

Under the Pavilion

By Ariana Ellis

The couple pulled up into the shaded parking lot at 2:33 pm, even though they had been told their room would not be ready until 4:00. Myra Orange was always prepared for disaster, and so she and her husband Leo had left significant time for that disaster to strike during their journey. It was not a particularly long trip, but, as it was March, the air was chilly, and the car did not have heat. The radio worked, though, so they passed the time listening to NPR and occasionally arguing about whatever politics were being discussed.

The road they had been on wound up and around the mountains, and Myra, who was driving, did not like this one bit. It was two lanes, one in each direction, and, whenever possible, she positioned the car firmly between them. Too close to the mountainside and you were sure to be crushed to death by rocks; too close to the drop-off and you'd inevitably plummet to your doom.

Fortunately, the drive was uneventful, and they arrived at Sparrow Mountain Retreat when the bright mid afternoon sun was still high in the sky.

No one was at the desk in the lodge when they entered, so they decided to walk around the property. Upon going back through the front door, they found a stone path lined with tangles of hazel-colored weeds. Myra, mostly out of habit, observed that any number of creatures could be lurking in the dense overgrowth. Nonetheless, she followed Leo as he lead the way to the back of the house.

The back of the house was home to a garden, behind which was row of beehives, and beyond that, a Chinese pavilion. Leo wanted to check out the pavilion, so Myra followed him, gripping his arm tightly as she passed the hives.

The pavilion was large and square, with stone steps, a red roof, and four golden pillars. Leo went up to the pavilion, circled it, then climbed the steps. A labyrinth had been painted on the cement floor, with groups of unlit candles placed periodically around its perimeter. Leo started to walk through it, but Myra seemed disinterested, so he went back down the steps and promised himself he'd come back some other time.

To pass the time, Leo suggested they walk through the woods. He expected Myra to point out all the possible threats they could face, which she did, but ultimately he won. After all, it was she who decided they should go on this retreat. He would be there to protect her, and hadn't she always liked trees?

At the edge of the forest there sat a few houses, all old and built partially into the hill. As they walked past them, Myra looked into one. When she did, a wrinkled face retreated quickly from the glass and a curtain fell across it, obstructing the view.

"Leo," Myra whispered.

"Yeah, babe?"

"Someone was looking through the window at us."

"Yeah, I bet they live there and were curious about who's passing by."

"No, they were watching us. They yanked a curtain across the window when they saw me looking in."

"They probably didn't want some stranger peering into their house."

“What if we’re being stalked right now?”

“Myra. Who would be stalking us? And why?”

“You think I’m crazy.”

“No, I just think you’re paranoid.” Leo saw the downcast look on Myra’s face and changed the subject. “These are pretty trees, aren’t they? I know you aren’t a big fan of pines but don’t they sort of remind you of Christmas?”

“I guess.”

The pair continued their hike around the property, and once the sun dipped lower in the sky and both of Myra’s watches read 3:55 they trekked back to the lodge.

There was now a man seated at the front desk. He was about 35, not much older than the Oranges, and his beard was more dense than any one of the four blankets Myra had packed. He greeted them with a smile and a calm “Namaste.”

“I’m Clay,” said the bearded man, still smiling. “How may I help you?”

“We have a reservation under the name Myra Orange,” said Myra, a little wary of how happy this man was.

The man flipped through the notebook in front of him and said, “Ah! Of course! You’ll be in the Alder room. I’ll show you up there. Want me to help carry your things?”

“Sure,” said Leo, “let me just get them from the car.”

Clay cheerfully followed him, with Myra trailing behind. When they got to the car, Leo felt awkward about the quantity of bags they had for a weekend trip, but if Clay was surprised by that he didn’t let on. The three of them, Clay foremost, walked up to the third floor of the house.

Clay set down their things in front of an aged wood door, handed them the key, and walked off with another “Namaste.”

Leo turned the key and, with some force, pushed open the door. They walked into a sparsely outfitted room, with another door leading into a tiny bathroom. After bringing their things in, half the open floor space was occupied. Leo wanted to make a joke about being it being too crowded to meet fire safety regulations, but he saw how calm his wife seemed to be, and thought better of it.

Myra walked around the bed to the window at the far side of the room and exclaimed, “Oh look, Leo, we can see the garden from here!”

“Nice,” Leo replied, sitting down on the bed.

“We could come back in June and I bet it’d look so beautiful and vibrant.”

“So you like it here?” Leo asked.

“I’m as comfortable here as anywhere else. You like it though, don’t you?”

“Yeah. Yeah, babe. I think this is gonna help.”

The Oranges spent the rest of the afternoon in their room, Myra reading and occasionally sharing quotes she liked, Leo staring at the ceiling. At 6:03, according to Myra’s watches, they went in search of the dining hall, where dinner was being served.

