

Moonscape

On the other side of a painting there's a dreamy world, where the unreal becomes real; where colors move like bodies and flinch at the first sign of assumption.

And in the morning the moon is just rising.

Adventurers howl; they're stuck in a loop of space, and soon the cage robs them of their desire to wander.

In such a world there is no knowing which, of course, is wise...



Claudia was sitting at a round dinner table, feeling an odd mixture of perplexity and contentment. Uncle Kent, his girlfriend Melanie, and Claudia's parents filled the other four chairs surrounding the wooden table. The whole house was made of grey-green timber. There were questions under Claudia's skin, itching to be asked, but she couldn't.

Uncle Kent's and Melanie's story about their trip to Australia played like soft background music, their voices echoing, but their words not sticking. Claudia couldn't remember Uncle Kent ever mentioning that he wanted to go to Australia.

She wanted to see their faces because it had been so long since she'd seen them last, but her vision kept going in and out of focus. The company was nice, but she needed to find a way to see—

A white rabbit with clocks for eyes hopped onto the center of the table. It began nibbling up the green table cloth like it was lettuce. Familiar, yet unfamiliar symbols etched into the table peaked out beneath the rabbit's meal.

—there were so many people wandering around the wooden house. The only one Claudia recognized was Aunt Lynn. In the kitchen now, she didn't have time to wonder where her other loved ones had vanished. She was just glad she could see her Aunt Lynn's face with more clarity now. However, Aunt Lynn's eyes were rapidly darting back and forth from the oven to Claudia's several times, before settling on Claudia with an intensity that unnerved her. There was fear and a warning in that stare, but Claudia had forgotten how to ask questions.

A man without a face walked through the kitchen and into the next room with a casual, yet watchful air about him. When he was gone, Claudia tried her best to ask what was wrong, but she could only tilt her head to the side and raise her eyebrows. Aunt Lynn grabbed her by the wrist and dragged her through a hidden, small doorway that led to a maze of hallways. Aunt Lynn pulled her along with purpose, navigating the maze with ease, while it all blended into a dark grey blur for Claudia. Eventually, Aunt Lynn had them pause at the mouth of the last hallway. It faced a room with a door that had been left ajar. Before crossing, they waited until one of the other lurking faceless men walked far enough down an adjacent hallway that he wouldn't spot them. Quickly and quietly, the two women dashed across and opened the door.

Beyond it, they found themselves in a room with a tall, wide, and clear glass tank buzzing with energy at its center. From what Claudia could see, the pulsating blue light contained inside was causing the droning sound.

“It’s what’s keeping this house aloft,” Aunt Lynn explained, laying her left hand over the glass. A tiny string of blue light extended from the main bolt to where her hand touched the surface. In her other hand there was a large hammer Claudia hadn’t noticed before.

The questions scratched at Claudia’s throat.

“If I hit it, we’ll all die,” Aunt Lynn said, longing clear in her voice. “Should I hit it?” She asked. Without waiting for an answer, the blue lightning reflected in her overblown pupils, Aunt Lynn took a step back, lifted the hammer, and began to swing it at the tank...

... shadows swallowed Claudia’s surroundings. Out of the dark, a human skull rolled across the floor until it rested at her feet. When Claudia took hold of it with both hands, black vines sprung forth from the empty eye sockets and coiled their way up her arms. The tendrils plunged through flesh and into her heart; terror was racing in time to each beat. The skull’s crown split open and thick, white vapors smelling of lavender floated up and through her nose, all the way to her brain; a sense of overwhelming peace flooded her perception. Still, fear pounded in her veins. Trapped, Claudia stared helplessly at the skull, pleading with her eyes for a way out. As she looked death in the face, the skull’s teeth turned fiery-gold. It grinned crookedly up at her, and obligingly opened its mouth, hinting...

“NO!” Claudia roared, sinking to her knees with the effort it took to speak.

Aunt Lynn’s swing missed the tank. The hammer went flying into the wall. They could hear heavy footsteps approaching. Aunt Lynn locked eyes with Claudia, her expression equally desperate and unhinged—

tornadoes tinged

green

countless leaves

sweep
 sight
 away
 underneath
 invisible wings
 grasslands rush by
 wolves for wind
 footsteps
 creak
 she, and she, and she
 leap
 e c h o i n g
 t h r o u g h
 front door's
 gap

—Aunt Lynn and two other women had leapt to their deaths from the front porch. Claudia hadn't seen it, but felt like she remembered seeing the wind thrashing through their hair before they took flight. She wasn't sure if she had known the other two; she felt a forgotten tie to them, but all she had were mismatched pieces of memories to string together.

