

The Hollow Tree

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Once every seven years or so a great storm comes along and reorders the cosmos. Some storms are small in size, some storms are large. It's never the storm alone that creates a cosmic shift, after all a storm is just a storm, but what makes a storm great always depends on the circumstances surrounding the storm itself.

This storm belonged to her.

It just happened that the atmosphere conspired seven years ago, in a similar fashion, to bring her a gift she never knew she wanted. And now she stood amongst a moment in time, the consequences of a choice she had made long ago, had arrived.

Light rain in the distance disappears into the ocean. Dark dots swim, driftwood, too heavy to be pulled into the ocean, is thrown by the waves back onto the shore.

He must have been no longer the width of her trunk when she was still a baby herself, this curious creature she found nestled between her trunk and thick roots that had developed over the past 175 years.

The first moment she heard that mysterious soft cry, she too began to cry. And even though she didn't understand why, she knew he belonged to her.

And with this great certainty sinking into her core, she began to open a part of her trunk to make space for the child.

Never has she known such intensity and pain, the cracking of flesh rearranging itself, the tension, and then the roar, twenty years, twenty rings of life being compressed, contorted, and released, compressed, contorted and released, compressed, contorted and then a convulsion that reverberated through the earth, through her trunk and beyond her branches.

Her resolve echoed into the sky for all the stars to hear, and then the silence, and then a shudder, the soft sound of gravity, as every tree in her forest dropped a leaf to the earth.

It was the moment that began what would become known as the great hollowing.

And for the next seven years as she hollowed a home for the growing child, all the trees in her forest would drop one leaf during the season when leaves don't drop, one leaf to nurture the soil and to feed her strength.

She was strong.

As the years passed, as the child grew, she would hollow out a bit more of her core, nurturing the boy.

Year after year he became stronger, as did her love for him.

But love had weakened her and she knew that without her care, he would not survive.

The bigger he grew, the weaker she became.

Clouds find their way home, fading into the sky like an echo
falling into emptiness.

She loved to watch the baby boy sleep and often hesitated to open to the morning sunlight. He always woke up as he fell asleep with a smile on his face, no matter the dreams he had, the dreams they shared, day dreams and night dreams, the dreaming was within him.

It was one of her favorite moments of the day, the rising sun.

The wind had been picking up all week. It wasn't abnormal for the child to climb into her branches during storms. He loved to be soothed by the intensity of a strong gust of wind, a gust that rushed through the trees pushing them further one direction, the wind disappearing into silence, the trees whipping back and forth before coming to center once again..

So when she asked the boy to climb onto her branches, like he has many times before, he didn't hesitate..

"This is going to be the most beautiful storm that we have ever seen. Climb higher sweetheart. I want you to see this sun set."

He climbed a branch higher.

She gave him a nudge; he continued to climb, holding on confidently as the wind picked up. "I have a surprise waiting for you at the top."

He's never been this high, not even on a clear day. He could see the clouds laying sheets of rain into the ocean. "Can you see the great curve?" The fog pushed through revealing the curve of the Earth. The ocean was smooth and gentle far and away, but remnants of the storm lingered.

The wind picked up. Sea foam was blowing into the trees. The ocean was snowing. The trees in an abstract dance were pushed and pulled, their branches touching for perhaps the first time in their lives. They've never known such physical closeness. Everything was alive in the storm.

The rain was drifting and the boy was exposed.

"Can you see the sun?"

"Not yet."

The wind picked up. She grasped onto the earth, displacing the soil with each gust of wind, sending a quake into her leaves. The rain ran from her canopy..

He began to cry, "I want to come down, please let me come down."

"It's alright sweetheart. Can you see the sun?"

"No, not yet."

The wind picked up. The sounds of wood popping ripped through the air. She tightened down once more.

The rain settled into a mist. The wind settled into a breeze.

He stopped crying, and relaxed into the swaying rhythm. The waves fell on the beach.

Except for the breeze the world was silent. Everything seemed to exist to soothe them; it was time standing still; perhaps the world's last gift.

"Is it like this for everyone," she wondered.

They sank down into their place and waited for the sun to pierce the horizon.

"I can see the sun. It's under the clouds."

The sky sparkled as if it had been cleaned in the sun's light, its rays flying upon the surface of the water, traveling into his eyes and into each of her leaves.

She eased her grip, relaxing into the warmth.

She has never felt such beauty, except for the morning when she woke up to discover the baby boy calling to her from below.

A gentle breeze blew the remaining moisture off of her leaves.

She fell into a reverie, remembering moments of his life, of their life together. Every moment from the past seven years became present as if it was taking place again; emotions concentrated within her core.

She began to weep, the weeping waters replaced the rain, tears falling from every leaf, saturating the soil. Another breeze blew through her boughs, drying her tears.

Her weeping soul sounded out, intertwining with the whistling wind as it displaced the forest floor of all debris.

And then a deep pain tore through her reverie, ripping her from her dream.

She instinctively tightened her roots once more.

Her hollowed body trembled.

The trees around her swayed and stretched, trying to touch her.

The sun began slipping below the horizon.

She gasped, her swaying top fractured. For seven years she had held him, felt his breathing body and in one snap she was blind to all the sensations of the boy. And before another sound had time to release, her roots let go of the earth, freeing her of her earthly home, as she too fell into the ocean below.

The morning after, the sun rose, the sky was clear, the breeze was gentle.

The forest floor was covered in leaves.

(THE END)