The dining hall was a rather munificent name for the back porch of the lodge, screened in and with one long table spanning its length. Leo picked two chairs adjacent to each other at the end of the table, pulled one out for Myra, and then took a seat himself. He put his head down. Dinner was already sitting in platters on the table, waiting to be served by the patrons. Myra

fixed Leo's plate, knowing he wouldn't do it on his own. She made sure to avoid the foods she found suspicious, and then filled her own plate in the same manner.

They were both picking at their respective meals when a gray-haired woman, wearing a quantity of scarves that many would consider to be worthy of discussing with either a psychoanalyst or a fashion guru, asked to sit in the chair across from them. Myra eyed her warily, but Leo, mouth full, nodded his assent.

She got her plate of food then said to Myra, "You have a yellow aura, my dear."

"What?" Myra asked, sliding her chair what she thought was an indiscernible amount back from the table.

"A yellow aura. You are afraid of loss."

"I guess so," Myra answered noncommittally, and went back to picking at her food.

"You're here for a reason."

Leo butted in. "We're healing."

"Of course. We all are, in a way." She nodded as if this vague statement held some unseen weight. "But, of course, I haven't introduced myself. I'm Edrie. I live here year-round."

"I'm Leo Orange and this is my wife, Myra."

"Wonderful to meet you," Edrie said and smiled, revealing a row of crooked teeth. "I could help you, you know."

"Help with what?" Myra asked impatiently.

"Your healing, of course. I can help you heal. I read fortunes and offer guidance."

Myra's face softened. She glanced at Leo. "What's your price?"

"I don't charge. Knowing I am helping someone is enough."

“That’s very kind of you,” said Myra. “When can we get our fortunes read?”

“We can do it tonight, if you’d like. After dinner.”

When they were all finished eating, Edrie got up and, gesturing for them to follow, walked out the screened door into the gardens. She led them towards the woods, towards the cluster of houses built into the hill. She started up the steps of the one nearest to the lodge, and Myra realized it was Edrie she had seen through the window earlier that day.

“You saw us earlier when we were walking through the woods,” Myra said, feeling a little more comfortable knowing she was not, in fact, being stalked.

“Yes, dear,” sighed Edrie, “I was observing your aura. I decided I ought to offer my assistance.”

They were now standing in Edrie’s living room, which was small and draped with tapestries and scarves. Myra wondered how Edrie decided which scarves to wear on her person and which to put on her furniture. Edrie turned on a few lamps and took a seat in front of a wooden table.

Edrie gestured for Leo and Myra to sit on the couch across from her. She pulled a deck of cards from a pocket hidden beneath her scarves. “Have you ever had a tarot reading before?” Myra and Leo shook their heads. “Tonight I feel called to do a five card reading. Now, ordinarily I would read for each of you individually, but I feel you two are so intertwined in your fates that it would be best to read for both of you at once”

Edrie shuffled her cards and dealt them facedown in a cross shape. She overturned the center card. “This is your present. The nine of swords. You are dealing with great emotional struggles.”

She overturned the card to the left of center. “This card is something from the past that is affecting you today. Ten of wands. This represents burden, though not necessarily physical. Leo, I have a feeling this card speaks to you.” She paused and looked at the card. “Of course, although you are the one with the burden, Myra has the burden of supporting you through this time.”

She overturned the card to the right. “Here we have the ace of swords. This card shows your future. In this case, I believe you will be successful. You will struggle for some time, but in the end you will prevail. Leo will be ok.”

Myra looked at her husband and smiled. “I told you you’d get better.”

“Yeah, yeah you did.” Leo wasn’t sure how much he believed in this tarot reading, but he saw how happy it was making Myra and decided to keep his thoughts to himself. Anyway, the idea that life would stop being so painful one day was nice.

“I don’t know if life will stop being painful, but your capacity to cope with it will be larger than your challenges,” said Edrie, looking at Leo intently. “Let’s turn over another card.” She turned over the bottom card. “Aah, of course. This is the reason you are in this situation. This card is the hermit, but reversed. Leo, I believe you isolated yourself from those that cared about you. You turned your back on the support they could offer.”

“I did,” said Leo, starting to have a little more faith in the cards. “I didn’t mean to, but I closed myself off. I was scared of...”

“Of being a burden,” Edrie finished. “But, in doing so, you made it harder for your wife. She saw you struggle but you wouldn’t let her help. It weighed her down.”

Leo looked at his wife. “Myra, is that how you feel?”

Myra chose her words carefully. "I wouldn't say you've weighed me down. I don't know how I can help you, though, and that hurts. I don't like how closed off you've become over the past months." Leo nodded, so she kept going. "I feel like it's impossible for me to help you at all, so I'm left obsessing over the things I can control, like how many blankets to pack or the least hazardous way to walk from my car into work."

