

(Static fades in. Then cuts)

The only defense I could have for leaving Roslyn is denial.

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Seriously. That's it. I might be doom and gloom, but all that is just a vision or an illusion until it can have some tangible shred of proof to attach itself to, around which it can properly manifest itself in the physical realm. Meaning that it's a glorified ghost. Until it stops being one. And it can try and rattle drawers all it wants like a ghost tends to do, but maybe I should have child proofed my home in the first place, and now it's a two for one sort of deal.

That might be comforting, but there are a couple of things that are both true and actively work to undermine that belief. For one, it's just not a great metaphor. More of a stylistic point there, but I'll accept that into whatever record this is. And on the other hand, there is evidence. Dad serves as evidence and provides more of it than I could ever hope for. Because all the things I don't know about Dad could also be considered evidence. I consider it evidence. I know that he can do things that no one has any right to do without consequences, details aside. I know a lot of it has to do with memory and power. I don't know the exact form of his regard for people might take, but it is largely instrumental. Even when his kids are involved. Especially when his kids are involved. He's one of those parents who thinks he has complete and total right or power over his kids. To their detriment. To their detriment as some sort of end goal. And I don't know what he did to me, but the more I think about it, the more I know it is something.

Then again, maybe this is the magic of obsession talking. It just creates a problem out of thin air. And I had a lot of time to obsess about it. About everything. This is what I tend to do, after all. This is what I've always done.

That shouldn't be relevant though, right? Because if I broke a bone, that pain would be hard to ignore. So I would be thinking about that a lot. My body would be demanding some sort of resolution, and that would be an understandable demand. I wouldn't be distancing myself from it. I wouldn't be dismissive. I recognized it as legitimate. And I think this is just as legitimate. In a few ways... No, in more than a few ways.

I am in pain, obsession aside. But I will admit that I have obsessed over it. In the silence of yet another hideout alone. In the silence of a road without a travel companion. But first and foremost, in the backseat of Dr. Hart's car while I waited for them to come out.

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Now I don't think it was a particularly long wait. But any wait without mental stimulation will drag on a bit longer than you would like. At least the car didn't get too hot. At least the back seat wasn't so old as to be lumpy or with springs breaking out just beneath the surface. Also, at least it wasn't leather. That's not exactly a forgiving material in times like that. Physically, it was all bearable. It was the mental anguish of knowing what was happening and what I did not do that racked my body.

And it was terrible, but of course, it couldn't last forever. And something came along that could serve as a distraction. Or someone. Or not a distraction. Dr. Hart came out in due time. They came out and came straight to their car, alone in a few ways.

They were always the first to leave. Their patient load was the lightest as a quirk of her speciality relative to the rest of the practice. They served a critical function but in their own way, so the wait wasn't long, and I could be reasonably assured that no one else was going to be entering the parking garage for a bit.

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But that being said, I was still careful I didn't sit up. It didn't seem prudent, but I also didn't wait. That didn't seem prudent either, but beyond that I genuinely could not wait. I had made a choice I wasn't sure I could live with. And the only way out was through.

So when they closed their car door, I immediately whispered, "Don't freak out."

Which is not a good opening line. Because saying that is a tacit nod to the fact that there is something to freak out about. Like how there's a person laying in the backseat of your car that definitely should not be there.

Luckily, they recognized my voice. So crisis averted. "Zaneta?" they whispered in disbelief but didn't turn to face me.

"I need your help," I said.

"Yeah, I bet," they snapped, sneaking a glance in my direction from the corner of their eye.

At the time, I didn't question what they meant. For one, I was in the wrong. But I also just needed to get them to drive to the safe house where I left Lottie and where--as far as I knew--she still was. Yeah, there were a lot of holes in that plan. It was hastily devised. As hastily as any plan could be. But I was making it work.

And I was able to make it work because Dr. Hart didn't ask too many questions. About me anyway. There was the issue of reconciling the story they had been told with the facts of the situation. Simply put, they had been told I was dead. Whereas, I clearly was not.

