

PIXEL PATH

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Marie Barnes, a student at Dyker Heights high school, in Ubbin Falls. It was just another day for school, and Marie, as always set out to go on foot. On her way to school, she saw some members of her school's football team, along with captain Wesley Mahoney, who was Marie's crush. She continued walking, and went through the school gates as usual. After some classes, she went to the school cafeteria to grab lunch with her best friend Alisson. There, they saw the mean girls of the school, who always made themselves look great and flawless in front of the boys. Marie and Alisson tried to find a seat to eat their lunch and then Amanda, one of the mean girls, bumped into Marie. Then Marie spilled some food on her. Amanda with an angry face said:

_Aaagh, you stupid girl, do you have any idea how much this outfit costs?

Although Marie was a shy girl and really scared, she courageously stood up for herself and said:

_It wasn't entirely my fault that you bumped into me; you should have been more careful and paid more attention to your surroundings.



Then Amanda got so surprised that Marie stood up for herself that she kept saying mean things, even after Wesley stepped in to help. But things got even more complicated when Wesley started speaking, as Amanda thought that Wesley was standing up for Marie, instead of her, his girlfriend. After a little while, the headmaster arrived and started asking for explanations. Amanda immediately started saying that Marie was at fault and acted as if she had been the victim in the whole situation, while Marie told the truth about what had happened. Wesley also said what he had seen but the headmaster wasn't at all convinced, so he gave all three of them detention. Marie, Amanda and Wesley were escorted to the headmaster's office by the headmaster himself. When they entered the office, they saw another student waiting inside. They were all asked to clean an old unused room full of equipment, every day after school, for the next two weeks. So the four students went to that room. When they reached it, everyone was amazed at how many useless things were in there, but with no complaints they started doing some cleaning, except for Amanda. She thought that there was no meaning in doing all this, so she took her phone and started taking pictures. After some time of cleaning, Marie found an old video game and a TV. Wesley proposed connecting them so that they could play. After some struggling, they were able to connect them, with some help from Tyler, the other kid. The TV was on and the game 'ZORELIN' the cursed sword started playing. The four students wanted to play it, so they read the short story and started choosing one avatar. Marie got Kami the explorer, Wesley got Valri, the assassin, Tyler got Arok, the doctor, and last but not least, Amanda chose Vakkos, the specialist in maps. After that they pressed the play button and, then, suddenly, Wesley started getting pulled into the game slowly and the others couldn't do anything. Little did they know they would get absorbed in the game too. Thus, Amanda, Marie, Wesley and Tyler entered the game as the avatars they had chosen.



Everyone woke up, slightly dizzy and saw a weird place, full of trees, strange creatures and things non existent in the actual world. They stood up and started questioning one another, 'who are you'? And after some time passed, did they realize they had become the avatars of the game. They were a bit shocked and trembled with fear. Marie, as an excellent videogamer, touched her left hand and a board of her attributes appeared in front of her. So the others did the same, to see what their capabilities and weaknesses were. Marie had got Kami, the explorer and martial arts expert and her weakness was venom. Wesley had got Valri, the assassin, swordsman and had no weaknesses . Tyler got Arok, the medical doctor and expert at blades and hypnosis. His only weakness was wild berries. Last but not least, Amanda got Vakkos, the expert in maps, and his weakness was running. They also noticed a tattoo on their shoulders that had three lines, and Marie suspected that this would be the number of lives they had.

Then Wesley said:

_Hey, if we are in the game, that must mean we have to play it. Remember the story. It said there are many obstacles and mostly those of demons and monsters. You have to return the cursed sword back to the temple in order to

save this place and all the people that had become monsters. Ragnarok, who was the one that had stolen the sword, had been possessed by its demonic aura and become a slave of the sword. Then all we need to do is to find the sword and take it back to the temple.

So, the four students, began searching for the cursed sword. While walking, Arok, who was Tyler, thought of the game and said:

-If we need to go through demons and monsters, we're going to need weapons to survive. So I guess we have to find some.

_Good idea, said Valri, who was Wesley, but where shall we find weapons in a place we don't even know? Maybe that backpack you got, has something useful.

_Oh, I didn't even notice there was a backpack on my back. You're right, Arok, there are some weapons in here. Let's see... There is a sword, a pair of blades and a lot of medicine and a map .

Kami, who was Marie, said:

_Ok, let's get going then, cause the game ain't going to be played by itself.

