

Their Tells

4. Three Parables

1. The Crease

At night, I drink and pore over the maps.

The surface, once smooth with only the ridges of the fold under my fingers, now seems more bruised and scarred each time. I run the digits over miniature peaks and troughs; not valleys or mountains, but the street plans of memory. I find myself thinking more and more often that in the same way I can map my past by touch, so too should I be able to cast into the future; divination through cordiform projection. Reading the texture underneath like Braille and seeking the answers for what has led here, and what will lead away.

I hold the numbers in my head as i keep my eyes tight shut and trace the lines under my hands, like feeling ribs through flesh. Ridges move underneath as I glide over them, repeating the mantra:

"There are 8 ways to fold a 2x2 map

There are 1368 ways to fold a 3x3 map

There are 300608 ways to fold a 4x4 map

There are 186086600 ways to fold a 5x5 map

There are 123912532224 ways to fold a 6x6 map

There are 129950723279272 ways to fold a 7x7 map"

I know if I can only grasp the next in the sequence, the universe will finally change into something more navigable.

2. All Thoughts Fly

Afterwards, we lay in the car, the condensation beading on the glass.

Neither of us spoke; we both knew that that would be the last time this would happen. With your head on my chest I could barely hear your words, but you were mumbling, almost to yourself -

- "It feels like being home, for the first and only time. But then I always have to wake up out of it and it's almost too much to bear"

Finally we opened the doors, the dull ache in my joints and cooling sweat making the car uncomfortable. We sat above the city, perched on the squat rocks that jutted from the moors. The silence sat between us, on that edge between comfort and hesitancy. You pulled your jacket tighter and shivered, the dusk air cooling by the second.

Above us, a plane traced the sky, marking a sigil in its holding pattern. The glow of the lights below tinged the clouds orange and as we quietly moved closer, instinctively drawn to warmth, there was a hushed anticipation in the air.

I closed my eyes, thinking of the druids that had carved the markings on the granite under me, and suddenly, clearly, I could hear great, sad music filling the air. Impossibly but unmistakably it was coming from above, from out of the huge grey sky.

Organs tumbled over themselves, impossibly fast arpeggios cycling over and over; fifths and octaves repeating in sequence and cascading together, at times seeming to move out of sync but always reconciling. Moments of modality were resolved time and time again, as the intensity grew. It felt like a sound born out of time itself, somehow both emotional and yet free from human intervention; a locked, looping torrent of notes diverging and converging, over and over again.

My eyes still squeezed shut, i reached for your hand and enfolded it; a small coldness with a larger warmth surrounding. You squeezed back but in the instant that you did, the music faltered - the notes started to drift out of time, and a faltering hesitancy in the rhythms slowed the oncoming notes to a trickle.

The last chimes sounding in my ears, I opened my eyes. You were smiling but through a face wet with tears. Below us, the lights of the city slowly started to wink out, one by one.

3. New Icons & Places of Prayer

The tree stands by herself, slightly apart from her sisters.