On one hand, that tale had its benefits, simply in the finality of it all. It was comforting that Dad had no easy way of bringing me back, not with the route he had gone down. No quick wave of his hand will make up for the fact that his entire practice--the practitioners, the donors, and the patients plus families--now all think I'm dead. Even if he can rewrite one person's memories with a flick of his wrist, he can't do that for every single person who now knows, especially not all at once. He can't erase this choice, like he could if he told them I was on a trip or in the hospital. He must have thought of those options, right? He's-- He's a careful person. So this was a conscious choice, on his part, to let me go.

Good news is I'm safe.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

And a liar, in some ways. Because I didn't tell Dr. Hart the full story. I couldn't. I felt like I could trust them but only them, not their judgement and not their mind. They might have liked me, but they were in my dad's camp and could never fully leave. He was their employer: the source of their income and the gatekeeper for those inner chambers of the medical field that every doctor wants to enter into, even if they won't admit it.

So I tried to spin this as burnout leading to burnt bridges. It was the... more delicate story. I couldn't say this was love gone wrong exactly. I couldn't say that I was

trying to chase my first love and reclaim what we had because I don't know you and I was... and I was asking them to visit my current love in order to keep her alive. Consistency is key in a time like this, and it's also the thorn that so many lies get snagged on and pulled apart.

Luckily, Dr. Hart didn't ask for much clarification on that front. Then again, how much of it was luck? I picked out a story that has been played out a thousand times before. So it must have been uninteresting. Compare that to their sense of morality, of medical ethics, screaming in their head to get to this patient. Triaging problems, and all that: I can't imagine it's a habit that doctors ever really shake, no matter the context.

And at that point, their car was almost out of gas. They weren't good at keeping up with it. They weren't good at tracking some of the minutiae of their daily life. So... inconveniences abound. But we both knew I couldn't be seen in that area.

Dr. Hart made it to a gas station outside of town, where it was quiet enough for me to move to the front seat where the conversation would be easier.

I breathed a sigh of relief while they fumbled with the pump. Not that it was entirely deserved. Sure, I had made their life exceedingly more complicated, but on the other hand, mine had improved slightly. It might have been a bit callous of me to take this small celebratory moment, but can you blame me? Dad wasn't going to go for me. I hadn't seen any sign of Mom chasing me, and if she had followed me that far, it was high time to remember that she had other children. And maybe she should do something about that. I think it was just the anger that silenced my worries surrounding her. I don't know what it was.

But that stop felt freeing in many ways. Now, Dr. Hart and I could mental shift from smuggling me the fugitive out of town and towards the medical call this trip needed to be. And as all medical calls, this started with a patient history. That seemed like the easiest part, to be frank. Because I had obsessed over Lottie's health, the timeline, her medications and every other detail for so long that I could recite it with ease.

"Her condition doesn't have a name right now," I started to explain. "At least not one we know."

They nodded, and so I charged on through. As I described Lottie's symptoms to Dr. Hart, they gradually lost all color in their face with every word I said. But they hesitated to explain why, which made everything worse because I knew that hesitation. It was fear of the bad news, of the reaction, and of the destruction you knew it would all cause.

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I tried to reclaim some autonomy in the moment. "I know it's not a good sign," I said. "I've seen this for myself. We've been together nonstop."

"I mean," they started. But there was no good way to finish.

(New music fades in)

I should tell you... I should explain. Dad brought them on because of a specific project they had assisted with in medical school. One concerning allergies to distorted or improperly produced pheromones in bees. The project was meant to be phase one in a larger investigation meant to investigate if a slight distortion in the body's many chemical and hormonal systems could lead a person to create a substance that they or

those around them were in some ways allergic too. But after the bee study, this entire line of investigation was halted.

At the time, it was considered, at best, irrelevant because of how rare those cases would be, and at worst it was horribly far-fetched. But the logic is sound. The human body is a delicate collection of systems working together, and recent trends in medicine--trends Dad himself was a pioneer of--were pushing towards more and more aggressive interventions, the sort of interventions that can buy you years onto your life but make no promise on the quality of that time.