As much as everything ached with sadness and the weight of her unasked questions, Claudia knew now that the house was flying like a plane, and a plane needed a pilot. She went to the only window in the house, but no one else was there. She briefly considered going upstairs to see if anyone was still around or alive. Yet, the thought of potentially running into one of the

faceless men cemented her feet. It felt like a better idea to ensure the house didn't crash into a mountain or something else.

A strange certainty came over Claudia as she stepped up to the large window. She didn't know how, and she couldn't ask why, but with the thrum of power singing in her body she knew she could fly the house to safety. The flying patterns of the house followed the movements of her hands and arms, and she leaned her torso back to slow their speed down to a less blurry pace. She'd never seen the landscape before her so vividly during her journey here. A forest eventually came into view; she hardly noticed, stuck as she felt on the word "here." There was a question mark on the tip of her tongue, but it flew off, forgotten when she nearly crashed into a snow-covered evergreen.

She decided to land when she saw a spacious clearing with a nearby pond. The front door wasn't far from the guiding window, so once she felt the house settle onto solid ground, she ran outside to follow the pull she couldn't ignore. As soon as she stepped off the porch, large roots sprang out of the bottom edges of the house and dug themselves deep into the ground, as if the snow hadn't turned the ground into unyielding ice.

"Nicely done, my dear." Aunt Lynn's voice called from the other side of the house.

Claudia ran to the backyard, ready to embrace her aunt, tears already welling up in her eyes. She stumbled backwards, though, once she saw the woman waiting for her. The woman looked vaguely familiar, but more like a combination of different faces rather than anyone she'd actually met. But, feeling like she couldn't trust her own memories, she tried to add warmth to the smile she gave the woman who had her aunt's voice.

A breeze carrying the scent of citrus wafted into her face, and for the first time in what seemed a long time, Claudia felt able to wander freely in her own head. Seemingly brought back

to life before her, Claudia wondered if this strange version of her aunt was a ghost. Is the price of something returned that it won't look the way it was left? Had her aunt returned in someone else's body, or was she incorporeal?

The undead woman began walking backwards, smiling as she went. She was saying something, but Claudia didn't understand the language she was using. She didn't sound like Claudia's aunt anymore either; the voice within had turned deep and grating. The woman's shape fell backwards into the murky pond, but there was no splash.

Claudia moved forward to help her back up, but the water was as still and reflective as glass. She reached forward, drawn by a temptation to disturb the unnaturally calm water.

Exploding through the surface, the woman's face was now decayed and stretched into a wretched, viscous snarl. Claudia stumbled back with a cry, kicking away at the rotted hands that reached for her. A clammy hand held firm at her ankle, it started to drag her back toward the wooden house. She tried to dig her fingers into the soil like the house's roots had, but it would not yield to her.

When they reached the porch, Claudia twisted around with her eyes shut tight, and screamed as loud as she could, "No!"

The hold on her ankle slackened to nothing. After opening her eyes, all she could do for a few moments was stare as the ashes of her attacker were swept up and away by the wind. The ground shook as the house began retracting its roots. Before those roots could reach for Claudia, she was already on her feet and sprinting into the shadow of the pines.

Bulleted Author's Notes

- I wanted this to be the first of my literary works I publish on here, because I feel it displays my range in creative writing genres well. I've been a storyteller since before I was even old enough to know what that meant; creating and tending to a story like this... I've rarely felt such overwhelming (yet not) peace and joy.
- The first draft of, "Moonscape," was completed in March 2021. This is the third draft of more to come, but the fundamental elements of the story remained the same.

