



Down the Road -- Epilogue

Alice slowly opened her eyes. Bright white light was shining down on her. She could barely move her head. "Welcome back, honey," said a woman's voice.

"Mom, is that you?" asked Alice in a weak voice.

"No, but if you can remember her phone number, we can call her for you if you like," said the nurse.

"Is Penelope here?" asked Alice. Her eyes were beginning to focus. She'd never seen a hospital like this. Everything seemed to be achingly clean. She could smell disinfectant that should've been rinsed off. Extending her senses outward, she realized she couldn't move her legs. She lifted her head slightly to see her legs in casts suspended by wires.

"I'll see if she's around," answered the nurse. "But first a doctor has to talk to you, OK?"

"Do you know your name?" asked a man with red skin. His accent almost made Alice giggle.

"I'm Alice," she said.

"Do you have a last name, Alice?" asked the doctor.

Alice's mouth opened and shut. She never needed a second name. There were only a hundred people in her town and no one was named after someone still living.

"It's Gardiner. I'm her father," said a stranger's voice. A man Alice didn't know walked over towards her bed. "You remember? I'm your father."

She could tell the man was asking her leading questions. However, she trusted him more than the man with a funny accent. "Yeah, Dad," said Alice.

"Well, glad to hear that. When she was brought in she didn't have any ID. You wouldn't happen to have an insurance card on you? We also need you to fill out some...," the doctor was interrupted by a strange fuzzy sound. The next thing Alice remembered, the doctor was walking out of the room.

"Sorry, I had to end that conversation. It was touching on dangerous ground. How do you feel?" asked the stranger.

"What do you mean, end did that conversation?" asked Alice.

"It's something I can do. You're in a place called Silver Springs, New Mexico. Last I checked it was still part of the United States. Your legs are broken, but in a good place. You'll be able to walk with time. Believe it or not I'm a friend of Phyllo's," said Mr. Gardiner.

"What about Penelope? What about...," she placed her hands on her stomach that was deflated like an old wineskin. She looked up and almost tried to stand before she felt sharp pain in both her legs.

"It's okay, Alice. He's right here," said Penelope holding a small, almost blue, wrinkled little baby in her arms.

The Dark Master...

Several of the pool tables were broken. The bar was smashed. There were dead bodies scattered about. The Dark Master in his rage had ripped the throats out of a few people just for entering his bar. There were toys scattered across the floor. In the middle of the toys sat the Dark Master. A hot wheels race track looped around him in a circle. Strategically placed along the racetrack were little motorized car accelerators. Each time a car rolled towards them it would grab it between two foam wheels and boost it down the track to the next accelerator.

He reached out his one perfect hand and touched one of the cars spinning along the track. The car rippled and twisted. The Dark Master accelerated the motors spinning the cars faster and faster around the track. The distortion wave grew. He giggled to himself and started to make more plans.

Bob...

Bob didn't make it far on his twisted leg. He sat down next to an abandoned telephone pole along the road. A man on a cart drawn by two six legged horses stopped and offered him a ride. The man was missing one eye and wore a long floppy hat over his scraggly gray hair that ran down to his waist. Around his neck hung a black iPod. It had a cracked digital display of an hourglass. The top half of the hourglass was, of course, filled with shiny sand and the bottom with dark. He offered Bob a coconut filled with lime and rum. "It looks like you could use this more than I could," croaked the old man. The cart was filled with produce and half broken technology.

They arrived at the town of Two Bits that evening. Bob was dropped off at the local quackery where a reluctant and slightly intoxicated doctor did his best patching up Bob's wounds. They drained the puss and splinted Bob's leg. The bones in his arm were reset and placed in a cast. The wounds to his face were dressed. He slept for a day and a half before waking up to a sweet faced nurse that should've gotten married 10 years ago. Against hers and the drunken doctor's orders, he grabbed a set of rickety crutches and left the two-room hospital. The town was made

of adobe red clay like you'd see in a Tex-Mex town somewhere near the Canada border of Bob's world.

Bob entered the sheriff's office and was greeted by a deputy who quickly offered him a chair. Everyone in the town knew about the stranger the trader brought in two days ago. "So, would you like to fill out a report on the gang that did that to you?" asked the sheriff. The man look like the spitting image of Wilford Brimley.

"No sheriff I'm here to turn myself in," said Bob.

"Son, let me just say this real simple. You're stranger in this town. No one knows you. Whatever you done somewhere else hasn't traveled here. You are who you say you are and we like it that way. Now if troubles come and down that road looking for you. We will let you walk away. By the looks of you, you ain't getting too far anyway. If trouble isn't coming down that road, you best keep your mouth shut. We can probably find you a job and you could start a new life. We're a forgiving place," said the sheriff. His voice was stern, but his face looked grave.

Bob swallowed, "I understand sir. And that's right kind of you. Forgiveness is what I want, but man has to atone for what he's done first, be for he gets absolution."