Meaning, that Dad would accidentally trigger one of those responses in a patient through his work only to have no clue what to do about it. I remember one of them. This patient cried tears that had an absurdly high alkaline level and ended up going blind from it.

Because you see, Dad doesn't just use electricity, you know. There's chemicals in prescriptions and used in the moment when applying so-called treatment. There's also a small metal webbing that has to be surgically implanted or slipped in under the skull and guided into place with the smallest of instruments, meant to better direct the flow of electricity and target specific sections of the brain. Never mind if he somehow misses and tells a gland to misfire.

Dr. Hart tried to explain to me that while they weren't exactly sure how, it was that metal wire that caused the most problems. There were many one-off cases and some recurring patterns. It's too many to list, but the most relevant of all concerns a change in the chemical constitution of the breath, specifically in the droplets that come out when you exhale, through a series of anatomical events that resemble the world's worst game

of telephone. And at least one patient's wife was allergic to that. She had the same symptoms Lottie has, responded similarly to the same medications, albeit with different doses. And the timeline was about right to when Lottie and I met.

Dr. Hart knew I had undergone the procedure without my telling them. It was related to my alleged cause of death. Apparently, in the past, I had a brain aneurysm, and Dad fixed the damage with his procedure, but I must have been prone to them. And that's how I died. With aneurysm 2.0, so much more aggressive than the first. Or that's what he said. And it's great that he said that. I see the appeal. It's the sort of thing that can strike a young person out of the blue. No need to explain anything. No potential for follow up questions. And no need to come up with a story to Dr. Hart or anyone about why I have that metal wiring in my scalp, why my breath chemistry might be off, and just how it is that I've been slowly poisoning Lottie for as long as I've known her.

That last part is the hardest to say. So I tried to sneak it in there. And it didn't quite work.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

But Lottie had her preexisting conditions, yes. That just made her more susceptible. It doesn't exonerate me from my hand in this. How those stolen kisses stole moments of her life and that other physical intimacies that I did not deserve from her were pushing her into her grave as ardently as I tried pushing her against my body.

I did this. I did that.

"So if I leave her," I asked Dr. Hart when we were two lights down from the safe house.



“She’s already getting better, isn’t she?” they pointed out, as a way of telling me the truth without being the one to do it.

“So it’s reversible?”

“I would say: only if the two of you never see each other again,” they replied.

And hey, that technically left room for a goodbye, I guess. I mean, maybe if I held my breath, put a piece of cloth over my mouth, you know? It wasn’t a guarantee, though. You can catch the droplets, but there was so much more Dr. Hart didn’t know about the side effects of this. There just... There were so many things they couldn’t guarantee. And--And I didn’t want to take one more chance. So I pointed out the street and the house number before taking out a wad of cash from my pocket.

“Take a bit for you, but the rest is for Lottie. Tell her to take care of herself for me.”

The sudden appearance of that amount of money raises a ton of questions. The only one I could answer was “I trust you.” Which was not the more important one, but it is what I said as I opened the car door and slipped out into the night.

There was nothing else to do, you know. No way of getting the metal out of my head without raising some sort of alert and probably no surgeon that could do it. This was supposed to be a one way street for people so close to death or despair that consequences be damned.

I was never going to not be a danger to Lottie, and I was never going to stop loving her. At that point, what can I do? What is there to do? The only way out of this mess was through. Through the inevitable parting of ways that dug a knife into my chest.

So for all my choices, I have nothing to show for them. Nothing but a path that has likely gotten harder to follow for all my dallying and delaying, for all the destruction I caused along the way.

But I'll walk that path, Lucent, if you'll still have me. At this point, you're all I have left.

(Static starts. Music cuts. Static fades out).

And with that, Season 2 of Temporal Light has come to a close! There's plenty more to this story, but I'm going to make you wait for it. In the meantime, this has been a production of Miscellany Media Studios with music licensed from the Sounds like an Earful music supply. It was written, performed, edited, and produced by MJ Bailey. If you like the show, please consider leaving a review and-or telling many friends about it.

Thanks.