

*Modern Parables*

"Everything Was Lost"

By the time he came to, everything was lost.

For decades he had toiled. Working so hard, a salmon against the current, to be what he was not. To run with the wolves selling and buying money. To forget where he came from - gritty fingers, caked with dirt, face lined from sun and wind. A man of the earth, the ground, the trees.

He worked at getting dressed. Wearing suits and ties and belts that matched his shoes. He worked at refining his hands. Sheltering them from the physical world, cept for the occasional deal-making handshake and the gentle tap tap tap of his tips on the computer keys.

He worked to remove himself from the life of his parents. The life of his brother. He wanted to be more. To mean more. To do more. To avoid the alcohol and demons. To stop feeling so damn much and so damn vulnerable and to just win.

The family he had was everything. And yet his need to succeed at burying his roots sat like a hard, round, heavy sphere in the base of his throat - heavier and more powerful than all else. It kept him from speaking out when failure weighed heavy. When doubt crept in. When he needed help. When money ran dry and when he did too.

He built his children's lives around his patience and values. He taught them humility and kindness. Humor and how to find peace in nature. He taught them all that he knew. All that was important but somehow not enough to stop him from losing himself. Not enough to keep himself from flailing and failing and ultimately ruining himself and all that was good in his life.

And he came to. In a strange apartment. Next to a strange woman that smelled as if she were rotting from the inside out. Where dust and dirt and sticky handprints covered the surfaces. With dirty dishes on the sink and frozen dinners taking up all the room in the freezer. With cheap furniture that barely stood the weight of the heavy, putrid air upon it. Without his family.

Everything was lost. And then he came to.

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"Time and Place"

Early spring in New England can be tricky. When the smell of fires and the feeling of the cool wind and the sight of the leafless branches and brown grass bring you back.

When the leaves that you had forgotten about before the last snow suddenly reappear as if they had just fallen. When the grey days are reminiscent of early December. And suddenly, you're not sure where you are. And you want to ask.

It can be tricky. When you once again become a child. Carrying a nearly full leaf bag to the curb. Talking about this thing or another with him. When you're brought back and you're not sure what day it is or what time it is or what exactly you talked about. But you want to ask.

And when you're cutting down the Christmas tree and he hands you the saw to give it a shot. And instead of a smooth and steady path, its twisted and rusty and rough. And you laugh and keep trying until you give in and let him fell the tree in one or two swoops. And you want to ask.

Then you come home from school and can't believe that everything is still the same. When he wants to hear all about it and you tell him like the star of your own show. And you eat warm food and speak like adults and you're simultaneously thankful for home and thankful you can leave again. And you want to ask.

Spring in New England can be tricky. You're not sure where you are or what day it is or when. And you wonder if he knew that this was going to happen all along. And you want to go back and ask him. In another time and place. Would he do it all differently?

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"Tahquitz Canyon, Palm Springs"

In a circle, they sit intermittently quiet and boisterous. The sun went down nearly an hour ago, but the tips of the palm trees and the shadows of the hovering mountains can still be made out in lines of blue night. The sound of running water and cool air remind them after the long, hot, unwielding day, they are safe.

Tahquitz is a merciless keeper. Looming among sharp mountains and creatures and miles of dry dry desert, he watches and listens and waits. He knows the orgy of water and plants and shelter will keep them in place. That safety and survival and decades of inhabitancy will keep them there. On the edge of pain and pleasure. Life and death.

Tahquitz watches their work. Molding the land to fit their needs for shelter and food and community. Building the symbols of generations out of rock and art. They know to revere him. To bow down and thank him for his abundance. And to beg him for their survival. But he is a merciless keeper. And happiness rests uneasy, impermanent.

In their circle, the shadows and threats become too much to ignore. And the talk turns to the missing children, the sick and hungry, and the love lost. Anger and fear take control and the unweathered youth beg for answers. Why continue. Why have hope. Or love. Or kindness. Why have at all if only to lose it.

The circle rests silent. Tahquitz leans in with the shadows to hear the silent victory. To revel in the day that fear won. The elder rises, indignant. Eyes reflecting the churning flames of their fire. Speaking loud for all to hear. He repeats over and over and over. Loss and sickness and betrayal is inevitable. Love and hope and kindness is a gift. Loss and sickness and betrayal is inevitable. Love and hope and kindness is a gift. Loss and sickness and betrayal is inevitable. Love and hope and kindness is a gift...