



Narrator Intro

It's the start of a new year. For many, it's the perfect time for a fresh start. Resolutions and plans are made to change their lives, to recommit to their health, or to start something they'd always wanted to do. For others, it's merely the changing of a calendar, another series of numbers to live through as the world continues on, for however longer they... or we... have.

However you choose to look at it, it's February. Whether you're progressing with resolutions, hit an obstacle, or just don't care to make them, we've gotten through the first month already. And we are back here, for the start of a new story.

It's called A Piece of Somewhere Else.

This is a story about choices. It's a quick one, and it'll lead into the next story soon enough. And then the next one, and then ... well, we'll let you find out. You're going to help us do it.

If you're new to Witchever Path, here's how this goes: the storytellers begin our tale. We introduce you to your protagonists, we set the initial scene, and then the episode with a character needing to make a choice. A choice that you will help with by voting on our website. After a week, the majority's decision dictates the script we record and produce for the next episode, and then we do it again.

We do this until the story ends. How fast is that? It depends on what you choose.

Characters have died horribly after three shows, and some characters even had a year of episodes to accomplish their goals. We're prepared for every scenario, but we take into account every choice you made in the story in its finale.

Let's create something together, shall we?



Written by Etienne LaFond



This was meant to be our anniversary hike. You decided to stay back at the cabin, though you didn't explicitly say so. Every time I started to talk to you, you used an appliance, or ran the water in the bathroom or kitchen. It was overstimulating. Each new noise agitated me, so I got my bag, finished getting dressed, and headed out on my own. I left a message for you on the dry erase board by the coat rack. I hope you read it before I'm back.

The stillness in the woods brings me comfort. I breathe in the crisp, forest air. And that brings with it a perspective that the fight we just had doesn't matter. That the small amount of time we had arguing is not equal to the 48 months we've been together. Breathing out, though, I'm left deflated, the only thing inside me is the truth that this fight isn't over.

As I keep reminding myself, it's our anniversary. We came up here to refocus and create, like we wanted to do for over a year. To be in nature, away from the constant noise of our neighborhood.

You didn't come with me on this hike, because I caught you writing to Amaya. Amaya, this gorgeous, fun artist whom you've been collaborating with for two months on a performance piece at the Capitol Center. Amaya, who gets my name wrong every time we see each other, whose jokes make you laugh harder than you do when we're home alone. Amaya who is definitely better looking than I'm ever going to be again.

She's young, and shares your culture.

I'm still trying not to say the wrong thing half the time.

Out here, we're supposed to be collaborating, too. The only breaks in our project were to focus on the two things that mattered most: nature... and us. All I see is covered in snow, giving the impression everything out here is connected. Except you and me. Or maybe ... I'm the only thing that's not linked to anything or anyone. Less than a quarter mile on the trail, I'm already picking up the sack of doubt and darkness I carry everywhere else.

I breathe in, and I hold it. Releasing it slowly, I walk further away from you. From all the distracting uncertainty of trying to hold this thing of ours together and toward... something quieter.

No one's been out here in days, not since we arrived. Out here, the wildlife are getting a chance to walk these places, unbothered by the hairless apes called humanity. That's what my father called our species. The phrase still rattles around in my head. But historical context and the slurs that thrive on the internet keep me from using it out loud. And that's the way language is *supposed* to work. It evolves, and when something takes on a grosser meaning, you find a new way to express yourself. Maybe I overthink it. Maybe I'm overthinking you texting someone who obviously is making you feel inspired and happy. Maybe the porcupine tracks that are crisscrossing my path are going to lead me to see one, up in a tree, eating bark. I don't know.



[strange sound, a sound that borders on an organic deer call and a car horn]

Whoa. What was that? Okay, back to the task at hand.

To the left of me, there are some turkey tracks heading West. Only one turkey, from the look of it. It's a big one, probably looking for acorns. There's a big tom that rules the park near our apartment, chasing joggers and bikes without any fear of consequence. You're afraid of the very *idea of him*, but out here, it's likely the turkey will keep its distance. In the city, people are just another nuisance... out here, everything's a potential threat.

Well, by the look of it, the snow isn't too deep. Following this well-worn trail is going to just lead me to the road, or somewhere closer to other folks. All right, turkey, I'm convinced, Let's follow the bird.

When we were new, you and I would walk trails. Just like this. I'd show you signs of where animals rested, or broke through the dirt to find something to eat. One Spring, we found the torn bark of a white birch, the trunk battered and bloody. You were nervous. It was mating season, and the male moose up North were shedding their velvet in order to fight off rivals. I've known that since I was a little boy, but I didn't want to mansplain that to you, so I just said "OH I KNOW WHAT THIS IS! Oh my god!" And you laughed at me being corny, but you liked the explanation and shared that fact with people back home.

Speaking of digging through dirt, I'm looking at a spot where the turkey had been digging for food. There are some acorns in this little patch of scraped ground. I find a little twig. I poke into the muddy slushy stuff. He'd been digging for a bit. His trail leads through the brush and [strange sound, is it a horn, or an animal]

What the hell is that?

[strange sound again]

There it is again.

