

Truman Journey

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Category: Short Story

The Light on Lake LeBlanc

Through the canvas of my window lay Lake LeBlanc, the lone finger lake nestled deep in the woods, stretching north-to-south about seven miles and east-to-west just under two. On the west shore, a small state forest bearing the same name as the lake, and on the east, a lakeside town of some four thousand by the name of Astoria. The city center of Astoria sat at an intersection in front of the town marina along Lake Road, which stretched the length of the lake and along the stream that fed into the north end-- as well as acting as the county line between Leblanc and Lake counties, east and west respectively. The center could best be described as a wide spot in the road with a convenience store, grocer, mom-and-pop shop, and local bar, and a walkway leading to the local marina. The small lake, while turgid at day with boats and swimmers soaking up the late summer sun, now lay quiescent, barely visible in the black of the night sky.

As is common in the late night and early morning of the lake during summer and fall, a thick mist slithered down the stream and onto the lake surface where it would hang until the sun arose to incinerate it. I would always watch late at night in wait for sleep to come and drag me to my bed. Each night I would stay, head rested on my palm, eyelids becoming heavier as the dark gray cloud entranced me, I would be lulled to sleep by the mist. This evening, though, I discovered something different about the mist, a light, faint and barely discernible, piercing through the fog. I squinted my eyes to determine the origin of the light. A boat? A buoy? A car parked on the other bank? None of these made any sense to me, no boats were allowed after dark-- it would be practically suicidal to man a boat in this fog-- and to my knowledge no buoys were ever deployed into LeBlanc, at least none with lights. For some reason this mystery kept me awake.

The light would flick and flutter in the fog as if it were a dying flame fighting to stay alight at the end of a worn out wick. Something about the specter enthralled me, I felt almost as though it was dancing for me. I lifted my chin from my palm and leaned my forehead against the glass, my nose pressed against it to allow my breath to cloud up on the window. My hands were open and pressed against the window to each side of my head as if I were watching something I shouldn't. For some peculiar reason the light seemed to burn away the fog as it beckoned me.

I don't remember how long I stared at that light, or when I went to bed that night, my memory held no record of time beyond seeing it; I just *woke up* and nothing else. The blackout curtain barred all light from passing except for at the edges where the mid-morning light formed a halo around it, and perfectly angled the rays directly into my eyes. My ceiling fan propelled the stale air of my room down at me while the pull strings collided with the porcelain light producing a rhythmic *tink tink tink*. I threw up the sheets of my bed and pressed my bare, calloused feet against the vinyl floorboards. I sat up and stared at my feet, the specter of the light still hanging in the back of my mind just as a fly hangs, entangled in a web, from the ceiling in an empty corner. I walked through the threshold and through my small kitchen to the window. I looked out to where I saw the light before. The lake was starting to fill with the early boaters, and the window allowed a faint purr of a speedboat hot in pursuit of a cove at the far side of the lake to permeate. Nothing existed where I found the light last night aside from a vacant patch of water.

Nothing abnormal happened for the rest of the day; life went about as it normally did, and the light eventually retreated to the deep recesses of my mind. The sun set below the treeline, and as the stars started to shine, the light returned. I had not noticed it until I was sitting by my window eating my late dinner, the faint light shined through again. Just as I did the night before, I stared at it, entranced by it. It was there, in the same place as last night, as if it were waiting there for me to find it again. I found myself staring at it again.

I had a dream that night that I was walking alone in the woods. I walked along a path carved out by the countless feet that have gone this way before. Bare roots poked out of the packed mud, their sides rubbed raw exposing the inner flesh. The black cloaked me at an arm's-length distance to show me where to place my next step. An incline started to form, and I ran up it. The harder I pushed, the more exhausted I got and the more my legs started to burn. I closed my eyes as I pushed more, with each step I battled upward until eventually there was no incline. I stumbled

forward and rolled on a flat surface, I stood and looked around to find that the woods were gone, I stood on a narrow strip of grass with thousands of stars speckling the sky around me. Ahead of me there was a path of stepping stones floating in the abyss, and at the end of the path was the light. It was no brighter than the others, in fact, it was dimmer than the others, but I was drawn to it. My legs started running, and my body followed. While charging toward the light, I felt the ground disappear from beneath me as I started to float. My floating accelerated as I tried to grab a stone to no avail. I began to feel as though I was falling up into the void, the path disappeared, but the light stayed visible.

The dream stuck with me that morning. Despite its banality among the hundreds of strange dreams I have had in my life, this one was particularly clingy. I stared out my window at the Sunday traffic flow into the church down the block, the dream playing on repeat in my head. I lost track of how long I sat at the window, I snapped out of it some time after dark to the sound of the A/C turning on. The sudden jolt of the unit coming to life and the subsequent steady hum made me step back. I poured myself a glass of water, and retreated to my room for the night—something still convinced me that sleep would remedy this musing.

I found myself on that same path from my dream, except this time it was *different*. The same force that compelled me to the light did so again, only this time, I felt no desire to run to it. I heeded its beckon by walking, and the path manifested itself beneath me, whole. As I inched closer to the light it became brighter. Each step lended more anticipation and I started to feel warmer. A door of ivory, decorated with beautiful cheeselings and lined with gold, appeared in the middle of the light. I stepped to it and knocked on the door. A blast of scorching heat pulsed over me as the door opened. A figure in a dark robe and black hood obscuring its face greeted me: “Come in, we’ve been expecting you.”

I smiled and crossed beyond the threshold, into the red inferno.