Then, their journey began, in search of the cursed sword through this unknown world.



They walked and walked through the never ending forest path with Amanda leading because she was Vakkos, the specialist in maps. They saw countless animals but they didn't find anything. All of them were exhausted from walking for so long, but they were lucky to find a small village, a few miles outside the forest. They struggled a little more in order to reach the village and have some rest there. When they arrived, they noticed that nobody was there, but fires and homemade food had been prepared. They wandered around a little to see if there was anyone there, and they found a little girl hiding inside a house. She was frightened. They approached her and told her that she had nothing to fear. They asked her where they were, what this place was and why no one else was there.

The girl replied that all of the people had got captured by Ragnarok and turned into monsters, and she was the only one that had got away. Her parents had talked to her about the cursed sword, but she didn't believe it till that strange man had appeared with a giant blade on his hand. Ever since that day she had been afraid to go outside this house, because the monsters would get her and turn her into one of their own.

'Don't worry', Marie said, we will find a way to lift the curse and save your village and your parents. One thing I want to ask you is to tell me where the temple is.

'It is in an abandoned valley' said the girl, where the priest's temple, used to protect the sword from anyone who wanted to take it and get its unlimited power. But now the temple is filled with demons and monsters, and the priest is locked inside a cage, under the sword's curse and hasn't been seen since that dark day. So please return the sword to the temple and save my village. But be careful, whoever has the slightest bit of intention for power, he will be consumed by the sword's wickedness and become a slave. Before they left the village, they took some food with them to recharge their batteries from all that walking, but little did they know that the food had wild berries inside. Arok didn't know that and accidentally there were some. After a minute he felt like bursting and so did he. Kami, Valri and Vakkos were injured and thought the same would happen to them because of the food. But a second later, Arok appeared from the sky and fell down. They didn't believe their eyes that he was alive, and after that, one of his tattoo lines disappeared.

_Arok said, 'ooh...'; that was intense, thank god I I am still alive.



Everyone laughed and later they began walking again bearing in mind that something bad was on their way. Then, in a split second, monsters had surrounded them, but they quickly grabbed their weapons and started fighting. They fought and fought and no one died, they rushed to get some place else in case other monsters appeared. While they were having a short rest outside the forest, they saw a valley and thought that this would be the one that the girl was talking about. Although it was not like anything she had described before, they went towards it to see for themselves. The place was peaceful, full of grass and flowers, and there was a small temple there. They continued approaching it but as soon as Kami stepped her foot on the temple, the sky got dark, the plants wilted and a giant demon appeared in front of them. Then everyone got their weapons and prepared to fight. But they had no idea that the giant would summon other monsters to the temple... ten to twenty and so on. The monsters increased in number. Kami was hurt by an arrow and Vakkos was stabbed in the back by a goblin, and they lost their lives. A second later they appeared again, and fought even harder. Valri was wounded by a demon and suffered for a while before he died. Afterwards he appeared from the sky and saw that most of the monsters had been killed by the others. He felt relieved but not for long, as Ragnarok appeared with the cursed sword. They heard the monsters say

_Master Ragnarok, master save us, those trespassers are trying to get into the temple.

Kami, Arok, Valri and Vakkos weren't sure of what to expect, so they launched attack to Ragnarok and his minions. Then Ragnarok put the cursed sword in the ground, and it started cracking and even more monsters came to the temple. Kami was exhausted, of the fighting, because she didn't even have a weapon, except for her hands and legs. Later Vakkos and Arok got killed once more and Kami and Valri were left alone. They killed all the monsters and the only one left was Ragnarok.

For some reason, the other two didn't come as quickly as they did the first time they died and Kami was worried about what might have happened. Then Ragnarok summoned snakes, venomous ones, and Kami was surrounded by them. She remembered that her weakness was poison and if she got beaten she would die. But while fighting Ragnarok Valri stumbled on a dead goblin and almost fell on the snakes. Kami moved her legs and pushed him away, but while doing that she got bitten. Valri said:

_ Why would you do that? Why did you save me? I have more lives than you and you shouldn't have wasted yours.

_ 'Why wouldn't I save the one I love, even if it means dying? It was the only thing I could think of at that time' she replied.

Kami bursts and loses yet again one of her three lives and she's left with one more.

Valri said:

_Noo... why? Why does everyone leave me alone, why again? It's not fair. You're going to pay for what you've done to my friends, and I'm going to kill you.

