SAM (CONT'D)
(laughing)
Wait up, you freaking mountain goat. In case you forgot, we didn't grow up doing this.

PATRICK

Yo, Maya. This is unreal. I can't believe you didn't move back here after undergrad.

Maya jumps up and practically tackles them as they reach the top of the ledge.

MAYA

(tearfully)

SAM! PATRICK! I found you! I'm so sorry I got lost.

PATRICK

You got lost? That was quick.

SAM

If you got lost, we were lost too 'cause we've been following you the whole time.

MAYA

You mean, you didn't notice I was gone?

SAM

When was this? What are you talking about?

MAYA

I've been gone for hours! It was a vortex! I was wrong, they exist!

Sam and Patrick look at each other then back at their friend.

PATRICK

You didn't eat any of the regional vegetation, did you?

SAM

(linking arms with Maya)

Okay, let's get you back to the car. I think you need some water. Patrick, I think she needs some water.

MAYA

(pulling away)

No, you guys! It was real. There was a river and my father was there, and Stella. Wait- Stella! My camera!

She fumbles for her camera.

MAYA (CONT'D)

I can prove it. The river, all of it.

Her camera won't turn on.

MAYA (CONT'D)

No! I forgot it went into the water with me.

Sam, concerned, and Patrick, amused, look at each other again.

SAM

Okay, well I at least could use some water. Come on. You can tell us alllll about this little experience of yours when we get on the road.

INT. VAN - SUNSET

Maya is in the back seat messing with her camera, trying to get it to turn on, but with no luck. Then, an idea!

MAYA

Patrick! Can I borrow your camera for a second?

PATRICK

Yeah, sure, dude.

She takes the memory card out of her camera and puts it into Patrick's. She looks through a few pictures that appear normal, then they start to get super over-exposed, almost white.

MAYA

(whisper)

Shit.

The last few are completely white. Until, she gets to the final photograph: Stella, in the same outfit as before, same pose, everything the same, only she is about 20 years old instead of 60.

Maya looks up and leans back in her seat. She looks out the window at the red rocks disappearing in the distance.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Hey, guys?

SAM
(turning around in the
passenger seat)
Mhm?

MAYA
Do you think we can stop.. at my
mom's house?

Patrick smiles and glances at Sam, whose face erupts into a big, loving grin. She unbuckles her seat belt and climbs into the back, putting her arms around Maya, who laughs.

Closing image: The van changes course and drives by a sign that reads: "Sedona, Arizona."