The Memories

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The wind was filled with feeling, with emotion and remembrance. The leaves of the many trees shivered and tremored, breathing in the memories. It was a wind rich with the past, the men that had tread upon the soil and the men buried beneath it. The voices of the past hovered on the gusts of wind, there but unseen, empty but full. Memory was a tangible thing in that hidden forest, composed of the breath of the green and growing trees.

It was spring then, and the limbs were sturdy and budding with bright green. Soft sunlight filtered through the leaves and cast a mosaic of shadows on the thick forest floor. The trees were waking up from a cold and bitter winter, coming alive from their yearly sleep. Spring was sacred time, the time of the recovery of memories. The memories once frozen in the ground would enter the hearts of the trees, rising through the deep roots. Then the visions would come.

Darkness, desolation, an empty stretch of land. Then, a seed, a single seed, falling on the hopeless soil. But then the rain came, falling, pouring, and the parched earth swallowed the rushing waters from the sky. The rains brought health to the earth, and thus a tree grew, tall and sturdy.

And then the travelers came. Just men at first; thick, broad, working men, coming to dig and plow. When they had worked the land and grown fields of corn, their wives arrived, and many homes were built. Soon, babies were born, and to protect the young children, a forest of trees grew, tall and

strong. The trees were the guardians of the people that dwelled beneath them, and they watched with many an observant eye.

Yes, the trees were watching and thinking all the while, when the kingdom began and when it faded. The people grew larger in number, and they set a king at their head. They built a castle for him and gave him gold jewels. The peasants farmed the fields and the artisans crafted and built, all for the king, all for the good of the kingdom.

The trees watched and did not interfere, but their gazes became keener and more intense. The trees were wise; they were observers. They were as all-seeing eyes. They watched and learned, never distracted by the need to move, to talk, or to interfere. Watching made them wise, and their limbs shivered with warning, but the people did not listen.

And so the king gave orders to build a wall of stone surrounding the kingdom, isolating its people from the forest. Boulder on boulder was hauled and stacked, and a wall was constructed. The wall severed the relationship between men and the trees, yet the trees still served the kingdom, the breath of the trees filling up the peoples' lungs and their branches constructing homes and houses. But the guidance of the tree was lost, and so faded the wisdom of men.

Some forgot the forest, its whispering winds and falling leaves, its sturdy trunks and branches, always growing, yet some remembered. Some managed to escape the wall for only a moment and breathe in the forest.

On a gray and misty dawn, a little girl tread upon the dew-covered forest floor with a satchel full of books. She lay against the trunk of a tree and read of greater and more beautiful times. The leaves tremored in approval.

A pair of young lovers tiptoed beneath the lowest branches. He told her poems and made her laugh, and she smiled at him.

"You are beautiful," he told her, "as you dance in the forest."

She smiled and kissed him, and the trees looked down warmly and gently.

At amber twilight, an old man stepped into the dark green of the wood, leaning on an old cane. He looked up and smiled, but his eyes revealed his melancholy spirit. The tree limbs shook with a gust of wind, for they knew what he had come to do.

"Spirits of the forest," he said, "I have come to die. I have lived for many years in a land that is not my own, but I wish to die in the land of my fathers. I want green grass and trees, oh, glorious trees! to grow from my body. I want to sleep in winter and come alive in spring and wave my branches in the western wind. Leaves above, grant me peace."

Peace was granted to him, and his time ended. Years passed, an age followed another, and the old man's grave remained unseen. Not far from his grave, the wall still stood, crumbling and falling, a deathly stillness all around. Abandoning the wisdom of the trees, the people had relied on their own wisdom, and it failed them. The kingdom fell into ruin. Darkness grew and fears arose, the people fled, but the wall stood, grim and ominous. And the trees watched it all, gazing and growing, guarding the unmarked graves of both men and creatures. These were graves marked only by the sullen branches that grew and the winds that blew and the peeps of sunlight on the forest floor. The roots of the trees were deep and strong, fearless, and did not easily forget. By them we will remembered, all of us, for the trees are always watching, always guarding silently.

A wet wind whistled with phantoms of the past, rising and falling in pitch and intensity. Sometimes it moaned, sometimes it sang in languages unknown to men, but the trees understood. The forest remembered.

With the warmth of spring would come the once forgotten memories. With the breath of new life in the land and the trees, the old and the fading, the faintest of times, the unmarked graves, are brought to light, if only by the splotches of sun on the forest floor.

Do the trees know of the future? Can such a thing be known? Is eternal wisdom of the past enough to foresee the dawn of a new day, the birth of new life? The trees are creatures of knowledge, but not of decision; no, decision rests in the hands of mortal men.