Valri was so raged that nothing could stop him. He continued fighting and struggling. Finally he delivered the finishing blow to Ragnarok 's head. When that happened, Ragnarok burst into ashes and disappeared. The sky became clear, the flowers bloomed again, the whole temple returned to its normal state and the priest was free from his cage. Valri cried and cried because he was alone and had lost his friends, but a moment later, Kami, Arok and Vakkos appeared in front of him . He immediately stood up and hugged them and said with a crying face:

- I thought I had lost you forever.

Then the priest got close to them and said to them:

- If you want to fully lift the curse and leave this world, you have to do two things; one, you should return the sword inside the temple, in the box with the Talismans . And after that you need to shout your names to get back to your world. Only then, will the game end.

Kami took the sword to the temple and placed it inside the box. After a while, she went outside with the others. Then all four of them shouted their names and they slowly transferred back to their real world.



When they arrived, they were in the old equipment room, from where everything had started. They got out of the school and went home. Marie, Wesley, Tyler and Amanda were back. Their parents were so worried because they had been missing for three days. Everyone explained to their parents what had happened but they didn't believe them. So the next day they went to school and they all met each other on their way to the classes. Wesley had met Marie earlier and said:

- Can you meet me at the bus stop? I need to talk to you after the classes have ended.

Marie agreed and left.

After that, they all went to their classes. Around noon, the classes ended and they headed for home. Wesley was in the corridor of the school talking to Amanda. He said to her:

- I'm sorry for what might have happened in the cafeteria but I don't think that our relationship is going to work out. Neither you nor I like each other, but we could be friends, right?

Amanda was at a loss for words but, finally, she managed to whisper:

_ Yeah, you are probably right, this wasn't going to work from the beginning, so let's end it here. But I want to ask you, why now all of a sudden?

Wesley said:

- I've been thinking about that ever since we entered the game. I've changed... I have fallen in love with Marie. She saved me once; she was always strong and kind and never feared anything.

Then both of them parted ways after saying goodbye.

Later, at the bus stop, Wesley found Marie and went up to talk to her.

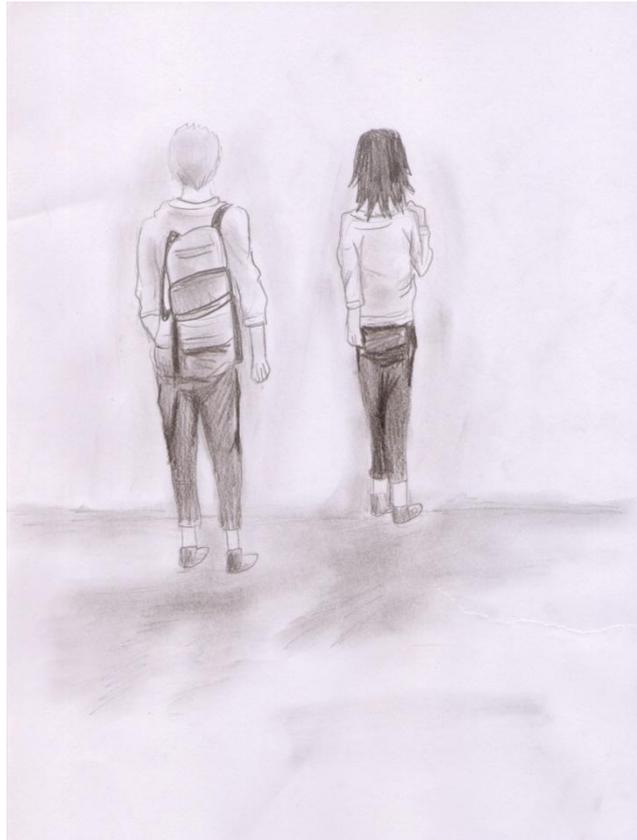
- Hey ,do you have a moment? There is something really important I need to tell you. Ever since we got into the game and things were a bit complicated something has happened to me. I am grateful to you for saving me, in the game I mean... I think you were amazing... I admire you... You were really good at fighting and never lost your temper. But all I'm trying to say is that I have fallen in love with you...

Marie said:

- Really? But... aren't you dating Amanda?
- No, not any more... I have broken up with her because I discovered that I have feelings for you. So will you go out with me Marie?

Marie said:

- Yeah, sure, I would love to.



Thus, the two high school students left for their houses and lived happily ever after because love can appear in the most unusual places.

By Vera Yfanti

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