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Damaged Magic

The smell of fresh dewey cabbage leaves fills my face.

Or, at least, that is what I call these large oval leaves that somewhat resemble the faces of cabbages.

Shady leaves that defy gravity by springing upwards under loose thin stems. Leaving a gap off the ground, just large enough for any items I could ever need, my notebook, chest of treasures, and me.

Every season has its lovely niche, the fluffy snow of Winter, the downpour of orange Autumn leaves, or Summer's heated oceans and loose sand. But if you were to ask me which season is my favorite, it would be Spring, when the sun is warm, fluffy bird balls fly around, and my place under the leaves appears with the growth of vegetation.

Earbuds in, I lay on dirt guaranteed not to leave any marks on my clothes or host any ants or other pesky insects. My mother is in the house, doing a few chores, before probably cooking up dinner with a delicious variety of foods before shouting for me to set the table. Her way of making sure I was included.

Living with a Witch mom at our cottage and enchanted yard that is situated in numerous places around the world has its advantages. We can get the best ingredients and foods from anywhere. Sushi, samosas, and fries are all on the menu today. Although she wouldn't say no if I

ask for boba later.

I've finally hit the end of the soft playlist of keshi, mxmtoon, Sarah Kang, and a few others- and before I can switch to another one, I wince to a couple of memories.

But that's to be expected.

My older brother is dead after all.

I swap to some cool electronic music, but they can't stop the electricity in my brain.

I still remember the shapes of electric sparks that were my brother's first manifestation of magic. The gleeful eyes on my mother, and the sense of wonder I had. It was practically my first memory, and my brother paraded around as if it was a miniature show just for me.

It's been a while since I've attended school. The stress of not knowing anything and not knowing what to think or feel in high school was rough. Stranger still that none of my classmates knew I would likely be headed off to a magical institute instead of college afterwards.

It was a strange feeling to see others struggling with stuff I would never encounter in my lifetime. Dreams of animation, programming, earning lots of money with business, writing the best love song that ever was. Worrying about grades and taking the SATs junior year.

Compared to them, I've always been more ambitionless.

My magical aptitude was alright, and my tests were decent as well. My brother always had the lion's share of attention given to him, especially with dad gone, his love for magic, and status as the eldest of the family.

"They say the younger siblings always slack off with their grades and efforts compared to the elders."

I was left alone to ponder my mother's words I overheard as that was the year my brother

went to the Magic Tower, the famed institute located in the newly renovated Clock Tower of England.

I remember tearing up while playing the same games on my Nintendo Switch, over and over again- don't laugh- just because we have magic doesn't make us technologically illiterate.

But what really affected me was how much the words seemed to represent.

What then, could my mother's words mean, other than to underscore my own immaturity? As if lacking dreams or efforts towards a goal caused my very soul to be weaker than my brother's. When I wasn't even allowed to have as much free time or resources as my brother did to pick out his own hobbies?

It wasn't really my fault. Having a worse magical aptitude tended to diminish your confidence by at least that much.

I was expected to scrape by- grade-wise at least. But my soul is weak from my brother's absence.

I got into a couple of alright schools, but mother hopes for me to retake the test, once I've "recovered a bit."

I am finally reminded of the murmurings of my magic tutor from my memories:

If the soul encompasses not only the individual sense of self, but also one's awareness of the world, then magic can be seen as its extension- an atmosphere that we reside within.

"Of course, that's why wizards and witches were always seen as the frail type, although you would regain your sense of your soul as the mana flowed back into your 'atmosphere', while in a state of mana-depletion, you would weaken physically and mentally as well."

Or archetypes of Wizards and Witches in literature- the older ones tended to be more

powerful as a result of their experiences.

And of the physical bookworm physiques of magic options in gaming and historical figures.

That's why any reputable magic academy always had great study abroad programs, class trips, great gym facilities, and a variety of food, books, and other cultural items available. Maybe that's why the best ones had large campuses, to force their students to actually get some exercise from walking everyday.

Under the shade of these leaves, my mind continues to wander.

If anything, I think I would have liked to be doing what he was doing. The cute guitar boy in my class senior year, someone who I never will see again. Honestly, the fact that he knew me enough to follow me back on social media was enough for me.

I pull out my phone and check my apps, my fingers moving in a set pattern like habit. Oh, Sophie's excited to attend classes at the Garden of Eden, a plant-based magical conservatory in France, and is even in a summer program there right now. Maxwell from my high school is attending Rice University and hit a high rank in a video game. That boy is writing songs while attending a program for his musical aspirations. Most of the others are just hanging out with their besties before college. Spending money like they own the world. And BeReals... so many BeReal stories.

