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DESTINY, AND THE STRANGE MAGIC OF LOVE.



A SUPERNATURAL LOVE STORY BY  
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INSPIRED *MOSTLY* BY TRUE EVENTS

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# **A Time in Awakening**

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*A fateful battle. An injured US Marine who comes home to a life emptied of purpose. A road trip across the country in search of meaning takes a strange turn into a land outside of time and becomes a spiritual journey toward self-worth, healing, and the love he was always meant to find.*

# Campfire Musings

1

Damn, that was more than two years ago...

That was the longest time we had spent without seen each other since we met, and I suddenly missed my friend a lot.

I raised my beer can towards the fire and made a silent toast, wishing her all the best this world had to give.

I drank what was left in the can, threw it into the fire, and let the flying sparks carry my wish along with them, hoping it would find its way to her.

I spent a while playfully feeding the fire with small sticks and some occasional thicker branches that caused a delightful dance of sparkles flying up towards the already darkening sky.

As I watched them merging with the stars above, echoes of past days camping with Grandma came to mind. I couldn't have been more than nine or ten at the time since Mom and Dad were still alive.

We were in Monument Valley at the time, sitting by the fire and watching the flames, when she turned to me and said:

“Fire is a gift from the Great Spirit, you know? It symbolizes His presence here on Earth. It is there, but we cannot touch it, yet it touches us with its warmth and light.

It talks to us; it shows us things; it tells us things, if we know how to look and how to listen.

Do you understand that, Chrissy?”

I didn't.

She nodded kindly at me and then added something else:

“Well, it doesn’t matter now. Just remember this: when you learn to use your Shine and listen to the fire, you will brighten up your life and that of all of us.”

I never understood what she was trying to tell me, and as far as I can tell, I haven’t been able to do anything with fire other than keep myself warm and some little lousy cooking.

But that wasn’t entirely true.

This night, like many other nights, I also got to connect with her memory, and that was good enough.

2

It was full dark already, and my thoughts again dwelled upon that night in Iraq, a night pretty much like this one. Even the landscape was very similar.

And again, I found myself thinking about that woman I kept seeing in my dreams, the one who came to me in that vision, delusion, or whatever I might have been through after losing consciousness. Something about her—something I may have noticed in her voice or the way she moved—always struck me as familiar, but whatever it was, it never came to me.

Why was I thinking of her so often? It was just a dream, maddeningly recurrent, but nothing else, so why was she so present in my mind? Since my early childhood, I have always been haunted by amazingly vivid dreams.

Regardless of what they were about, or whether they were good or bad, they felt like a real-life experience every time, and then I would wake up with an odd feeling of dislocation, not knowing if I was still in the dream or just coming out of it.

The dreams about the woman started shortly after I turned thirteen and would come every now and then. I'm not completely sure, but I think it was a young girl back then, and that she was growing as I was growing too. The setting wasn't quite the same; at least, there weren't initially that many details for me to be sure... Other than that, they were all pretty much alike: I'd walk down a winding lane on a summer evening in this peaceful place, and there she would be, standing against the sunset by some body of water.

As time passed and I grew older, I noticed some differences. For one, now it was definitely a woman that I found on the shore. I could also see and feel my surroundings in more detail, and I could go a little further down the lane until I reached the point where I'd be right behind her. She would turn around to face me, and then I'd wake up.

That night in Iraq was different, though.

For the first time, I went beyond that point. That time, she turned around and faced me, spoke to me, and our fingers touched briefly. I felt them.

And, of course, there was also that other thing.

For months, I had been pointlessly trying to understand what had happened that night; how was it that I managed to stop the bleeding as I did, buying myself those precious minutes I needed to stay alive until the medevac got there?

The support team arrived shortly after I passed out and started caring for my wounds quickly enough. I was also damn lucky to have had a medic and a surgeon on my Blackhawk ride to Baghdad CSH.

All that played a crucial role, for sure. Still, the way I got to improvise the tourniquet to keep constant and unattended pressure on the wound when I did was what made all the difference.

Almost thoughtlessly, my hand reached out to my right leg's patch pocket and took out the worn-out, still a bit bloodstained, red bandana—with its knot still pulled tight, a bit to the left of the clean cut, the severed edge slightly frayed now from years of handling—I'd been carrying with me ever since.

I cleaned it, but some of the stains remained.

I kept staring at its intricate paisley patterns for a while as the reddish glare of the fire cast light-and-shadow patterns in it.

I held it close to my face and breathed deep through it, but all traces of the perfume it once had were gone; it just smelled clean now.

At first, I thought it might have belonged to one of the guys in my platoon and that it had ended up lying on the ground after the last firefight. I came across it later, used it, and it became a part of my delusion at some point.

