

What the Day Holds

By

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based on a short story

(c)May 2012

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EXT. A HOUSE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE - DAY

The wind blows dust around the dwelling, which is homely, lived-in, friendly: wind chimes on the porch, pinwheels in the yard. But also, moving boxes stacked outside the front door.

Two German Shepherds chase each other around the front yard, barking, playful.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Sam, 30s, rugged, wholesome, and weighed down by life, is packing a bag. He carefully handles a framed picture of him and a pretty blonde woman with sparkling eyes before placing it gently in the suitcase.

One of the dogs enters and barks.

SAM  
(to dog)  
Almost done, Cindy.

Another scan around the room. It's done. Sam zips up the bag.

SAM  
That's it.  
(petting dog)  
Where's your partner in crime,  
huh? Where's Champ?

The dog looks at Sam quizzically. Sam laughs and heads out the front door.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Sam tosses the bag into the bed of a red truck which looks like it could survive an apocalypse. He scans the yard. The other dog appears, an almost identical German Shepherd, covered in mud. Sam sighs.

SAM  
Perfect.

EXT. SIDE OF HOUSE - DAY

Sam hoses off the dog.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Sam towels off the dog.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Sam corrals the dogs into the cab of the truck. He looks back at the house.

SAM

Bye, Missy.

Sam hops into the truck and drives towards the main road.

INT. VIRGINIA'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Virginia Richmond, 60s, full of sunshine, down to earth yet spiritual, steeps a teabag in a mug. She brings the mug to her lips and sighs contentedly. The phone rings.

VIRGINIA

(answering)

Hello?

INTERCUT VIRGINIA'S KITCHEN/SAM'S TRUCK - DAY

SAM

Aunt Ginny! Hey, it's Sam! I just left the house. The movers will be there tomorrow to finish up.

VIRGINIA

Oh great! That will put you here in...uh..two days?

SAM

(laughing)

Something like that. I'll try to hurry.

VIRGINIA

Don't be ridiculous. You enjoy that open road. Take your time. California will always be here.

SAM

Thanks, Aunt Ginny. It will be great to see you. I'll call you later.

VIRGINIA

Okay, sounds good...Bye.

Virginia puts down the phone and pauses thoughtfully. She closes her eyes.

MONTAGE, VIRGINIA'S MIND'S EYE

Flashes of a woman - the same woman in Sam's picture - in a dark forest, beckoning, surrounded by wild animals.

INT. VIRGINIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Virginia opens her eyes.

VIRGINIA

Oh, Missy. What are you trying to tell me?

INT. SAM'S TRUCK - DAY

Sam drives along with his two dogs. The road is desolate, flat, desert. He is singing to the radio - something like Bruce Springsteen. The windows are open.

One of the dogs starts whining. Sam looks over at the dog.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

Sam pulls over and lets the dogs out. They take off. He pours bottled water into a bowl and looks out over the desert as he waits. It is blank and barren. A mirage-like image forms on the desert. It is Missy.

Sam peers closer into the distance. He rubs his eyes.

SAM

No.

The image disappears. Sam shakes his head and looks again. She is gone. A dog barks. They are back. He packs back them into the truck and takes one last look. Nothing.

SAM  
 (to dogs)  
 We have to get out of the desert,  
 Guys.

Sam hops into the truck.

INT. VIRGINIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Virginia is on the phone.

VIRGINIA  
 Yes, that's what it looked  
 like. But no, she was surrounded  
 by animals but they seemed  
 friendly.  
 (She nods her head)  
 Yes, exactly. I have no idea. It  
 didn't seem like a warning, but...  
 (She sighs heavily)  
 That's what I was thinking too. I  
 will try that.  
 (She nods again)  
 Okay. Thanks, Rose. I appreciate  
 your help.

She hangs up the phone. She walks to living room and sits  
 at a table. She is surrounded by crystals. She lights a  
 candle and a stick of incense. She closes her eyes and  
 takes a deep breath. She whispers a few unintelligible  
 words.

Virginia opens her eyes and picks up a stack of cards. She  
 begins to turn them over. They are the Tower card, the  
 Death card, the World card. She looks at the cards.