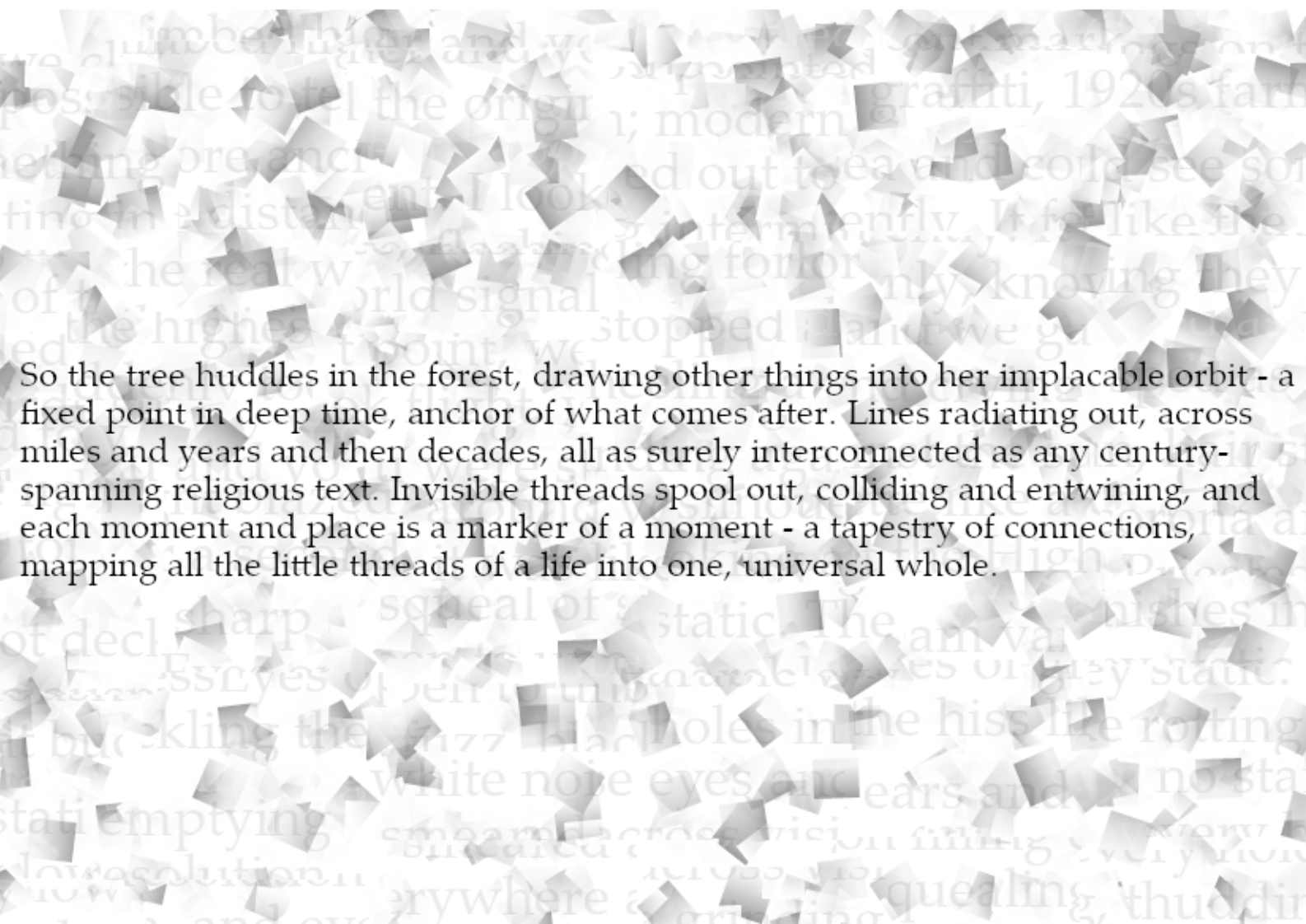
There's not much to set her out; no blue plaque or note in the literature. Largely huddled together with the rest, you could almost argue that she was unremarkable - a drop in a sea of spruce. Save the proximity to a broken wall, itself hemming back a road, you could be forgiven for not noticing; not that you'd be passing through the forest at this point anyway, shorn as it is, here, of byways or concession to travel.

But this spot is sacred. One of many dotting the landscape - shrines to be made pilgrimage to, devotion shown through patronage. In our largely secular times, the landscape of our memory is dotted with these; sacred territory. Objects of reverence. A constant exegesis of maps and letters, ontological texts and graffiti, directional signs and arrows pointing towards the new spiritual.

These are sometimes prosaic - a card pinned to a board, talisman of a different time - or profound, be they standing stones or island lighthouse. But they all create a grid that could, with effort, be plotted on an atlas with string, linking holy sites together; a complicated, personal mixture of cosmogony and private spirituality, explaining How You Came To Be.

In these enlightened times, each individual is the main character in the story they add to and embellish constantly; and these embellishments work retroactively, as new totems and sanctuaries need woven into the framework of one's own set of quasi-religious rules. Rules that come from past pain, past glories; rules that bind and break, as rigid as any dogmatic doctrine. We are our own priestesses, skirting around the higher inner self that we get closer to each day as we pass through life onto the completion of our journey; and we tend the sacred sites, burnish the icons, whisper the incantations to ourselves as we weave the tapestry of narrative around us into a consistent way of living. We begin as Fools, setting off on our long road; along the way, heavenly bodies - temptation - a fall, from height - a chariot to carry us forwards - and death. But after even that comes The World, in consistent order, revealed only through the path looked back upon. A tarot shorn of external mysticisms, but instead archtypes heavy with symbolism to your private universe.

There are schisms of course. Heretics. What nascent religion hasn't had to rework some fine details along the way? But these are not failures of faith, but instead evolution of our worldview into the final, truly consistent looking back that can only come about right at the end of a life - peering back approvingly at the map of days, laid out, with points and places interconnected; holy relics placed like paperweights across the bumped paper. There are regrets and missteps, sure - but all that matters is being able to say that All This Was Yours.



So the tree huddles in the forest, drawing other things into her implacable orbit - a fixed point in deep time, anchor of what comes after. Lines radiating out, across miles and years and then decades, all as surely interconnected as any century-spanning religious text. Invisible threads spool out, colliding and entwining, and each moment and place is a marker of a moment - a tapestry of connections, mapping all the little threads of a life into one, universal whole.

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