Instead of successes like these, I've been moping around with regrets.. I've been living with mom since high school ended a month ago, just resting. I can barely do any magic with this damaged soul after all. It's not all bad. My mother cutting up fruits for me, me drawing what my eyes see outside of the yard or reading a new book whenever I'm bored.

But I can't remember the last time I went out, either alone or with friends.

Even through our garden doors could lead to anywhere I wanted.

Yet the regrets and thoughts- "would she have spent as much time with me now if my brother was still alive" or "what stresses of school could I have been encountering right now" plague my mind.

I enjoy the coolness under the leaves more than warmth these days. Though I won't get sick from it, our house's atmosphere is sanitized a great deal from magic.

Nowadays I'm always jealous. It's like any achievements or original thoughts I've had never matter. What I have isn't even the same type of thing that I want.

What do I want? Social media followers? Grades? Likeability? Hobbies and Skills? Talent? Would I want these if no one else was around? Or was this jealousy implanted in me from my surroundings?

So much of what I want is what other people want and have.

I barely notice my mom moving aside the leaves to see where I lay, letting the sun seep in. I hiss like a cat until she lays beside me and lets the leaves cover both of us once more.

"Oranges" she asks, a smile under her beehive sunglasses, with a plate of freshly cut oranges with their peels next to them on the plate, forming a wonderful aroma.

I snuggle up to her like a cat, taking out and giving her my left earbud, as I pick up a few pieces to take nibbles out of.

She pets my head gently and shakes her head slowly to the music along with me.

Maybe thinking my mother's love was a limited commodity was a mistake to begin with.

And now I wish my brother was still here, so our mom could love him too.

Letter

I initially wrote this piece with the goal of replicating the relationship in the form of value present between siblings in the Miracle Girl. When reading Rita's work, I was especially impressed with the sense of inferiority caused by relatively small differences between the two girls. I think with Rita's work, as a reader, I almost hated the miracle girl of the pair, thinking to myself that she was definitely faking the miracles and her benevolence when dealing with her sister. If she really knew about the difference in treatment, why would she not attempt to make her parents treat her sister better? So I tried to make the older brother of my story more loveable, and the feelings from the main character more from oversights rather than intentional actions from her family.

I began the piece with the idea of 2 characters: a girl and her older brother, as well as a location: under big leaves within the garden or base of a witch's house. I ended up trying to have that jealousy between siblings through a lack of parental attention like Miracle Girl as well.

The primary feedback I received was to expand more on certain sections- clarifying how her brother's death led to her magic weakening due to the paragraph on explaining magic, the nature of her relationship with her family, and more on the main character in general. As a result, I tried to elaborate more on these sections in the final draft, especially including more about the brother's connection with the girl, and trying to have more emotional scenes present.

I think this piece really plays to my experiences as a reader of novels with magic systems present. Usually a good magic system incorporates a conservation and scarcity of energy or mana in the novel, or takes into account details that would make experienced and older wizards stronger. In this case, I chose to write about magic linked to the soul, where greater experiences

would result in a larger soul, as defined by connections to other people and being able to think and feel with other people and places inside of thoughts. As a result, the main character, who is grieving over her older brother's death, whom she has been feeling inferior to, is evidently weaker currently, both due to the pain and due to shutting herself away from the outside.

I've been told before by one of my peer editors that it seems like all of my pieces have death in some form. Here, the death of the brother also seems to negatively impact my main character, but I believe it also contributes to a change in her understanding of the world and the nature of her relationships with her mother and friends. I think this difference makes it different from my other works, especially since I wanted to focus more upon healing and growth, especially from the perspective of a high schooler that is entering higher education. I also tried to write from a female main character perspective, which didn't work out as well as when I used a male character, and I mainly just copied over what actions my little sister does sometimes to make the main character more human-feeling.

I wound up making the family a single-parent household, almost to give an excuse for any oversights or feelings of not enough time being spent on a child, as a result of that difficulty. However, I'm not sure why it didn't come off that well. I think I would need to focus more upon the characters if possible, but it just felt so much easier and fun to focus on the environment and what was possible with magical elements included.

In all honesty, I should have attempted to include more normal aspects of family life and connections in these characters, maybe even social mapping relationships and friends to fully define the state of the main character's psyche. But I found it really fun to play around with a Howl's Moving Castle garden gate, magical plants that served as shelter from the outside, and

even a nintendo switch as well.