A car door slams outside. Virginia looks up, then hurriedly  
 puts the cards away.

EXT. VIRGINIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sam's truck pulls into Virginia's driveway. Virginia  
 appears from the house.

VIRGINIA  
 You're here! You're here!

Sam gives Virginia a big hug.

SAM

So good to see you, Aunt Ginny.

Sam lets the dogs out of the truck. They seem tired.

VIRGINIA

(watching dogs)

Well, well, I guess we'll have a lot of company over the next few months! Are you hungry?

SAM

Nah, just tired.

Sam grabs his suitcase out of the bed of the truck. Virginia looks at him for a moment.

SAM

What?

VIRGINIA

Nothing. I just...you look well.

SAM

(eyeing her)

Yes, I'm fine. I know what you're thinking. I'm fine.

VIRGINIA

Of course you are.

(She smiles quickly)

Let's get your things inside. Did you say you were hungry?

Sam laughs. They head towards the house.

#### DREAM SEQUENCE

Missy, blonde, pretty, with thoughtful eyes, wanders through a forest. Darkness surrounds her. She is lost. She falls to the earth and clutches something in the dirt. She starts digging and chanting, "Yes, yes."

#### INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sam wakes from his dream in a sweat. One of his dogs is in the bed with him. She whimpers.

SAM

It's all right, girl. Just a dream.

Sam collapses back into bed.

EXT. TEMECULA VALLEY - DAY

Night moves into day. Trees change. The light changes. Time is passing.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD PARK - DAY

Sam walks the dogs through a landscaped grassy park with a playground. Tina, nine - precocious, energetic, with a big smile - plays in the sand. She smiles at them as they approach. She gets up and runs to them.

TINA

(kneeling down to the dogs)  
Hello, Cindy-Lou-Who! Hello, my  
Champion!!

SAM

Say hi to Tina, guys. What's the  
word, Tina?

TINA

(conspiratorially, checking  
her back)  
Well, Mrs. Poole is evil and Jack,  
the postman, is delivering poison  
to people's houses.

Sam looks around. Mrs. Poole, thirties, with a smile that's too big, and energy that can't be authentic, is corralling toddlers into the front door of a house across the street.

Jack, the postman, 60s, Cliff Claven-type, is delivering mail. He stops to talk to Mrs. Poole. Sam and Tina watch them exchange pleasantries.

TINA

He works for the government. He's  
giving people anthrax.

SAM

(egging her on)  
Really??

TINA

Yes. He's getting paid by the  
higher ups to poison people so they  
will obey the government. There's  
anthrax in your mail that makes you  
think differently about things.

SAM

What are we going to do?

TINA

Destroy your mail. Or, if you want to write me a letter, you need to bring it to my house yourself. And I'll do the same.

Tina stands up from petting the dogs. She looks around.

TINA

We need to invent an alternate mail system. Maybe carrier pigeons.

SAM

That's a good idea. Although I haven't seen any pigeons around here. Just those creepy black crows.

They both look towards the center of the grass, where a flock of crows stands watch, unmoving. Then, Tina's eyes widen. She starts backing away.

TINA

No. We can't use those birds. They aren't for us.

Her breathing becomes heavy. She looks around, panicked. She keeps backing up. Sam follows her. They walk towards her house.

SAM

(trying to distract her)  
Hey, have I told you about my movie?

TINA

(still distressed)  
You're in a movie?

SAM

Not exactly. I'm making one. Here in town. It's a documentary about the Indians.

Tina stops. She looks at Sam.

TINA

Native Americans.

SAM

Right.

They keep walking.

TINA

What's a documentary?

SAM

It's a movie but it's about real life.

TINA

So it's the truth? It's not a story?

SAM

Well, truth is your perception, I suppose. Sometimes some people think things are true but others don't. What do you think?

He looks at Tina. She smiles.

TINA

I think it's cool! Can I help?

SAM

(laughing)

Maybe. We'll see. I might need your advice on how to get some information.

TINA

I'm on it!