It all made sense. But that wasn't it.

I asked around, but no one recognized it—and believe me, a girly thing like that wouldn't have gone unnoticed over there. I kept looking into it; I even went so far as to ask the families and relatives of the guys we had lost that day, but none of them recognized it.

I couldn't stop thinking about it; it got to the point where it was bordering on obsession.

I'd always considered myself a reasonable man. Any taste for weird, paranormal stuff started and ended with The X-Files. Still, there it was in my hands, stubbornly asserting its irrational existence and precedence despite all my efforts to rationalize it...

Fuck it. There was no point in dwelling on it now.

I crawled into my sleeping bag, tired and heavy-eyed, trusting the circle of rocks I made around the fire would keep the embers from throwing sparks over me.

I lay back and rested, looking at the stars for a moment, ending the day thinking once more about that woman with what I came to call my nightly prayer: 'Let me know you're real, let me know you're out there,'

and again, I got that recurring feeling of anticipation, the feeling that something was about to happen.

And soon enough, it did.

# Lost and Stalled

1

“I’m not gonna say it!” I shouted to myself over the loud roar of the forced engine and the wheels bouncing off the dirt and gravel road.

Countless rows of pine trees rushed back like blurs on both sides of the truck as it flew rattling over the uneven ground.

“Just a couple of miles now, and I’ll find the damn Interstate again; that or any other fucking road.

But until then, I’m not...

gonna fucking...

say it!”

Still, less than one hour later, and very much to my regret, I had to.

I was lost.

2

I came out from under the tree shades to the top of a steep hill cut across by what looked like Road 126, and for a while, I thought I knew where I was... at least, the surroundings seemed somewhat familiar, but after that, I didn’t know anymore.

The original plan—the one I never seem to follow—was to leave the Boulder area and keep heading South on CO-72 for a few miles... just the highway and I dancing ‘Peak to Peak,’ so to speak. But then I gave in to that damn habit of mine and swung onto a particularly attractive woods road I thought I could use as a shortcut. From there, I took another one, and then another one... until there was nothing around me

but cliffs, vast mountains, wooded fields, and some old cattle fences; then more wooded fields, more old cattle fences, and even more cliffs and mountains.

Further down, I turned off again and took a path I could barely call a road, hoping it would eventually lead me back to some recognizable trail.

It looked old and untouched, as if it hadn't been used in at least ten years.

I drove down that path for half an hour or so, and by the time I was reluctantly admitting to myself I was lost, the engine stalled.

It didn't stutter and fail; it just stopped dead, and everything else went out along with it; the radio, the air conditioner I had installed, everything.

The truck kept rolling on impulse for a couple of seconds until it finally stood still.

I stared blankly at the dashboard for a moment...

I tried turning the ignition switch, but I might as well have been turning the knob on a Double Bubble gumball machine, for that matter; all I got in return was a dry and indifferent 'click.' No gumball, though.

I tried a couple more times, but nothing happened.

I opened the door, got off, went to the front to pop the hood open, and looked inside. Everything seemed fine—muddy, and too old, but fine. Nothing broken, missing, or out of place...

I closed it with a slight sigh of exasperation, went back to the side of the truck, and stood there, hands on hips, giving it a reproachful look.

It was then that the silence struck me.

Some birds were twittering, and a soft breeze was whispering through the pine needles, but that was all.

That was fucking odd...

These days, you're always close to something; a highway, a road, a town; but there was no car engines sound here, no machinery in the distance, nothing. As a matter of fact, I didn't recall seeing any other vehicle since I left the highway a couple of hours ago.

I looked around, puzzled.

The road was lined on the nearest side by a limber pine grove extending up a steep slope. A solitary quaking aspen favored me with its shadow, shielding me from the unusually scorching afternoon sun.

On the other side, there was a dirt ditch—which was obvious since dirt was all there was—and a dilapidated old fence poorly made out of rough branches a little farther. Beyond that line, huge scattered boulders and mountains covered with dense and undisturbed forest stretched down as far as I could see.

No other roads were in sight, though; no farms, nor cattle... not even telephone poles or power lines.

Again, that was fucking odd.

I started brushing my beard as I watched my bewildered expression of 'and now what?' reflected in the truck side window.

On impulse, I checked my phone, but it was also dead—not that I expected otherwise. I was carrying a spare battery, but I doubted it would make any difference. Besides, who could I possibly call with these mountains all around? Hell, I wouldn't get a decent signal here with a sat phone.

I could walk up or down the road and see if I could find any help, but the afternoon had gotten too hot, and I wasn't that eager to undertake a walk of such an indefinite duration or length with no water source in sight. So that would have to wait for now.