"Moonscape," was inspired by a dream I had in February 2020, which I wrote down as a journal entry for my nonfiction class (the focus and theme of the class was on dreams) at the University of Rhode Island. For those curious, a copy can be found underneath these notes (some of my opinions, like the meaning of the power I felt in knowing I could fly the house, are different from how I would see them now. Now, I would see it as having a very similar symbolism to the fiery-gold teeth in the skull).
 - A fundamental element from the first draft's author's note for class: "In the creation process of this piece, I wanted to see if the two sections could create this other-worldly (but still adjacent to ours) space together. You know when you wake up from a dream or nightmare, and the world [you were in] felt so real that some part of you can't help but believe in the possibility that somewhere out there in the infinite universe, filled with infinite worlds, it exists outside of you too? That feeling inspired this piece as well."
- The first section of this piece is inspired by and an imitation of Russell Edson's prose poem, "Antimatter." It is meant to imbue the reader with a mixture of clarity and confusion to set the stage for the rest of their reading experience. Hopefully, it can help

answer any basic questions a reader might have during or after this short story, while leaving enough mystery to ponder over as well.

- Elements of when something looks or seems safe, but isn't
 - Written in my original author's note under the first draft for my peers and professor: "I didn't realize this until reading my finished first draft, but I think I unconsciously wanted to incorporate the experience of something that feels or appears safe turning into something threatening. Last weekend I was sleeping over at a friend's house, and while sharing the bed with her, her dog Lily (who had been quite friendly up until that moment) growled and tried to attack me when I tried to gently move her over so I'd have more room on the bed. I'm alright thankfully! My friend grabbed her dog in time and my flight instinct helped me to roll off the bed fast enough, but it was a little traumatic to go through because I've never been attacked by a dog before. I don't know if I'll ever forget those cute dog eyes rising up slowly to look directly into me, looking just as they had while being friendly earlier that day, suddenly and overwhelmingly backgrounded with a deep, threatening growl and sharp teeth."
- The pace of the story is meant to mimic a stream of consciousness or thought-flow as you would in a real sleep-related dream.
- The two portions blocked off with em dashes (I used to create a kind of literary "hard cut") are where in my own dream the scene shifted within the house. At first I wasn't sure how to communicate those types of shifts that happen in sleeping dreams in an artful way. So, I played around with possibilities and decided to add some familiar imagery from other fantastical, dream-like stories (specifically *Alice in Wonderland* the first time, and

The Wizard of Oz the second time). The tornado poem I played around with over the years, and finally feel good about where it landed.

- The fourth paragraph on page three is my best attempt to articulate in a literary way what impending death can feel like; I've only experienced this sensation in dreams a few times. As I found it very difficult to put into words, I sought inspiration in the form of two creative videos on YouTube about death. These are the links:
 - o "The Tale of the Doctor Who Defied Death - Iseult Gillespie"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJ9UtAmjs7Y&list=PLb4Bw0_EA1eiAb4v_yZxLFjtRspjJ7T4d&index=9
 - o "Adventures of Mark Twain" (only the "Mysterious Stranger" portion)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ntf5_ue2Lzw&list=PLb4Bw0_EA1eiAb4v_yZxLFjtRspjJ7T4d&index=8

Dream Journal Entry

The most recent memory of a dream I had comes from a week or two ago. It started out with my parents and I having dinner with my uncle and his girlfriend. We were in a house I've never been in, but it felt familiar anyway. Something within the dream shifted. I was still in the same house, but my parents, my uncle, and his girlfriend had left the dream. Instead my aunt and a bunch of random people were in the house.

I was in the kitchen and my aunt kept looking from the oven to me and back again with meaning in her eyes, and she had a manic air about her, though she seemed to be trying to keep it hidden from everyone but me. I asked her what was wrong and she told me to follow her. We took a hidden hallway out to a different hallway that led to another room. Before crossing to the

other room, she waited until one of the random guys walked enough out of range that he wouldn't spot us. When we got to the room there was a shelf with some sort of energy tank (it was cylinder in shape, the size of a lamp, its top and bottom was red, and inside the glass in the middle there looked to be a blue lightning bolt of energy that was moving) that also had a bomb on it. My aunt told me if she hit it, we'd all die. She took out a two-handed hammer, and as she started to swing it towards the bomb, she asked me, "Should I hit it?"

There've been a couple of dreams I've had where I've felt (at least it felt this way to me) "the hand of death" reaching for me. It's hard for me to describe the feeling exactly, it definitely feels inarticulable. But if I had to try, I'd say it's an odd mix of terror and peace. Terror floods my heart, but peace eases my mind at the same time. Thankfully, I've never felt anything like it in real life, but I do think it's extremely interesting how sometimes dreams can give you the experience of sensations and emotions that real life hasn't yet.