Without another word, Tina takes off for her house, stops at the front door, gives Sam a thumbs up, yanks the door open and disappears inside.

SAM

(to the dogs)

What was that all about?

INT. VIRGINIA'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Sam and Virginia are having tea.

SAM

And then she just looked weird for a second. I don't know. It freaked me out a bit.

Virginia puts her cup down and shakes her head.

VIRGINIA

That girl. She has a lot of trouble in school. Her parents are beside themselves.

SAM

She seems all right. Just an active imagination. She thinks Mrs. Poole is evil.

VIRGINIA

Well, then she knows what she is talking about!

They laugh.

VIRGINIA

How are you doing? Still having nightmares?

SAM

Aunt Ginny, I'm fine. Honestly, you don't have to worry.

VIRGINIA

I know, I know. It's just - well, you've been here a few months now and we haven't really talked about it.

SAM

There's nothing to talk about. I loved her. She's gone. I'm here now, getting on with my life. That's all there is.

VIRGINIA

Okay. I just want you to know that I'm here if you ever want to talk.

Virginia goes to the sink and rinses out her teacup. She dries her hands.

VIRGINIA

We all loved Missy, you know. We all wish she was still here.

Sam sets his teacup down forcefully and stands.

SAM

I know, Aunt Ginny. She loved you, too. But she's been gone a year and I - I just can't mourn any more. I need to work. Besides, what else do I have left?

They look at each other for a moment. Then, Virginia smiles.

VIRGINIA

Are you going to that meeting tomorrow?

SAM

(sitting down, calmer)

Yes, the tribal elders are finally letting me petition for permission to film my documentary there. Finally. Geez.

VIRGINIA

What do you think you will find when you start shooting?

SAM

Well, the truth. I hope. History is a muddy subject. I just want the truth.

Sam stares into his teacup. The tea leaves move around in the bottom, forming trees and wolves and figures in darkness.

DREAM SEQUENCE

A short flash of Missy's face. Trees. Darkness. A wolf howls.

INT. TRIBAL COUNSEL ROOM - DUSK

A roomful of people - working class - dark-skinned Native Americans and others fill the meeting room.

A counsel of five sits at a long table in the front, led by Bill, late 60s, stoic, weathered and strong. Sam is addressing the table. There is disorder, many people shouting simultaneously from the crowd behind him.

MAN #1  
No more documentaries about the  
poor Indians. No.

MAN #2  
What is the point of this anyway?

SAM  
(trying to address the crowd)  
It's not about any of that. It's  
about relationships - marriage,  
family. Different cultures and  
views on relationships.

Bill raps a gavel, asking for silence.

BILL  
Family?

SAM  
Yes.

BILL  
Do you have one?

SAM  
What?

BILL  
A family?

SAM  
Of course.

BILL  
A wife?

SAM  
Ye- No. No. I'm..widowed.

The room is silent.

BILL  
(standing)  
Come with me.

EXT. GARDEN OF MEETING HOUSE - DUSK

Bill walks into the garden, touching flowers, trees. Sam  
follows him awkwardly. Finally, Bill turns to him.

BILL  
You can call me Bill.

Sam raises his eyebrows.

SAM  
Sam.

BILL  
So, you have come to uncover our secrets, have you?

SAM  
No, Bill, no. It's nothing like that. I just - this film is important to my wife.

Another awkward pause.

BILL  
How did she die?

SAM  
Why does that matter?

Bill is silent. Sam relents.

SAM  
She was sick. She didn't know. By the time she realized, it was too late.

BILL  
(nodding)  
You feel guilt.

SAM  
(breathing deeper)  
I feel...loss.

Bill takes Sam's hand and holds it in both of his. He closes his eyes. A long moment passes.

BILL  
(opening his eyes)  
You seek truth. You shall have it.

Bill walks out of the garden and back into the meeting house.

SAM  
What the...I gotta get out of the suburbs.

Sam stands a moment in the garden. Missy, faintly, ghostly, appears before him. He is not afraid.

SAM

I miss you.