"I didn't know. I'm sorry."

"Honey, I love you. You don't need to apologize. Just please, please, stop trying to fix everything on your own."

"Okay," Leo said, and squeezed her hand.

Edrie waited for a moment then overturned the final card. "Of course, you've opened up more these past few weeks. This card shows what will happen if you keep doing so. It's the lovers. Your relationship will only grow stronger, and you will have a harmonious life." Edrie smiled at them, the corners of her eyes crinkling, and said, "That concludes our reading. I hope I was able to offer you some guidance."

"You absolutely did. Thank you, Edrie," said Myra. Leo nodded. The two rose and walked towards the door, which Edrie opened for them. They stepped out into the night and started walking toward the lodge, and Edrie waved and watched them until they got too far away for her to see.

"It's pretty tonight, isn't it? We can't see all these stars in the city," Myra said.

"Yeah, it's really nice," Leo responded unenthusiastically.

"What's going on?"

"Nothing," Leo muttered. Myra didn't press him further.

The walked in silence the rest of the way back to their room, and then Leo spoke up. “I don’t know why you’re still with me.”

“What does that even mean?”

“You were so much happier when we first met, before I started having all these issues. You weren’t as paranoid. You’ve got a good job, you’re smart, you’re kind. You could be with someone else if you wanted. Why are you still with me?”

“Leo, don’t do this to yourself.”

“Do what? I’m just asking a question.”

“I wish you’d stop being so self deprecating. You know I love you.”

“I don’t know if I’ll ever get through this, Myra. I’m trying as hard as I can, for you, but I’m hopeless. Every day I feel so hollow.”

“Please, just keep trying.”

“I can’t do this forever!”

“You heard what Edrie said. She said your capacity to cope with these problems will be larger than your challenges.” Myra’s watches beeped. Silencing them, she said, “Take your medicine, babe.”

“It doesn’t even make a difference.”

“You know that’s not true. Ever since Dr. Fortmeyer upped your doses you’ve been feeling better.”

Leo didn’t say anything, but he swallowed his pills.

Later that night, after his wife had fallen asleep, Leo pulled on a sweatshirt and shoes and walked out to the pavilion. He climbed the steps, lit the candles with the lighter in his pocket,

and went to the start of the labyrinth. As he made his way through it, he thought about all the good times he and Myra had before everything started crumbling and he got his diagnosis. At every turn, he thought about the times they laughed together and smiled together. On their first date, at the museum. On their wedding day, at Myra's church. The mornings where Myra was rushing to get out the door but still took the time to have a cup of coffee with him. Pulling at these memories like the moon pulls at the ocean were darker thoughts, thoughts that weren't fully formed into words but instead were torrents of emotion. They originated in his serotonin receptors and seeped into his bloodstream, but he tried to focus on the memories and make their glow cleanse himself. When he got to the center of the labyrinth, he sat down, put his head in his hands, and cried.

Myra woke up in the middle of the night to an empty bed. A pang of fear struck her heart and, in a horror-ridden trance, she arose. She pulled on her coat and her boots and walked silently out of her room, down the stairs, and to the backyard. The moon was bright and full, and a silver path of light connected the lodge to the pavilion. A figure sat there in the shadows. Myra broke into a run.

"Leo?" Myra said, voice quaking, when she reached the pavilion. She slowly climbed the steps.

The figure turned, stood, and said, "It's ok. I'm here."

Myra stepped towards her husband, arms outstretched. She embraced him and, voice still breaking, cried, "I was so worried. When I woke up and you weren't there--"

"I'm sorry. I didn't think you'd wake up. I'm fine, I just needed to come out here and think."

Myra clasped his face, noticing its dampness. “Oh, honey, you’ve been crying.”

“Yeah.”

“What’s wrong?”

“My depression is like an undertow. I’m happy on the surface, but it’s always there, hiding, waiting to drag me down.”

“It’ll get better. It has to.”

“Don’t say that. It’s so cliché.”

“I don’t know what else to do.”

“It’s ok. You’re here. That’s enough. Want to sit with me?”

Myra sat on the concrete in the center of the pavilion, her arms around her husband.

“Myra?” Leo said.

“Yeah?”

“Do you think we have the power to change our fates?”

“Yes. Even if we don’t, we have to believe we do. That’s how you keep going. Keep trying.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.” They sat there for a while in silence, and then Myra stood. “Come back to bed. Tomorrow, we can go swim in the river.”

“It’s freezing.”

“So?”

“Aren’t you afraid we’ll get hypothermia? Or drown?”

“I think I’m willing to take that risk.”

Leo stood as well and walked with his wife back to their room. Myra sat on the bed next to him until he fell asleep. She saw how peaceful he looked and somehow she knew it would all be okay; they would heal.