In this dream, I felt death approaching, and shouted "NO!" at her, and her swing missed the tank. Her eyes looked equally desperate and unhinged. I was so confused. Why did she want to kill us all? What drove her to almost do it? Why did she seem to half-need my permission?

Then the dream skipped over some events and time for me (not when you forget a piece of the dream, but when it puts you in a different "area" of the same dream). Still in the house, this was when I first realized the house was flying. I didn't see (thank god) so much as know that my aunt and two other girls had just jumped from the house so that they could die. As sad as I was, I saw that no one was "flying" the house and if someone didn't take control we'd probably crash. I went to a corner room with a window to see out of. I briefly contemplated going upstairs to see if anyone else was still around or alive. But I was afraid they'd be hostile towards me if I checked, so I focused on flying the house.

This part was very vivid, and one of the coolest things I've ever been able to do in a dream! I didn't know how, but I felt with complete certainty that I had the power to fly that house. So, with the movements of my hands, I flew the house and got us to land in a safe spot. I almost hit a few evergreens covered in snow. When the house landed, I went outside and saw that literal roots were coming out of the bottom sides of the house and digging themselves into the ground. Then my "aunt" (the dream was telling me it was her, but it didn't look *anything* like her) materialized and praised me for landing the house safely. I wish I could remember if I had this dream before or after we watched *The Lady Vanishes* in class, but I can't remember the date of the dream. I wouldn't be surprised though if it was after, and my dream pulled it from the movie.

I asked her, "Would you have been proud of me?" She nodded and started to reply, but started walking backwards and fell into a nearby pond. Then my mind started to think about how she was a ghost, and they're a type of dead brought back to life, and how zombies are undead, too. So, of course, being one of my worst fears (I have a weird fear of being eaten, alive or dead, so I've always been terrified of zombies and cannibals, even just as a concept), the dream started to turn her into a zombie. Her face decayed to a dark grey and stretched into a disgusting snarl. But I could still feel a power in me, so I pointed at her and I either said "no," or felt it strongly enough that her zombie face looked surprised, and then she kind of disintegrated or melted into the bank of the pond. And then my alarm went off and I woke up.

I was extremely perplexed and shocked by this dream. It was a rollercoaster of emotion. I could piece some of the possible inspirations my dream was drawing off of, but it wasn't until I read Freud's essay, "On Dreams," and his dissection of his own dream that I started to understand some of the wilder aspects of mine. I haven't been able to see my uncle in over a

year, and I love and adore him very much. And the family dinner with him did feel very nostalgic while I dreamed it, but very bittersweet when I woke. It was like I'd had a visit from him, but I don't know when I'll get to have a visit like that with him again. With my aunt and the dream suicide: during this past Thanksgiving she was telling my sister-in-law a few years ago after her hip surgery she had to take these pills that made her want to kill herself. But she looked at me briefly with trepidation before she said the last part. I knew why (I struggled with thoughts about that for most of my teenage years), and I had wanted to tell her it was okay to talk about that, but I didn't because I didn't want to bring more attention to that part of my past than was already being acknowledged with the nervous look she'd given me. Those two things I figured out the same day I'd woken up from the dream.

A few days later though, I was thinking about Freud's dream analysis and decided to try that out with this dream, because I really wanted to know what the flying house and what happened during the landing meant. It seems obvious to me now, but before I put some real thought into it, I felt clueless about it. I think because the things with my family were being drawn off more from memory. But I think the house being able to fly (and me being able to fly it) was a representation of my love and deep desire to travel. Which is funny in a way, because I think the roots coming out of the house was a metaphor for how I also want to find a place I love to settle down and build a life in.

I wonder if the house had other meanings, too, but I don't feel knowledgeable enough right now to explore that further, if that makes sense. My "aunt" coming back as a ghost that had a different face still confuses me, and makes me question my mind a lot. Was it just the movie the dream was drawing on? But what if the dream happened before I watched it? Was it Dream Me being in denial about my aunt really being gone? Was it my unconscious and consciousness

playing in tandem with ideas of death? That I could have her “back,” but only if it didn’t look like her? That could be, especially since my conscious mind started wondering about the different states of un-death, like zombies. And how if she’s one type, can she turn into another type? I read in a spiritual book once that we’re the co-creators of our reality, which feels true. It definitely seems that way in some of my dreams.

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