I climbed back into the truck to give the ignition one more try, but it resulted in just another 'click.'

With another sigh—a heavier one this time—I got off, closed the door, and used the rear left tire as a step to climb up the bed of the truck.

I had to evaluate the situation calmly. There was no point in wandering off aimlessly; I would only worsen my 'lost' status without the temporary shelter of the truck.

I sat down, legs crossed, resting my back against the backpack. I took off my sunglasses, put them over the cap, and stayed there for a while, considering what to do next.

The top branches of the aspen—that tall, solitary representative among all the other limber pines—were gently rocking above, its leaves projecting sparkling drops of sunlight on me as they fluttered soothingly in the warm wind.

The whole setting was lulling me into a strange near doze I couldn't resist.

What the hell, I thought, if there was ever a perfect time and place to get some shuteye, this was it.

When the sun got lower in the sky, and the heat dropped a bit, I would seek higher ground and figure out which way to go to get some help.

The best option for now was to wait it out.

I closed my eyes, stretched my legs, and took a deep breath, inhaling the sweet, spicy scent of the woodlands. It smelled ancient and untouched, like something that had been left alone for quite a long time.

I could see the sun through my eyelids. It was like watching from behind a red-orange curtain, with an old movie projector flickering its light towards me.

The doze soon deepened further and further, turning the red flickering into oblivious blackness.

3

The dust from the road was suspended in the air. Everything was still and silent; clouds, tree leaves... nothing around moved.

A big, white, old-fashioned police car rolled slowly down the road. It bore a close resemblance to a Plymouth Fury—only, any vintage car expert would agree (or would have, had there been one around) that it wasn't quite the same; it looked oddly longer and larger, even for a Plymouth, and its white paint, though immaculate, didn't cast any reflection of the sun or of anything that was around it. It had the word 'Sheriff' stamped on both front doors. No crest, no county, nor even a state name; only that single word in tall golden letters.

It slowed down to walking speed and then stopped as it reached the truck parked on the side of the road.

The two men inside the car watched the man lying in the back for a moment, though he was never aware of it. He was deeply asleep, as it was expected.

His hands rested limply over his chest as it slowly and regularly rose and fell, the deep lines in his troubled face finally smoothed out.

"You ready for this one?"

The one in the passenger seat, a man in his early 70s wearing a big white Stetson and a matching white shirt, asked the man driving the car; a bulky, somewhat younger guy, mid-60s perhaps, with white hair and sharp blue eyes, and dressed in khaki uniform and matching khaki hat.

"I don't know," the other man replied without taking his eyes off the guy sleeping in the truck bed. "I'm not sure about this one yet."

"He's got this far. You know that doesn't just happen."

"I know, but there's something about him I don't like. He's all hate and fear, and he lacks the confidence and determination he'll need to go through it. He is trouble, I tell you."

“Well, it’s not up to us to make that call, but to our man here in Midland, you know that, and he has already made it. He actually likes the guy. And so do I... kind of.”

“Of course, you do. As I recall, you both used to be pretty much like him in more than one way. I just hope he’d play it by the book this time, no rule-bending, no rule-breaking, smooth—”

“He’ll do what he has to do,” Stetson said promptly, cutting the other man in khaki uniform off. “Some creative latitude is to be expected in his position, particularly in cases such as this.”

“No, it isn’t. Not here, not with the Plan, and not by me.”

A silence fell between them, but not an uncomfortable one. They had known each other for many decades and knew precisely how to get on each other’s nerves, but it wasn’t through silence.

“So, you ready or not?”

The older man pressed on, amused by his friend’s reluctance and well aware of the way his insistence was rubbing him up the wrong way.

“Do we even have a choice?” the Sheriff snapped, finally taking his eyes from the sleeping man to face his friend.

“Always, my friend,” he answered, looking brightly at him with a crooked smile, “Always.”

Scowling and grumbling to himself a little, the Sheriff put the car back into gear, nodded lightly, and they both drove away.

There were exciting times ahead. They both, each in their own way, knew it; they could both feel it.

The potentialities for change and expansion were already there, like catalytic chess pieces positioning themselves for the game of the millennium—or perhaps it was more like those domino tile lines, each tile falling to enable the next; pure potential moving towards an unimaginable outcome, just waiting to be unfolded.

It was time for the first move to be made, and wait to see how it would play out. This man might have the potential to play a big part in it by toppling the first chip and setting things in motion, although his involvement may involve much more than that.

The aspen leaves resumed their dance, swayed by a gentle warm breeze.

A bird called somewhere over the nearby limber pines, and a second one answered back at a distance as the hot afternoon sun resumed its way through the afternoon sky.