INT. VIRGINIA'S HOUSE - PRE-DAWN

Sam wakes, rises, makes coffee, feeds the dogs. He makes notes from a book on Native American history. He checks his tape recorder. He changes into running gear.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD PARK - DAWN

Sam runs with the dogs. They approach the grassy lawn where the crows tend to hang out. He spies the birds, converged on the grass, holding court.

The birds flicker for a moment, as though they are part of a fading holographic projection. Briefly, they are replaced with human forms, giant grim reaper robed figures standing in the exact places of the birds.

Sam stops his run, pulls his earphones out of his ears. The dogs go wild, tugging at their leashes.

The figures flicker and the birds are back, motionless. The dogs break free and run to the center of the grass, scattering the crows. They look back at Sam expectantly.

Sam shakes his head.

SAM

Cindy! Champ! Get over here.

The dogs return. Sam gathers the leashes and walks away from the park, looking over his shoulder.

INT. VIRGINIA'S HOUSE - DAY

Sam finishes a cup of coffee and quickly gathers his notes. He is dressed in a nice button down shirt and slacks, with a messenger back slung over his shoulder.

EXT. VIRGINIA'S HOUSE - DAY

Sam walks out to the car, jingling his keys, muttering potential questions.

SAM  
(to himself)  
How would you describe your relationship in the context of...How would you describe the nature of your marriage...

He stops.

SAM  
(to himself)  
Are you happy?  
(laughs)  
Maybe direct is best.

Sam reaches his truck and notices Jack the postman across the street. He double takes and watches him as he sprinkles some white powder into his mailbag. Sam drops his keys. Jack looks up as Sam picks them up from the driveway.

SAM  
(waving)  
Hey. Hey, Jack.

JACK  
(waving back)  
Hey, Sam. Off for your big interview?

SAM  
Yeah...Hey, Jack.

JACK  
Yeah?

SAM  
Um, nothing. Nevermind.

JACK  
Have a good day, Sam.

SAM  
(to himself)  
I must be going out of my mind.

EXT. GARDEN OF MEETING HOUSE - DAY

Bill sits playing with the blossoms on a tree. Sam rushes in.

SAM  
Sorry I'm late. It's been a weird morning.

BILL  
Things are different today?

SAM  
You could say that, yeah. Wait...how do you know?

BILL  
You wanted to see the truth. I helped you see it.

SAM  
You helped me...that's why I've been going out of my mind? The hallucinations? The nightmares?

BILL  
Nightmares?

SAM  
Yeah, I see my dead wife wherever I go.

BILL  
Truth...is perception.

SAM  
Wait, what?

BILL  
What you thought could be real, became real. What you wanted to be real, became real. You see your wife because you have not let go.

SAM  
It's not going to happen. I'm not going to let go.

BILL  
You seek the truth, but you tell stories to yourself everyday that are not real. You live your life by these stories. We all live our life by our stories.

SAM  
And my stories are...

BILL  
That you killed your wife.

Sam stops. He sits on the bench and holds his head in his hands.

BILL  
It's our stories that are the most difficult to let go of. Even though they are not fact, they are our perception. Our truth.

SAM  
I was supposed to take care of her.

BILL  
Her time had come. It was her choice, not yours.

SAM  
I promised to take care of her.

BILL  
You did take care of her. You did everything she wanted you to.

SAM  
But she still died. She's still gone.

BILL  
If that is your perception, then that is your truth.

SAM  
Stop speaking in riddles, you medicine man. Why is my wife haunting me? Why did you give me hallucinations?

BILL  
Because in order to truly understand the plight of another, it is necessary to see their truth.

SAM  
Tina's truth. The birds. Jack.

BILL  
And Missy's truth.

Sam closes his eyes.

DREAM SEQUENCE

Missy in the dark forest. She walks through the dark trees into a light - a beautiful green meadow with blue skies. She walks into the light and disappears.

EXT. GARDEN OF MEETING HOUSE - DAY

Sam is crying. Bill puts his hand on Sam's shoulder and gets up and goes into the house. Sam stays on the bench, looking up at the sky.

SAM  
Bye, Missy.