

Of Love

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by LiyaChen (Macao)

Prompt: *Fairytale and Myths Competition 2024*



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Do you have everything ready? Brushed your teeth, tucked in your blankets? Ears wide, heart open? Alright. I'll tell you another secret tonight, then. Listen closely.

Long ago, before there was anything except this story, there was an absence, and within it there was a soul. It was, in fact, the only soul in the world, and so was an incomparably bright and beautiful thing. But because it lived in an absence of something, rather than plain old nothing, the soul knew as truly as anyone can know anything that this state of things, the soul and the absence, could not continue forever. So the soul set off, wandering and lonely, in search of something greater than itself.

Unfortunately for this poor soul, as you may recall, this was a time before all else. So as you can imagine, it was not a particularly fruitful search. Souls do not like to be denied the things that they crave, though this was a universal fact that our soul was yet unaware of, due to extenuating circumstances of there not being a universe yet. But regardless of whether the soul knew it, it was true. The soul searched long and hard but could not find a thing. It continued. It searched crevices that did not exist yet and empty swathes of space that would sometimes part and give way to still less. It continued.

This soul was relentless. You must remember that it will one day belong to a human, and those are some of the most stubborn creatures you will ever find. This soul searched the void, but absence is a clever thing, and tends to use itself to create still more of itself. The absence was hungry, and ate at the soul as it continued its desperate search until finally it had lost so much of itself that

there were only pieces left of the whole, which scattered the earth like snowflakes over the winter ground, and laid themselves to rest.

Don't fret, child, the story isn't over yet.

The absence was not content with this state of being. It was loneliness itself but could not stand to be alone. It had nothing, remember, to work with, so it settled on something that does not exist: coincidence.

The absence sat and waited. Coincidence got itself ready. It spun the world around and whirled it in the machine called luck that looks a lot like a cotton-candy machine, and the fragments of the first soul were flung into motion. Coincidence, you must remember, is not a very efficient worker. But once every so often, at one point or another, those melting strands would cling together into something very nearly whole again. This, you may have guessed by now, is how we were created. It is how we are still being made now—the body provides a shell of breath and life, and a piece of soul makes that house into a home.

It is important that you remember that the shattered pieces of something will never quite be whole again, even if only because the fracture lines can't forget lost time. This means that every single one of us is a bang-up fixer job, bits of things thrown together in a way that only vaguely makes sense, with absence leaving its ghostly once-presence everywhere. It is because of this that so many of us have a penchant for self-destruction, all the bits of our souls collapsing inwards upon themselves in their desperation to search for the missing pieces. The only way in which you escape this hungry fate is to fill the space in, the way one does with the gaps in sidewalk concrete and the cavities in your teeth.

There are a variety of ways to go about doing this. You can search for them, certainly, but oftentimes they will find you on their own. The pieces of soul that once bordered yours are scattered all across the earth, and when you find them, they will know. There are misplaced pieces of you in other people, which will slot neatly into the places you didn't even know were hollow, and strands of soul woven into all that you find beautiful and oddly magnetic: poems, melodies, colors, patterns. This is why you try so hard to cling to them all. This is how they speak to you without any words. We are all trying to make ourselves whole.

So never fear—dream on, child, for the world is a never-ending scavenger hunt and you never know which treasure you may find around the next corner waiting to return to you. You may never be complete again, but that emptiness is itself a gift, for the absence of one thing is only the possibility for the presence of another. And if you are to find the passion that holds your missing pieces, or the person whose fingers fill the notches between your joints quite perfectly, then you must also learn to hold on. You will know this in your heart one day when you are all grown up, with a new moon in the window, whispering this secret again across a different set of blankets.

Tonight, however, your hand fits in my palm well enough, and it is time for you to go to sleep. Please remember your dreams tomorrow.

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