As soon as you would have heard that, you'd have said "nope" and walked back. You might be right to do it. I love figuring things out like that. It's a compulsion. White people nonsense, you call it. I've heard Blanco a lot recently, when walking past our room while you're on the phone. I'm worried it's about me and not some random person or obstacle in the way of your stuff. I used to just ask you. But I'm more afraid of the tension in the air now. The familiar brings more dread to me than the unfamiliar does to you, so I say "nope" to heading back and, instead, I follow ...

[strange sound] ... whatever that is.

The wind picks up behind me. With it comes the smell of the wood stove from our cabin. I could turn back to you. To come back, apologize and just try to salvage all of this, somehow. But I'm out here to cool down, to make sure I'm seeing what we're going through clearly, and to give you time to process without me there.

[sound of horn again]



Okay, there's that sound. Let's solve this mystery. Let's find out what that is. White people nonsense away.

The tracks lead me to a cluster of brush. Scanning the trees, I don't see anything in them. No mammals, not turkeys, nothing. Just underneath a thin covering of snow, I can see the thorny vines of what I think are blackberry bushes. I didn't even know they grew out here. There is a small gap between two of them, and the turkey's tracks lead into it. There's a two-foot-tall rock I can stand on so I can look over the brush. I don't see any signs of the tom anywhere. The woods just carry on around this mess. I could walk around it. But I remember you scolding me for not being as playful as I once was in the beginning. You're right. I don't play anymore. And because I know you're right, I decide to crawl through the hole in the bush. Going around is sensible. I'll save being sensible for the cabin.

Ah, damn it. The thorns catch in my coat, my gloves, and even my hat. The gap is thinner than I thought it would be, or I'm not as thin as I was. Whatever. They scrape against the weatherproof fabric of my coat, occasionally piercing it. I'm feeling lucky until one of them scrapes my eyebrow. The hot pain of the cut brings tears to my eye. I get down on my stomach and start to squirm through the hole. My eyebrow is throbbing. Drops of red fall onto the snow in front of me and into the ruined half of a turkey track.

[sound of snow crunching, and the breath of something... unnatural]

"What?" That's from behind me. Something is there. From the sound of it, it's big. I gotta get out.

The passageway through the thorns feels claustrophobic. I can't look back. I pull myself forward on my belly, trying to avoid getting caught on the thorns. Whatever is behind me is scraping at the snow in front of the tunnel, it sounds frustrated and angry. I don't think it can get in here, but then it pushes against the thorns. Vines snap and I hear it groan in pain. Clumps of snow begin to fall on me.

Move, Philip, move! Fuck!

I power through, come out of the bush and push my glove onto my cut.

I regret it instantly.

The throbbing pain spreads to behind my eye. I'm such an idiot.

I stand up, eyes closed and breathe in. Hold the breath, listen for the animal behind me. I've got my knife. It means I'm going to get hurt. Nobody gets out of hand-to-hand with an animal without a wound. But I hear... something walking away and then... Nothing. Okay. Breathe out. Breathe in... yeah, it's not even pacing out there. The pain is just a distraction. I'm warm, not too wet, and the cut is minor. Breathe out, feel the cold on my skin. Concentrate on the feeling. Breathe in,. Count to twenty. All right, all right. Breathe out. Whatever it is, it's given up. Okay I'm gonna open my eyes.

"What the ..."

I'm standing on the edge of a small clearing, surrounded by frozen brush. It's higher than my forehead. I didn't see any of this before I crawled through. Just the trees beyond. The clearing is thin, about two people wide, leading about forty feet to my right. The brush is dense, almost like solid walls. There are no gaps, except the one I crawled through.



“Oh no...”

I look up to see the branches above bending and an ungodly amount of snow begins to drop from the trees.

“SHIT SHIT SHIT”

The tree continues to shed its snow, and ends with a muted thump and rustling of pine needles. I brush some snow out of my collar and look at where the rest of the pile had fallen. Right on the way I came in, completely burying the exit.

“That’s just great Philip, that’s just fucking great” You’ll read me the riot act when I get home, judging me for doing this stupid walk alone in the first place. This pile is fucking immense.

The wind picks up and I can hear the groaning of the tree branches. Oh... I don’t like the sound of that.

Being buried alive wasn’t the type of cooling off I had in mind. I try to call you, but you’re not picking up. I text instead, but it fails to get to you. The signal on my phone keeps changing from NO SERVICE to ROAMING. I have to figure this out myself. Digging my way back out could take a couple of hours. I don’t even know if the hole exists anymore. I could walk further down the clearing, maybe I can find another way out. Where the fuck are those turkey tracks?

Fuck. Snowfall has covered them. All right, Philip, think. What are we gonna do?

Outro

Well, it looks like Philip is in for it now. What do you want him to do? Should he dig out the hole and try to go back the way he came, or try to find another way out of the clearing? You can vote now at WitcheverPath.com/vote. You have until February 14 to decide.

This episode was written by Etienne LaFond and produced by Witchever Path LLC. Voice and principal foley by Etienne, with supplemental sound by Audio Hero. The song Burning Karma by Robert Ruth comes courtesy of epidedemicsound.com!

The Witchever Path Theme Song was written and performed by RYDR.

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