"Yeah, I guess a man has to do that. But here, you are who you say you are," said the sheriff.

Bob reached into his pocket and pulled out the gun he called Yod. The weapon was battered and rusty now. The thing was an albatross around his neck. It was something he couldn't escape. "I shot my brother with this gun. I've been running from my guilt through time and worlds. The word repent means that you're sorry. It also means you recognize what you've done and changed your ways. I need your help finding forgiveness," said Bob.

"The trader says you're a traveler and a finder. You reached the end of your thread?" asked the sheriff.

"Not yet."

The sheriff picked the gun up off of his desk, opened the breach, and inhaled the smelled deeply. His eyes rolled back into his head and Bob could tell he was using some kind of power. *What other job is there for a man that can smell history in a small town?* thought Bob.

When the sheriff returned to the present he gave a quick nod to his deputy who gently brought Bob up onto his feet. The deputy put handcuffs on Bob and walked him back to the small hospital. There he was handcuffed to the bed. In two days they held the trial where Bob was the only witness for the prosecution. The town map keeper defended Bob before the town.

The trial only lasted one afternoon. The whole town showed up to watch a man testify against himself. The only visitor they had seen in two summers, came to charge him self with a crime. When it was all over the town drew lots to see who would be the jury. The jury then passed

judgment by casting sand on the scale. Each person was given 1 gram. The final vote was seven dark grams to five shiny.

They took Bob back to the hospital where he sat on the bed unhandcuffed. That night the door was left open as the doctor tried not to be too obvious. Bob stayed the night laying on the cot. He was feeling better and didn't need the crutches to walk. The nurse had applied an ointment of shiny sand to his wounds. It was a luxury that he knew the townfolk couldn't truly afford. He was grateful to them for all they had done and were trying to do. The hospital was left open for seven days as the town slowly made the gallows. Bob waited patiently.

On the sixth night Bob was grabbed from his bed. He was thrown on the trader's wagon and wheeled out of town by a group of men wearing masks. They poked him with clubs and threatened that he wouldn't see justice in their town. They took him to a bonfire near the river and told him if he didn't run now they would cook him over the fire, slowly like a Midsummer roast. The mob looked awkward and uncomfortable. "Sheriff, the mask doesn't suit you," said Bob. He limped his way back towards the town leaving the men to feel stupid in their masks.

On the seventh day, in the morning Bob walked out of the hospital and stepped up onto the gallows. He could see threads all around him burning. He had all the possibilities in the world. He could walk away from this fate at any moment. The one true silver thread passed from him into the rope of the noose. He stepped onto the smooth wooden log and try to keep his balance waiting for the rope to be placed around his neck. Bob saw two flesh crafters standing in the crowd. They had come to harvest Bob's organs. He nodded at Toby and Edgar. They nodded back.

As the rope came down, Bob could see another world through the opening of the noose. Inside that opening Bob could see his brother Brian standing above the crowd surrounded by a halo of golden light. His face was angelic and reminded him of Jesus. Many wondered if it was Jesus in front of him. He slowly realized the idea of Jesus and his brother and forgiveness were all one and the same. He stretched out his hand towards his brother and stepped off the log.

Carthage...

Mr. Gardiner drove as Alice and Penelope sat in the backseat. Little Michael was so happy to finally be able to sit up front without using the car seat. In two more years, he would enter elementary school. He was totally flying through the flash cards. His sharp blue eyes ran a strong contrast to his olive skin and curly red brown hair. When the doctors explained that Michael was a mixed race child Alice laughed and said, "I'll say he's mixed." Penelope had to explain it to her. Neither her nor Mr. Gardiner really cared or questioned. Michael was a perfectly happy little boy.

"Are you sure you two still want to do this?", asked Mr. Gardiner. He pulled the car to a stop outside of the precious moments Chapel in Carthage, Missouri.

"Leave the dragon running," said Alice. They were both dressed in long yellow raincoats and hats. They opened the lid to the trunk and took out an aluminum baseball bat for each of them.

"We've got five minutes tops," said Penelope.

The two of them moved quickly and smoothly through the Chapel. In front of them was the sea of chubby faced figurines with dull doughy eyes. "For Phyllo!" shouted Alice and she swung her baseball bat.

Somewhere not in America...

There's a pond in a forest. A secluded little glade that only the innocent know about. On a rotten little stump sits a boy. His hair is red instead of blonde. His gossamer wings aren't dirty. He wears a checkered shirt over his clean cuffed overalls. His eyes are green and not piercing blue. He looks at the world with light and innocence not with creepy knowing. He is looking into the pond and sees another world in its reflection. He watches the precious moments figurines being smashed. A cascade of porcelain dust showering the banal tour bus of senior citizens from Missoula, Kansas. He watches the rapture of Alice and Penelope as they alter the world just a little bit. He puts a harmonica in his mouth and plays "Ode to Joy" as he watches from afar.

The end

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